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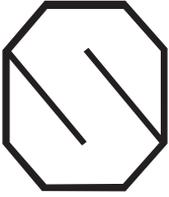
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You Bastard: A Narrative Exploration of the Experience of Indignation within Organizations

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Abstract

Our patience with forming interpretations and reinterpretations of others' behaviour is not unlimited. The time comes when we lose interest in trying to understand, and conclude that another person is behaving in a way that is simply unacceptable. This paper explores the narratives that go with immoderate indignation, even for those best versed in the idea that they should attempt to understand the perspective of the other. The paper offers a reflexive comment on the difficulty of analysing such a topic, on the grounds that the phenomenon under discussion can debilitate analytic writing. Three narratives are discussed in which one person was seen as behaving in a despicable way by others. The description and analysis of the narratives are used to offer a narrative understanding of the process by which some people become indignant with others. It suggests a narrative construction of how sense is made of indignation, particularly in cases where two narratives come up against each other. It concludes by considering how the process of being indignant can produce conflicting emotions of joy and guilt for those involved.

Keywords: narrative, indignation, emotion, storytelling, sensemaking

A pluralist view of the world is no defence against a sense of indignation towards colleagues who are seen as having behaved in an unacceptable way. Organization theorists have long made jokes about the gap between the relativist language of much of their professional discourse about the world and their capability of single-minded practical anger at others' behaviour. There are times when any relativism of view disappears in a cloud of heart-felt indignation. Then an interested, exploratory stance to what the other person thinks they are doing becomes impossible; it is replaced by a clarity that the other person is up to no good. The internal discourse changes from one in which the other is 'construed as behaving strangely', or as 'seeing the world differently', or even as mistaken; the discourse becomes one in which they are 'wrong', 'wicked', 'simply a bastard', and should be treated as such. Not everyone would use the word 'bastard' for those with whom they are angry; however, the word was in very widespread use in the situations in which I have seen indignation expressed, and was certainly used by several participants in all three of the narratives quoted in this paper. I shall therefore use it without further apology or circumlocution, trusting the reader to translate between it and other words that express indignation if appropriate.

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The word 'bastard' does not have any satisfactory equivalent verb; in this paper, I shall refer to the process of casting someone into the character of a 'bastard' as 'demonizing', while recognizing that this is a word that has attracted significant academic attention of its own (Donskis 1998; Stein 2001).

This paper discusses the discursive means by which organizational members may produce and cope with indignation. It explores the experience of, and response to, indignation. It offers a brief reflexive passage in which I say what I have learned about the topic of indignation through reflecting on the process of writing about it. The paper will look at three narratives, chosen for the variety they offer, of one or more people in an organization defining someone else as a 'bastard'. This makes no claim to being a full catalogue of all the kinds of demonizing that human beings can inflict on one another, but the narratives have been selected for the breadth of coverage they offer. Along the way we shall also mention some other public expressions of the view that someone is a bastard — for example, when they are demonized by tabloid newspapers or television.

The paper considers how the definition of someone as a bastard is maintained. I argue that this can be achieved through a narrative process, and that demonizing narratives are used both to convey to others the view that someone is a bastard, and also to maintain that view for oneself. I shall go on to the theme of sensemaking, and the notion that to demonize someone is one of the ways of making sense of their behaviour, and conversely that one of the roots of feeling that someone is a bastard is the failure to find any other way of making sense of their behaviour. I shall suggest that, for many, the definition of someone else as being 'just a bastard' is a definition of last resort; indeed part of the indignation may arise from the feeling of being forced into an uncomfortable style of definition.

The narrative argument will be continued with the notion that the definition of someone as a bastard is connected with how others enter their stories. People may look for different ways of writing themselves into others' stories, and the definition that someone is a bastard may come when they can see no way of writing themselves into the other's story without demonizing that other. Similarly the character that the person writes themselves into may be affected by their definition of the other person. If someone is defined as a bastard, that offers some clear characters that others can take on in relation to them. For example, there is the character of the hero who defeats them, the victim who suffers under them, or the prophet who warns others about them.

Finally I shall take a rather more rounded look at the consequences of demonizing for the person doing the demonizing, recognizing that there is some relief from complexity to be found, and a certain pleasure in taking the moral high ground, in demonizing, as well as a measure of guilt.

In order to do this I have considered a large number of narratives in which one member of an organization is demonizing another. No special efforts are required to collect such narratives; many organizational members are marinated in them. The extremely common occurrence of demonizing narratives means that selection of examples is crucial. There are methods available for categorizing narratives (Riessman 1993), but they always raise the question

of whether the different stakeholders in a narrative would classify them similarly. I have therefore selected three narratives, not on the basis of such categorizations, but on the basis that:

- 1 In each case I have had the opportunity to observe the setting of the narrative directly.
- 2 There are a number of others involved with the narrative who have been able to give me their reading of the narrative.
- 3 The narratives have been ones that I could reconstruct so as to show the reader reasonably quickly how the story might have looked for several different participants.
- 4 The narratives raise a wide range of the issues involved in considering the experience of indignation in organizations.
- 5 However, the narratives make no attempt to cover the complete range of those who might be designated 'bastards'.

This last point needs some qualification, because the definition of someone as a 'bastard' is made by an individual. I have not chosen to focus on those who might be expected to elicit agreement from everyone about their status as bastards. For example, Robert Maxwell, a British industrial tycoon who drowned off his yacht and was then found to have spent most of his employees' pension funds in trying to keep his business solvent, might be widely seen as having behaved disgracefully, but even in his case I have collected narratives from former employees that show a grudging admiration for his daring. Similarly, in some of the narratives that I have used, the range of reactions from different people working in the same organization may range from being beside oneself with anger to moderate indignation, to amused admiration, to approval. The range comes in the way that others see the behaviour, rather than in something that is necessarily inherent to the individuals discussed.

The Concept of Indignation

This paper explores the experience of indignation. It enquires into the processes through which this conviction of one's own rightness and the other's wickedness occurs. The paper takes a narrative approach, in particular building on Linde's (1993) work on the multiple stories that people may use to explain a situation. It follows Linde in contrasting consistent stories with coherent stories, and considers how people maintain coherence and manage the impression of inconsistency likely to result from multiple stories. It considers the way in which demonizing stories are built up, and the way in which organizational actors are able to maintain such demonizing stories for others while being aware of the multiple stories which they tell about their own actions.

The dynamics of demonizing stories are also considered. Some people have stories about how they used to regard one of their colleagues as a complete bastard, but then developed another narrative for understanding them.

Sometimes these are forgiveness narratives, but more often they are about how they neutralized someone they regarded as 'unreliable', 'needing to be stopped'.

It is also important to understand that the purpose of storytelling can be representational or interactional (Wortham 1999). Stories are not told only for their content, but also for the effect they have on the relationship between the teller and the hearer. This is as true for demonizing stories as for any others. There may be benefits to the way a person is seen by others arising from that person telling stories which demonstrate the heroism of their victory over the powers of darkness, or the skill with which they have slain the dragon and rescued their listener from some terrible fate (Gabriel 1991).

What causes the indignation and frustration which are experienced even by those who can speak fluently about differences of perception and construction within organizations? When does the time come when someone ceases to be regarded as misguided, to have a distinct if unpopular point of view, to offer an alternative perspective, and becomes seen instead as a 'bloody liar', or a 'bastard'? I suggest that there are alternative reasons for this change of perspective; it may come about because they have done something which can be externally verified as false, but more surprisingly it may be because they have offended a canon of narrative truth. The person making the demonizing judgement can think of no coherent story to understand and explain the other's behaviour. It seems impossible that the 'bastard' believes what they are saying.

I suggest that one of the reasons why this produces such strong emotions is that, if we cannot understand the narrative coherence of a person, we do not know how to write ourselves into their story. If we believe, with Edwards (2000), that such writing of ourselves into others' stories is what makes life meaningful, this may go some way towards explaining why we get so angry when we cannot make sense of a character's actions. Their seeming incoherence threatens our own view of our lives as meaningful. This may not be the only reason for anger (Harlos and Pinder 2000), but it may be significant because of the extent to which the reasons behind it are often obscure to the person experiencing it.

The resulting emotions become particularly interesting in organizations where many of the members are well versed in the discourse of multiple perspectives, of pluralism, and indeed of discourse. This can lead to a double statement, where the speaker says something demonizing about the target person, but also says something about the possibility that there may be some other way of understanding what the demonized person was doing. 'Of course I may be missing something, or perhaps that is how people usually behave round here, but it seemed fairly horrific to me.' This implies that the speaker is a very reasonable person who is looking for alternative, less negative interpretations, and means that they can avoid the use of discursive resources which might make them look as if it is actually they who are the bastard. The alternative to the demonizing view is often made to sound fairly improbable, or to offer the possibility that the person demonized is stupid rather than evil ('Perhaps he didn't really mean that?'). If they are not bad, they must be mad.

We may take it that the alternative view is offered for prophylactic purposes, to prevent others thinking that you have not already fully considered reasonable explanations and discounted them.

What is the place of narratives in which others are viewed as 'bastards' in organizational life? For some, the fun might be gone if they felt they had to adopt an intellectual perspective which denied them the right to build up a head of indignation. For others, there may be comfort in not having to demonize others.

A Reflexive Comment on Writing about Indignation

With exceptions (Fineman 2000; Stein 2000), negative emotions do not figure very largely in organizational studies. I have reflected on this since originally delivering the conference contribution on which this paper is based. Many people seem keen to talk about the topic of this paper, but not to write about it. Is there something unusually difficult about addressing such a topic with sufficient formality and rigour for a journal article? In order to focus on the topic of indignation, I need to call the experience to mind. If I do so effectively, I am not put into a frame of mind in which I can readily write about it. As usual with the recalling of emotion, recall of specific experiences takes us into a mental and physical state where the reliving can be quite intense (Sims 1987). If I recall my own experiences of intense indignation I will usually find that, at the time of recall, I have exhibited many of the physical signs of indignation that I would have exhibited in the original situation. This is not conducive to the writing of an academic paper. By the time I have calmed down again enough to be able to write considered prose the experience is dissipated, and I cannot fully recall what the indignation felt like.

Not everyone would have the same problem in treating indignation academically; there are different ways of dealing with this emotion. Some people deal with their own and others' indignation through humour, seeing their emotion as somewhat ridiculous, as belonging to the school playground rather than to their current adult life. Others will dismiss such a response as a form of conflict avoidance. The possible intervention of humour suggests a temporal factor in taking a narrative view of indignation in organizations. The instant response to a shocking event is a physical reaction, not mediated by narrative or any other form of accounting. The immediacy of the physical reactions associated with indignation is in dialogue with the narrative and other processes that we use for longer-term sensemaking. The data on which this paper is based are of the longer-term, considered, reflective kind, and I note this limitation to my study as an area for further work.

This reflexive section is not purely confessional. I know that I am not alone in being aware of the discrepancy between the visceral and the considered reaction to bad behaviour because it forms a regular topic for academic jokes. People will talk about someone whom they feel has behaved despicably towards them, will discuss alternative explanations of how that person behaved, and will eventually suggest, to applause from their colleagues, that

none of the reasonable explanations of the behaviour of the person who wronged them apply, and that the person is 'in fact' 'just a bastard'. The phrase 'in fact' is usually sufficient to raise a laugh among those who have been taught to think pluralistically, and this coupled with the relief of not having to go through any more layers of explanation of the bad behaviour usually means that a good reception is guaranteed for this line of explanation. The sense of relief is important; the need to make sense is strong, and the attraction of a parsimonious way of making sense is even stronger. The multi-authored storytelling (Boje 1991) involved in this performance makes it different from the situation of the solitary writer, because there is a conversation in which participants can engage in a well-practised joint sensemaking. The immediacy of the indignation is lost, and this facilitates the conversation. The narratives I have used in this paper are all ones where many people can tell some version of the story, but it is worth bearing in mind that there are quite a few people in organizations who do not have access to others to make sense with.

Three Examples of Indignation in Organizations

Narrative 1: Clever Bastard

Everyone thought Mark was clever. His numerous consultancy clients in many organizations would tell you so, although none of them seemed to need to specify *what* he was clever at. He had a way of convincing people that he had a clear image of what they might achieve together, and the power of that image often seemed strong enough to create the impetus for change. He always seemed extremely relaxed, even when some cherished project appeared to be going wrong. He wore a cynical air with pride, and yet those with whom he worked did not believe in his cynicism; they were sure that he was a competent individual who would end up by helping them to produce the kind of organization they wanted to live in.

Tom was the chief executive of one of the organizations where Mark consulted, and had worked with Mark for some years when I first met them both. Their double acts were famous throughout the organization and well beyond. They were frequently invited to talk about their work together at business schools and conferences, as a fine example of the level of co-operation which could be developed between a consultant and client in a long-term relationship. They were seen by many as a model of how to go about changing organizations.

Jill, Kelly, Paul, Derek and all the rest of Tom's senior management team had also been very impressed with Mark. Because everyone knew that he was clever, they were not too surprised that they could not always understand him. His last and greatest change project with their organization was the one which drastically reduced the number of layers, and was to give them the ultimate in lean, agile management structures. They asked him how people were going to develop their careers in future, and as Derek put it,

'He looked me straight in the eye and said, "We will have spiralling careers", while drawing a slow, careful spiral in the air with his finger. We all thought he meant something by it, that he had some ideas, and the spiral was just a shorthand. When it came to it, we found there was nothing else; he hadn't the faintest idea how career progression or even continuation might work in his new organization. But we all thought that everyone else understood, and if not that, at least Mark knew how it was going to work. But he didn't.'

Jill was the only one who expressed doubt from an early stage, and she was the only member of the senior management team who was still working in the organization one year after the project. Everybody else had moved on, in most cases involuntarily. All of them except the incorrigibly nice Paul would refer to their former consultant as 'that bastard'. Mark was unrepentant; he had never claimed to know exactly how everything would work out. But he was not available to discuss what he had done at length; he was too busy drawing spirals in the air in other organizations.

Narrative 2: Bastard ex Machina

Geoff was far too affable for most people to get round to distrusting. He was full of bonhomie. An evening with Geoff was always likely to be fun. He was also chief executive, and generations of new employees had been led by his easy-going personal manner into thinking that they could safely do or say almost anything in Geoff's presence. Many of them had simply not realized how bright he was.

And indeed the cheerful discourse was not all pretence. To a considerable extent, the better you knew him, the more genuinely he seemed to be enjoying himself. But he could still be characterized by some of his colleagues as a bastard, not so much for what he did as for what he regarded as outside his responsibility. His management style was to set up mechanisms; he created frameworks by which his organization worked, and then left them to run. He refused to intervene in order to support any particular vision or agenda. In a sense he disempowered himself; once the mechanisms were set up, he could attribute all organizational events to them rather than to his own decisions. So if his subordinates did not like the decisions, they were hardly ever able to attribute them with any conviction to Geoff. He practised the kind of planned, limited responsibility that was made popular by the Thatcher government in the UK. This denies the role of senior or powerful people, arguing that top decision makers should not disable themselves by attempting to take too detailed responsibility for the effect of their decisions.

In addition, Geoff was very much a numbers man. His staff would joke that he never forgot a number, even if he could not remember what it was a number of. Geoff did not appear easy to demonize because he was basically very likeable, and few questioned his honesty or his integrity. However, he was also the boss and very highly paid, and this may be why there could still be a fair amount of suspicion or possibly scapegoating of him. When people got angry with him, and it did happen, it was because of his non-intervention, because of his concentration on numbers rather than qualitative issues, rather

than because of anything they positively disliked. Indignation was almost always for what he had not done rather than for what he had done. As one of his deputies, Adrian, put it,

‘The trouble is that, when the heat is on and you need support, Geoff will never be there. You’ll get the sympathetic look, perhaps the comment that he has always found a particular investment rule very tough, and you think: “You bastard, you wrote that rule, you’re the boss here, you could have helped and you didn’t.”’

Narrative 3: Devious Bastard

Alan had reached his senior position in the organization through a succession of mergers. He had a reputation for having always turned up in roles without anyone acknowledging having appointed him to them. Several of the managers around him had also been involved with him in a number of previous organizations, including (as his detractors were delighted to mention) a secondhand car venture. The general view of him around the organization was that he was not very competent at his managerial tasks, but that his staff were intensely loyal to him. Even in an organization that was usually reasonably politically correct, for some reason a lot of people outside his department saw fit to comment on his physical makeup, which was quite short and fat with a tendency to profuse sweating. Members of his department did not appear to see him, physically, the same way.

The time came when Alan’s department was being swallowed up in another department. Alan’s job and salary were safe, but his authority and autonomy were not. The manager in charge of the merger, Don, was keen to develop co-operation. Alan put around his department the story that the purpose of the merger was asset stripping. His department had considerable financial reserves which had been built up over time, and he claimed that reorganization was only being done in order to get hold of these. Don was an experienced manager who was not accustomed to being cast as the innocent abroad, but he found this so incomprehensible that he did not believe there was any sincerity in Alan’s statements. He had started from a fairly innocent position in which he assumed that others would treat him with the straightforward openness that he always showed. However, after two or three weeks of Alan’s programme of disinformation (in Don’s view), Don embarked on a campaign to make sure that his own view prevailed, which was that Alan was a devious, slimy bastard, and that those members of Alan’s department who believed what he was telling them were thereby showing themselves to be (a) easily fooled, and (b) incapable of sound, evidence-based judgement. So in this case bastardry is not only being attributed to an individual, but thickness and incompetence are being attributed to any who were prepared to ally themselves with that individual.

A Narrative Understanding of Bastards

Demonizing narratives

Our three narratives are different in the kinds of indignation expressed. These range from real anger (Tom on Mark, Don on Alan) to mild scepticism (Jill on Mark), to grudging admiration for daring action (the 'how does he get away with it' sense from many of Geoff's senior managers) to admiration for an heroic attempt to unseat the powerful (some of Alan's longest-serving subordinates on Alan). These are tales from organizational life, and do not show many of the extreme forms of hatred that are reported in political life, although several of Alan's subordinates would probably have been happy to see Don dead.

How do people hold and pass on negative views of others? In narrative literature it is claimed that we learn and remember through narrative.

'We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative.' (Hardy 1986)

Weick (1995) relates this to sensemaking:

'The requirements necessary to produce a good narrative provide a plausible frame for sensemaking. Stories posit a history for an outcome. They gather strands of experience into a plot that produces that outcome. The plot follows either the sequence beginning-middle-end or the sequence situation-transformation-situation. But sequence is the source of sense.' (1995: 128)

In order to make sense of someone else's activity, people develop a narrative about their activity. Indeed that statement is almost tautological. A narrative is the way that people connect up events, causes and effects, and that *is* sensemaking in action.

O'Connor (1997) says:

'To discover how anything happens in an organization, we ask people to tell us stories. To convince others that we know something about how things happen in organizations, we construct and tell stories about those stories. As others react to our stories, they tell stories about the stories we have told — and so on. (1997: 304)

So stories are how people in organizations get to hear what is going on, and how they persuade others that they know what is going on. My particular focus in this paper is the sub-genre of demonizing story. When someone wishes to present their self in some character, for example as strong defender, the knight in shining armour, heroic victor, and so on, they need something to defeat (Ochberg 1994). It is an accepted role of senior managers that they should go into battle on behalf of their subordinates, so there is an expectation on them at times to take on some such role. But if they are going to defend good against evil, they need something or someone that they can characterize as evil to defend it against. St George is utterly dependent on the dragon for his narrative power, and indeed for being remembered. Debates about whether he had any historical basis are more or less irrelevant here; the point of interest remains that the story of St George slaying the dragon to rescue the damsel

lives on, possibly without even having required a physical event or person to trigger it in the first place. St George needs his dragon as a matter of narrative necessity (Pratchett 1992).

This means that there may be a need for demons. In the cases above, Don may have needed Alan to demonize in order to demonstrate that he, Don, was doing a good but demanding job. English football hooligans may be dependent on having someone to fight against. Ideally it would be the supporters of an opposing team, but if those are not available, they will make do (as they did during the 2002 World Cup) with the Belgian police, while chanting 'No surrender to the IRA'. In this case we can see that the demonized party is absolutely essential to the sense of unity and the sense of self, and the non-sequiturs involved in the demonization do not seem to prevent the narrative being good enough for some football supporters. This demonization goes on, as those demonizing supporters may come to be seen as 'bastards' by the supporters of opposing teams, the police, and by other English football supporters who wanted to watch the game. Horrendous examples of the pathological extremes of this can be seen where scapegoating leads, via demonization, to genocide. The narrative process by which Hitler persuaded many that the problems of life and the economy in Germany in the 1930s could be attributed to wicked actions on the part of Jewish people has been widely commented on (Furksten 1993).

Indeed it is familiarity with such notorious examples of attribution which leaves many people unable to recognize the extent to which they engage in a demonization process. This may lead to taking care of appearances rather than to avoiding demonization in attribution processes. So someone may take care that, when referring to someone else as being 'a complete bastard', they have chosen an audience who will appreciate the strength and clarity that they are showing, and possibly the potential for exciting action in favour of good and against evil, rather than an audience who will cast doubt on the authenticity of their claim, or question their right to dismiss another human being so thoroughly.

Thus I argue that demonizing narratives have something to offer to the demonizer, and that the choice of audiences before whom demonization is performed is also important. This applies across the widely different degrees of demonization that are possible, from those for which acts of murder could be committed to those which involve mild mockery. But they are also needed for personal purposes. Why is someone taking such vigorous action against a particular colleague? Why are they treating that colleague as less than an equal human being? Narrative explanations about how the colleague's own stupidity or weakness mean that there is no choice but to treat them in such a fashion, how they have 'brought it on themselves', how 'there is no alternative' have the interesting effect of being acceptable where more propositional arguments would be mocked or undermined by others taking a reasonable view of what is going on in the organization. Thus for example, Mark's claim that he was not responsible for knowing how everything would work in the reorganization is quite reasonable. But the stories told about him by Jill, Kelly, Paul, Derek and Tom show different degrees of demonization

between Jill the survivor, Kelly and Paul who saw the need to move on from the organization, and Derek and Tom who both lost their jobs as a result of Mark's reorganization. Kelly, Paul and Derek all told stories about Mark's irresponsibility which would make anybody else think twice about working with him, and would achieve that much more effectively than simply saying, 'He does not always take responsibility.' Tom's stories attributed more intention to Mark's refusal to take responsibility, suggesting that Jill and Mark were in league to remove him. Similarly, Adrian can make his point about Geoff much more effectively by telling a story about one of the times when the expected help did not materialize, rather than by directly stating that 'He claims to be powerless to deliver promises and help friends in situations that are within his control.'

Making Sense of Bastards

It might be reasonable, in line with the argument above, to see demonizing as one means of sensemaking. In each of the organizational narratives above it was noticeable to me at the time of collecting the narratives that people seemed to keep looking for ways of making sense of others, and would try out several such ways before, in desperation, they would resort to describing them as bastards. Note that each of the three organizations in the narratives had a relatively liberal and pluralistic tradition. I am not suggesting that demonization is the only strategy for attribution remaining to the person who describes the other as a bastard, but they are certainly beginning to run out of alternative convincing constructions.

For example in the first narrative, Tom described how he had originally valued Mark highly, and had been reluctant to believe that he was just a cynical, get-rich-quick consultant with seemingly no higher goal than his own continued employment. He would describe the intensity with which he had sought other explanations of Mark's behaviour, but without success. I am not of course implying that this account is in some way historically correct. It was part of Tom's discourse that he had tried all this, and he would have been aware that his audience would have expected him not to demonize too readily. It would have been easier for him if he could have found some other way of telling the story of Mark. With Geoff it was even more clear that people were very unwilling to define him as a bastard, and that his mixture of affability and purposeful irresponsibility permitted a whole array of definitions, with people more rarely feeling that they had run out of explanations, and with many people feeling that he was bad at his job, rather than having bad intentions.

Indeed part of the anger when anybody in these cases did describe anyone else as a bastard may have had to do with their feeling almost trapped into that definition by the target of it. Not only were they angry about particular behaviour on the part of the other person, but they were even more angry because they could not make sense of that behaviour without thinking of the person as a bastard, and this felt like failure to them. The phenomenon is the same as when journalists describe people as 'mindless hooligans'. The

attribution of mindlessness seems to many to be an irritating cop-out. What steps have they taken to check on the presence or absence of a mind behind the actions that they are reporting? How irritating for those who regard themselves as sophisticated, pluralist thinkers, with a good understanding of their fellow human beings, to be pushed into having to make such a poor-sounding attribution, to have to describe someone as just a bastard without being able to give their account any more depth. How much more angry a person may become when they are unable to find another way of responding.

This may lead into a vicious circle by which the definition of bastard is self-proving. Someone can find that they have no other way of defining another's behaviour, and this leaves them feeling entrapped. As they begin to treat the other person as if they were a bastard, so they conclude that they must indeed be a very unpleasant character, because there is no way they would be treating them so badly if they were not.

Where Narratives Meet

As people go about living their narratives, they write themselves into others' stories. To return to Edwards (2000) most of the things which drive people in terms of ambition are to do with writing oneself into a more significant role in other people's stories. The ambition to be more senior in an organization may have a lot to do with the desire to write oneself into others' stories. Of course there is extra money and different work content, but often not enough to explain why people are ambitious for seniority. This is particularly obvious in academic life, certainly in the UK, where the extra money that goes with senior positions is trivial compared with what could be amassed by private practice. Status is not a sufficient explanation in itself, except as a proxy for the fact that with more status people believe they can write themselves more effectively into others' stories. With more seniority generally they hope that they will be able to enter those stories in some way that they are happy with.

But with some people it is very difficult to know how to enter their stories. If someone behaves in a way which seems unpredictable, which is difficult to make sense of, how can another person write themselves into that story? They are unsure of what their character (in the novelist's sense) is, of how they will respond, and they are therefore unsure how to write themselves into the other person's story. Some level of trust is required for many kinds of narrative presence, where trust may for this purpose be defined as feeling that you know how the other person will respond in their character (O'Neill 2002). If there is not that sense of trust, they may be emplotted in a character where unpredictability or unreliability are built in. For example, they may be emplotted as a bastard. This imposes its own kind of predictability and reliability by acknowledging that this person is not trustworthy.

If a person feels compelled to emplot someone else as a bastard, the cast of characters open to the person in the interaction is correspondingly influenced. They may choose to emplot themselves as the missionary, saving the soul of the other by converting them from their wicked ways, but my own participant

observation in organizations has found relatively few accounts or examples of this. This most fundamental kind of staff development is no doubt being carried on or at least attempted by some in organizations. However, it is not currently a fashionable way to tell the story, so even if there are people who believe they are converting others around them to better ways, they are not usually offering this discourse. Indignation is not predominantly dealt with by attempting to 'improve' the moral behaviour of the target of the indignation. The one exception I have come across was someone who was the subject of many stories from colleagues, in which he was described as 'bringing out the best in others', and 'someone whose presence makes it easier to do the right thing'.

Conclusion

The Joy of Demonizing

Indignation can feel good. It is a very certain emotion, an emotion in which we know who we are, and know that we are right (Mangham 1998). It places us clearly in the world, and also places the other character(s). As one of the participants in Sims and Lee (1993) put it, sometimes it can be a pleasure to sack someone, if you are sure you are doing the right thing. The action could make you feel 'all of a piece'.

It is continuously alleged that indignation sells newspapers. British tabloid newspapers carry many stories in which horror is expressed at someone's disgusting behaviour. Trials of murderers and rapists are covered in what is overall a very morally ambivalent way, but with a clear intent to express feelings of indignation, and then an invitation to readers to join in these feelings against the perpetrator. The moral ambiguity arises from the salacious entertainment being offered at the same time, with accounts of the crime which are aimed to titillate in the same way as violent films. This process has been described as 'loving the sin while hating the sinner'.

Television pictures of the same trials show that there is usually a crowd outside the courtroom, hurling abuse and anything else that comes to hand at the accused. The police often have to protect those accused of the crimes that attract such indignation from the public. The angry members of the public are not the relatives of the victim, who are shown in a different television shot, but some presumably unconnected collection of the indignant whose stories for themselves of their own lives may have them guarding good against evil by going and expressing their rage.

They are not alone. The experience of fury while watching or reading serious news reports of the actions of whoever is considered to be a bastard is very widespread. People who consider themselves normal and balanced will sit down deliberately to watch or read such reports, about events which are outside their sphere of influence, and will knowingly put themselves in a position where they feel full of indignation. Why?

A full answer to that question is outside this study. But it is clear that a discourse of moral indignation is sought by many people, and they will put

themselves in the way of experiences which fuel that indignation. There is a warm glow to be had in knowing that someone can be looked down on as a bastard.

The Guilt of Demonizing

On the other hand, as said earlier, there is an opposite side to this. There is a discomfort involved in demonizing. I have demonized the demonizers above, and many people seem to be happy to show their disapproval of the salacious use of moral indignation to buy a cheap feeling of superiority. Tabloid reporters of crimes, and indeed those who read their papers, are not the company they would wish to be seen in. They are, in their own view, too mature and balanced to be whole-heartedly part of a group which they see as self-righteous bastards.

People therefore erect their own platform from which to tell the difference between legitimate and illegitimate indignation. The voice of indignation is carefully modulated to bring a tone of exasperation which suggests that everything has been done to see the other point of view, but in the end there was simply not enough good in that other view. This is the discourse of liberal reason, when it explains that it has done all that is possible to comprehend the point of view of the other, but there was nothing coherent or reasonable to comprehend. This is one of the oldest tricks in the demonizing book. It depends once again on narrative, in that the story being conveyed is that the person making the judgement is totally reasonable and has sought hard for an alternative way of construing the other.

However, many never feel comfortable with this activity. Arguably this may be because they feel that it is too self-indulgent, that it constitutes too great an evasion of moral responsibility, and that the only demon who could make them so indignant is one that they know well from within.

The relational side (Wortham 1999) of demonizing is always ambiguous. The clarity of emplotting someone in a clear, negative way may be satisfying as a representation, but does that story about the other person satisfy interactional purposes with an audience? Is demonizing an acceptable form of discourse in that group? Is it one of those activities which is made more exciting by being on the edge of being acceptable?

If so, then the joy and guilt of demonizing are one, and together form a piquant sauce which organizational members are not likely to give up.

Final Comment

This paper has argued that the experience of indignation, of dismissing someone in the organization as a 'bastard', can be understood by considering how organization members emplot themselves in narrative. Even those who are predisposed to understand that others' behaviour may need careful interpretation before attributing a motive or a moral category experience a visceral reaction of indignation to some of their colleagues. This can be because they

can find no way of making sense for themselves of why those others are behaving as they are. Furthermore, they may become all the more indignant because they are uncomfortable with acting in such a demonizing way. Demonizing may both be a relief because at least they now have a way of understanding the other, and yet still bring guilt because it leaves them with a discourse which sounds unsatisfactory both to them and to others.

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