

Towards a Conceptualization of Recidivism and Repetitive Behavior¹

Jens Martin Svendsen²
Håkan Preiholt³

Abstract

Our main goal is to propose a prototype for a model in order to qualitatively vet uncontrolled behavior, foremost criminal recidivism, and we put forward the following research question (RQ): how might a prototype be constructed theorizing the process of uncontrolled repetitive behavior? This paper is of a Conceptual design type. The conceptual design shows that each type of movement that a criminal makes has its own particularity and opportunity that cannot be repeated exactly from one event to the next. That is, the progress in an individual trajectory is dynamic in its character and cannot be reversed, here identified as *Dynamic Replication* rather than repeat behavior. With this research it is probably safe to say that an individual has little knowledge of the direct outcome of a process of repetitive behavior and thus has little chance of departing from it, at least all by themselves. In the criminal case, there are organizations that work in the direction of accepting a *Dynamic Replication*, which means an acceptance of processes in social networks but aiming to other desires and an individual mind. The prototype purports to help render clear—factor by factor, step by step, event by event, prop by prop—an individual's entrapment through a recurrent mimicking behavior, frequently out of rational control in terms of its teleological outcome.

Introduction

Repeat behavior is one of the basic aims in human action in that it establishes a secure identification and a stable personality of the individual, which means that humans seek comfort in familiar close relations. Earlier studies and findings such as *The Swedish Crime Survey, 2015* in appendix 1 gives the picture of this very problem in quantitative terms and figures. Freud called this *repetition compulsion*, which he famously defined as “the desire to return to an earlier state of things.” But there are many

¹ This research was supported by Center for Baltic and East European Studies, Södertörn University.

² Department of Social Studies, Södertörn University, +46 8 608 4088 martin.svendsen@sh.se

³ Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University, +46 8 16 2000 hp@sbs.su.se

other different reasons for repeat behavior. For instance, most of us develop patterns over time, whether positive or negative, that become well established as nested configurations. That is, we each create a world for ourselves and discover what works for us. In times of stress, worry, anger, or other emotional highs, this familiarity becomes a safe haven in which to feel self-assured and comfortable (Inderbitzin et.al. 1998).

The idea that periodic involvement in abnormal networks, such as a prison environment, leads to increased levels of criminal activity has been widely studied by criminologists (e.g., Akers 1985; Hagan 1993; Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Haynie 2001; McCarthy and Hagan 1995; Thornberry and Krohn 1997; Thornberry et al. 2003; Warr and Stafford 1991; Hagan 1993; Bernburg and Krom 2006; Pyrooz 2014). Certainly, the causal effect of associating with criminal peers and their behavior has been well documented empirically, (e.g., Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; Jessor and Jessor 1977; Kandel and Davies 1991; Thornberry and Krohn 1997; Warr and Stafford 1991). In those studies, criminal embeddedness refers to immersion, or involvement, in ongoing criminal contexts; the longer the exposed time in such networks, the stronger the affiliation and the stronger the links within the network. The links can consist of deviant family members, peers, or other acquaintances. The important point is that these individuals compose a distinct network of which an individual is an active member and that particular sets of relationships oriented toward a corrupt value system, abnormal acts, and opportunities are vital, (Bernburg *et al.* 2006). It is generally hypothesized that immersion in such a criminal set of relations and dispositions can directly increase corrupt behavior, perhaps through the learning of definitions favorable toward deviance and through modeling and reinforcement, (e.g., Akers 1985; Warr and Stafford 1991). Figures clearly show how repeat behavior among criminals leads to repetitive recidivism into criminality.

Number and proportion of recidivists within 1, 2 and 3 years among all persons with an initial event in 2004–2008, by gender.

Sex	Year						
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008		
All	All individuals	73 315	74 021	78 759	79 755	84 640	
	1 year	No. of relapses	19 089	19 253	20 241	20 143	21 015
		%	26	26	26	25	25
	2 year	No. of relapses	25 838	26 199	27 476	27 626	28 876
		%	35	36	35	35	34
	3 year	No. of relapses	29 828	30 236	31 737	31 793	33 483
		%	41	41	40	40	40
Female	All individuals	14 929	15 128	16 051	16 153	17 503	
	1 year	No. of relapses	2 650	2 775	2 791	2 815	3 003

		%	18	18	17	17	17
	2 year	No. of relapses	3 654	3 798	3 899	3 936	4 251
		%	25	25	24	24	24
	3 year	No. of relapses	4 247	4 450	4 573	4 553	4 982
		%	29	29	29	28	28
Male	All individuals		58 386	58 893	62 708	63 602	67 137
	1 year	No. of relapses	16 439	16 478	17 450	17 328	18 012
		%	28	28	28	27	27
	2 year	No. of relapses	22 184	22 401	23 577	23 690	24 625
		%	38	38	38	37	37
	3 year	No. of relapses	25 581	25 786	27 164	27 240	28 501
		%	44	44	44	43	42

Figure No. 1. Source: The Swedish Crime Survey, 2015.

What the figures doesn't show, however, is the driving forces and feelings and intentions guiding these individuals along the path of a criminal career. These factors are best described as qualitative in their nature, hence best researched through qualitative methods, like observations or interviews, or other means of researching qualitative properties in humans. Such research calls for a framework in order to make visible what would otherwise remain hidden behind a veil. The purpose is then to present a such a framework, or model, on which to build an investigation into driving forces of uncontrolled behavior when it comes to criminal recidivism, based on the assumption just outlined, and we propose the following research question (RQ) in this article:

RQ: *How might a model be constructed theorizing the process of repetitive behavior?*

Based on this background, we will in the following describe a conceptualization of a prototype for a research model.

A Contextual Approach

Contextualism describes a collection of views in philosophy which emphasize the *context* in which an action, utterance, or expression occurs, and argues that, in some important respect, an action, utterance, or expression can only be understood relative to that context. Contextualist views hold that

philosophically controversial concepts, such as “meaning P,” “knowing that P,” “having a reason to Q,” and possibly even “being true” or “being right” only have meaning relative to a specified context. In this sense, context dependence may lead to relativism; nevertheless, contextualist views are increasingly popular within philosophy, (c.f. Liedman et.al. 2008). In ethics, contextualist views are often closely associated with situational ethics, or with moral relativism. In the philosophy of language, the context principle is a form of semantic holism (Fodor & Lepore, 1991) holding that a philosopher should “never... ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition”, (Kluge, Eike-Henner 1980). In the enquiry that follows, we have kept to the principle of process to never ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition, in order not to lose sight of the distinction between used concepts and how these concepts are related to a trajectory and props.

The Prototype for an Expression Model of Repeat Comportment

As has been shown above, some central concepts come into use when analyzing the drifting-into process of becoming, and the creation of an “*P*”. We will here attempt to systematize this into our prototype for a model that we have called The Model of Repeat Comportment, since it aims at being a tool when analyzing the setting forth of this construction called an “*P*” as a criminal. (The model, though, might as well suit other types of drifting-into, thus be of more general use. We, however, focus here on criminality, since our model builds on earlier research regarding criminality and the recidivism problem, published elsewhere.)

This repeat behavior seeks to portray the different aspects in the development of an “*P*” in connection with criminality and the development of a criminal sentiment and all the way from the initial phases into and beyond the actual behaviors that form the conscious consumer and *consumption-as-criminal*. It is teleological in its scope and outlook, even though it should not be interpreted as having either a left to right direction or a top to bottom (or the reverse) direction. The telos can in each case be different; the point is that the telos appear as a driving force, becoming the stretch in the model. The model is based on two axis (red) that give the model its basic scaffolding. Around the axes one will find keywords that denote deportment—both in terms of norms, rules, and meaning content—as well as a display of inner feelings or mental events, or the teleological stretch, conditioning that very same deportment or feeling of what’s right and wrong in a specific situation. In the following, we will focus on each of the key elements and how they relate to one another and to the axes.

The First Tier Towards the Prototype

The first tier contains empirical knowledge that can be received by observation and experimentation. They will be described below one by one, left to right. The figure shows the initial two fields of research regarding repeat behavior.

Figure 1 Meaning Structure and Demeanor



Meaning as a supporting empirical factor

Brands as well as goods retain meaning in the social context where they operate, (Lury 2011), in the play where they are the toys. From a methodological standpoint, *thick description* is a method where you seek the meaning structure in a cultural context, (Ryle 1949, Geertz 1973). In contrast to what is termed a *thin description*, such a *thick description* in itself has the aim of “cutting down culture to size” as Geertz puts it. In short, this means that the method aims to reveal meanings and meaning networks in a cultural context, so this supporting factor partly focuses directly on the methodological parts of the model, even though the aim of the model overall is as a methodological tool. Geertz maintains that he “[...] take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretive one in search of meaning”, (Geertz 1973., p. 5). By *web*, Geertz means the web of meanings in which a human is enveloped, so this is in part the ambition of our model; to follow such webs of meaning.

Example of meaning

Relatives, friends, and colleagues etc., are part of the web of an individual’s meaning-constructing habitus, thence having a role in society, each contributing and hence being coauthors of meaning.

Demeanor/Attire as supporting empirical factors

In “cutting down culture to size” we propose to follow the meaning expressed by the body and its clothing. Body movements can be said to reflect one’s gender, or at least reflect one’s own perception of oneself, (Heinämaa 2003: p. 21 ff). Thus, the way we travel on foot or move and behave in space becomes a factor accessible through observation. For instance, when males travel on foot they tend to hold their arms further away from their body than women, expressing, if nothing else, a command of the space which they inhabit. So the way one carries oneself and the way one keeps one’s body in space becomes one way to express oneself.

The Second Tier of the Prototype

Figure 2 Fantasy, Make-believe, Adjective and Desire



Fantasy as a supporting empirical factor

This same ability to imagine, and hence to build a fantasmatic world of non-existing conditions and relations between things, we use to create a world of which we speak, when we speak of something. Ricoeur (1981) argues that we create such a world every time we speak with someone; in Ricoeurian terms we create a vis-à-vis that we then refer to in an ostensive communicating interaction, much the same way as in a make-believe play, (Walton 1990). Walton's example is two people playing a fictional hunting game where tree stumps become bears. The tree stumps have to be bears in order for the fictional play to work: they have to be really dangerous. We manage to play such games because we can imagine, and that also pertains to foreseeing a future. One might say that we are anticipating planners in that we can foresee and plan our future: summer vacations, work life, next week's party, etc., (for instance, see: Gärdenfors 1992/2001).

Make-believe as an analytical factor

Make-believe constitutes the personality, but it is dependent upon the sensations emanating from outside of the person, thus forming itself into an *outside-inside* dichotomy. Then, as much as the inside is a play, so is the outside, offering itself for esthetic experience. The outside may be seen as something factual, seeping (oozing) into the person and thus forming the personality. But there is reciprocity in that, when an "I" is so constructed, when a history and a personality are there, that same personality projects itself onto the world. Frequently research is focused on these projections Kendall Walton's theory of mimesis. In his work (1990), he sketches out a *make-believe* relationship between fantasy and factuality. He explains that the *make-believe* play also takes place when we play fantasy games, such as when two people imagine things to be what they are not: a stick becomes a horse: a dress becomes the clothing of queens or kings. Early research like Schiller (1801) also speaks about play, e.g., when he explains in Letter 26 that the reality of things is of their own making.

Adjective as an analytical factor

The analysis in adjectival terms an analysis of the constituent elements and the effect they have on the specific meaning of the whole. (This of course is a specific application of both linguistic analysis as well as semiotic. For instance, see: Danesi 2008).

Example

The “dandy” type takes care over the details in their outfits which together complete the image of perfectionism, not single items such the hat, necktie, or whatever single item it might be.

Desire as a empirical supporting factor

Desire is a direction; a longing-for circumstance in which you strive to find yourself in. The concept of desire has been explored extensively, lately in a volume edited by Gasparski and Airaksinen (2008) in which the term has both philosophical as well as technological implications. Our focus, though, is the consumer in the form of criminals. From a praxeological view, desire is instrumental in analyzing comportment since desire can function as a driving force and reason for actions. Equally, desire plays a role in ethics since ethics concern actions and the rationale for action, (Tennenbaum 2010). We understand desire as a stretch for something, a gripping-after or longing-for in order to get that which is desired: the object. Hence desire functions as a reason and can thus rationalize actions. In short, Davidson (2001) explains it this way: if a person wants something, and they know how to get it, it is rational that that person performs the actions that will enable the person to get what the person wants. Hence, the action that leads to the desired is rational even if desire in itself is fundamentally a feeling that is a cause for the action taken.

Towards the prototype

Figure 3 Enactment /Individual mind section (Resonance, Transitive)



The figure shown above can be viewed in non-processual as well as in processual terms; in the latter case as a path from the visible enactment followed by three dimensions of the process deeper and deeper into an individual mind. That is shared stories and value systems. The visible enactment becomes an enactment of such a comprehension of the world even if it cannot be observed directly. Still, what is possible to observe and analyze, are the various indicators of resonance, transitivity, and its emphasis as part of a larger individual mind: a shared world view that the person is a part of.

Visible Enactment to Individual Mind as empirical supporting factors

A play is an enactment of norms, rules, and desires. At the same time it is an enactment of ideas and ideologies, thus as well forming discourses. Schiller (1801) argues in his letters on esthetics that only when a person has become a personality through esthetic experiences are they then a moral being, because only when the person engages with the world and experiences it first-hand can a moral system emerge at all. This intervention in the world is much the same way that Matthew Crawford (2009) portrays it: to be part of the world is to do things in the world. It is doings from the experiences that build the Schillerian personality; a sort of dialectic process regarding the inner as well as the outer.

The example of criminals is striking. The relapse of criminals has just such a background in that one practices a behavior that is enhanced the longer the practice continues.

Resonance as an analytical factor

The “resonance” concept regards reverberating in a pool of societal factors. The concept has been explored earlier where resonance is mainly seen as a factor that caters to the personal, at least in terms of consumption, (Belk & Kozinets 2005 and 2007). That is, of course, one aspect of it, but we would like to stress that what we intend is a resonance concept from an esthetic point of view, where the resonance is experienced as something outside of the person. It resides between objects as a background projection, as a sounding, as a wave like a wave of gravity, not a connection between an object and a person that would be how a common language reading would have it. The resounding would be picked up by a person if that person listened and adhered to the sound, much like a calling, not noticing even if it might be apparent to some other person. The difference would be a difference in the situation rather than the person.

Example

Tattoo would be such a case of resonance with ideas and oneself, inside and outside the body.

Transitive as an analytical factor

If the Adjective factor builds on linguistics and semiotics, then the Transitive factor builds likewise on linguistics, but also on formal logic. The basic transitivity structure is this:

$$\text{If } a \rightarrow b \text{ and } b \rightarrow c, \text{ then } a \rightarrow c$$

This means that c is accessible from a , and that this accessibility creates the web of meanings that build up the overall meaning of attire and demeanor into an intelligible whole. A linguistic use of the term portrays the same influence in a slightly different way, in terms of affecting: consider the sentence “*Jill washes the car.*” *Washes* here is said to be transitive in that the washing affects the car since the act of washing needs something to be washed. In the same way, the components of attire and demeanor have impact on the constituent elements, thus creating a web of meanings, each part specifying the other. Meaning is transported or moved through the network to new ports where meaning can be harbored, and in order to analyze this we propose there is a need for the concept of transitivity as well as adjectivity.

Individual Mind as a empirical supporting factor

There are at least two sides to our thinking of and perception of the world in which we live and its relations, be they social or physical. Of course we experience the world through our senses, but to make something out of it we need cognitive tools and systems. These tools and systems are shared; at least, that is how John Dewey portrays it with his dichotomy of an individual mind and mind in individuals, (Dewey 1925–1953; also, see: Tiles 1990: 77 ff). The idea is that our thinking consists of

a shared mindset, a shared cognitive map, shared stories and value systems. These shared ways of thinking and interpreting perceptions are shared in the sense that each individual is part of the individual mind, and thus, in Dewey’s terms, have the mind with them. If, then, a person wants to be part of something, then that person will acquire its values and ways of speaking, etc.

The Axes

Props

For our purposes, we would like to point to Husserl’s intentional object, (Husserl 1989). Husserl’s phenomenology states that even if one, at one moment, observes just one instance of an object, it still is a whole object in the sense that all aspects of it are mentally accessible at that specific moment. This means that, if one observes a tree, the backside is also visible.

Trajectory

The word *traject* is a verb, thus denoting an event, the event being a moving of a body in space. *Trajectory* is the noun denoting the track that the moving body takes in space. This scaffolding factor thus seeks to portray a moving-into, deeper and deeper toward a corrupt demeanor, through each and all the factors in a prototype of a model of repeat comportment, each factor being its own researchable and analytical sphere, thus portraying a trajectorial development within themselves, as well as being part of a larger whole together with other factors. Within sociology there has been discussion on space and time, defining these factors as explanatory tools (e.g. Adam 2006, and Thrift 2006), and asking which would be the better tool. We propose instead a space/time concept when grappling with the problem of corrupt comportment since there is a clear process and the process involves things.

So then the prototype for an Expression Model of Comportment includes both a time and a space axis, i.e., the trajectory and the props axis. Trajectory is here construed as consecutive situated events in space/time, and we add here to the Russellian view of time as the changing of locations, be they concretely spatial or socially spacial: the trajectory consists of consecutive changes, afforded by attire, resonating with the calling of the make-believe play (like the call of the wild in Buck). So, finally, here is the fully composed Prototype for an Expression Model of Repeat Comportment:

Figure 4 The Prototype for an Expression Model of Repeat Comportment

		Props axle		
		Meaning structure Discourse	Demeanor Attire	
Trajectory (process axle)	Fantasy	Make-believe	Adjective	Desire
	Enactment	Resonance	Transitive	General other /Individual mind

Critical Examination and Analysis

This model does not portray a river, but it does portray flowing. Each factor is hence part of the endeavor to describe this flow. Even though each factor is not a passing-through in an of its own, the trajectory consists of different parts interacting to make the flow possible, and the flow has an ulterior consequence, and that is the sought-for and so constructed “*T*”. The trajectory has its driving forces, both in terms of push (Fantasy and Enactments) and pull (Desire and Individual Mind/Generalized Other) and its stepping stones. The structure of this now finalized Prototype for an Expression Model of Compartment might give an impression that each step follows into the other field of analysis from make-believe to intensity, but each is backed up by the repeat behaviors themselves in a logical sequence portrayed in the trajectory axis and the push and pull factors at either side. It is a mistake, though, to see the intermediate factors as having any consecutiveness between them, rather that each involves a deepening of commitment to the process of becoming an “*T*”. Instead, what we see here is a situation where an individual never can move by themselves in the same way over a sequence of time between those analytical areas, (Davidson 2001: 163 ff). The reason for this is the fact that for each move that a person takes the circumstances change; a brand new situation has occurred because each event is individual, and thus never occurs again. From the individual perspective, this new scene makes it difficult or impossible to retract and start all over again, in other words “the bridges have been burned” for each move along the trajectory of the becoming-path of creating an “*T*”. The moves become a logic based on, for example, the desire (pull) and the fantasy (push), (see Davidson 1980: 3 ff). To illustrate this illusion of logic for the individual movement in the model above, we can refer to early thinkers like Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher who lived toward the end of 500 BC: “*You cannot step into the same river twice, because each time it is new water that flows through the river.*” That is, every movement that a criminal has its own particularity and opportunity that cannot be exactly repeated or reversed. Instead, the movement an individual is expected to make is a dynamic process over the trajectory—the time span—one at a time, one after another: each occurrence must be analyzed in its own terms, and each such occurrence is dynamically linked to the other. The Prototype does not explicitly show this, but it must be understood in these terms anyway. Hence, behavior cannot be seen as a mere repetition, that is at best an illusion, instead the trajectory consists of a dynamic, changeable process, consisting of non-repeatable events that follow one upon one upon one. We here propose to call this latter point a Dynamic Replication, a sort of mimicking, not only in terms of mimesis but a mimicking of events. As was illustrated initially, research has depicted the problem of repeat behavior as a consumption issue, given criminals etc., all based on the illusion that you can step into the same river twice. But you cannot. Finally, this is a reason why recidivism exist in such an extent that it does. This means that to cure criminals there can be a change to other trajectory desire, which is possible to do in the same process.

Concluding Remarks

The initial RQ was: *How might a model be constructed theorizing the process of repetitive behavior?*

The prototype purports to help render clear—factor by factor, step by step, event by event, prop by prop—an individual’s entrapment through a recurrent mimicking behavior, frequently out of control. The general picture is that each step into a recurrence, when it comes to compartment, has its own

logic dependent on a previous sequence of events paired with the use of props in a make-believe play. From the push of fantasy to the pull of desire, from that admired visible enactment of norms, attitudes, conducts, and demeanor, which seem so attractive and compelling to the seeker of the “I”. It is about the drive to penetrate an *individual mind* in order to be part of it and acquire that precious bit of *mind in the individual* ultimately. That is the sought-after “I” that justifies the logic of the repeat comportment, which leads to the well-behaved other to a recidivistic problem or fascination with the strange or the daring of a criminal has been created. However, in this model it is expected that each type of movement that a criminal makes has its own particularity and opportunity that cannot be repeated exactly from one event to the next, neither can it be reversed. That is, the progress in an individual trajectory is dynamic in its character and cannot re-occur, here identified as *Dynamic Replication* rather than repeat behavior. With this background it is probably safe to say that an individual has little knowledge of the direct outcome of a *Dynamic Replication*-process and thus has little chance of departing from it, at least by himself simply because the consumption seems rational to the person and persons involved. Not having support from someone else to create a new Fantasy and a new Make-believe play with new toys to toy with and hence a new rationality is not feasible. Apparently, there are organizations that might have the ability to operate as such supporting agents, e.g. Criminals Return Into Society (CRIS), a nonprofit organization where former criminals and drug addicts help each other return to a normal life in society, playing a normal play.

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