



Author response

Narratives of criminal action and forensic psychology

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Purpose. In commenting on Youngs and Canter's (2012a) study, Ward (2012) raises concerns about offenders' personal narratives and their link to self-concepts and identity. His comments relate to explorations of personal life stories rather than the narratives of actual crimes that are the focus of Youngs and Canter's (2012a) study. The elaboration of this different focus helps to allay many of Ward's (2012) concerns and reveals further possibilities for developing the narrative approach within forensic psychology.

Methods. The focus on offenders' accounts of a particular crime allows the development of a standard pro forma, the Narrative Role Questionnaire (NRQ), which deals with the roles a person thinks they played when committing a crime. These roles act as a summary of the criminal's offence narrative. Multivariate analysis of the NRQ clarifies the specific narrative themes explored by Youngs and Canter (2012a).

Results. The examination of the components of the NRQ indicates that offence narratives encapsulate many psychological processes including thinking styles, self-concepts, and affective components. This allows the four narrative themes identified by Youngs and Canter to provide the basis for rich hypotheses about the interaction between the dynamics of personal stories and identity. The four narratives of criminal action also offer a foundation for understanding the particular, detailed styles of offending action and the immediate, direct processes that act to instigate and shape these.

Conclusion. These developments in our understanding of offence narratives generate fruitful research questions that bridge the concerns of investigative and correctional applications of narrative theory.

Responding to Ward (2012)

Ward's (2012) commentary on Youngs and Canter's (2012a) exploration of the forms of personal narrative revealed in interviews with offenders provides a valuable elaboration of the utility of the narrative approach. Furthermore, by identifying areas for further clarification, he shows the fruitfulness of this perspective and the rich research opportunities it provides as well as many practical applications. By opening up the background to the consideration of narratives tracing this back to Plutarch, he shows

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their long-recognized value in providing insights into the human condition. All this is most encouraging and supports our view that the time is now ripe for the careful elaboration of the study and application of personal narratives within forensic and related contexts.

In reviewing the exploration of personal offender narratives, Ward raises a number of issues that he sees as crucial. We address these in the current paper and show that the integration of theoretical with methodological considerations helps to resolve them. This integration also provides a basis for incorporating applications of our particular approach to criminal narratives into a wide range of contexts as varied as therapeutic interventions with offenders and investigative interviewing. However, we draw a distinction between the narratives of crimes, which we explore, and the broader life narratives that are Ward's focus. As we show, it is this more limited, focused examination of an offender's account of his experience of a crime that provides the strongest opportunity for developments in theory and method.

Ward identifies three classes of problems in Youngs and Canter (2012a) that he says are 'evident within the broader field of narrative theory and research'. He lists these problems as 'definitional vagueness, lack of clarity concerning the nature of the self and its relationship to narrative roles, and methodological problems involving reliability and validity'. We consider these all to be aspects of the methodologies typically used to explore personal narratives. These methodologies have been limited within the 'broader field of narrative theory and research' because, indeed, of the *broadness* of that field. Ward identifies the problems he sees in our paper as typical of the general narrative approach. This general approach places narrative theory firmly within considerations of identity and emphasizes the forms of life stories that cover many stages in a person's existence. The clearest, often quoted lifetime, offender narratives that Ward draws attention to are the scripts that Maruna (2001) explored within the context of desistance from crime; *condemnation* and *redemption*. Such generic conceptualizations of a person's offending history underpin Ward and Marshall's (2007) argument that 'the rehabilitation of offenders depends crucially on the construction of a more adaptive narrative identity' (p. 280). In other words, they see identity as embedded in offenders' overarching, personal narratives. This makes considerable sense when the forms of narrative are lifetime frameworks, dealing with wide-ranging issues of criminality that have some underlying process such as redemption or condemnation at their heart.

However, Youngs and Canter (2012a) have a more specific objective of understanding what happens in any given crime. They agree with Presser's (2009) argument that a person's narratives can contribute to an understanding of the here and now of a particular set of actions. Youngs and Canter's starting point is the narrative that drives focused criminal action. This recognizes that such narratives may differ substantively from narratives that have allowed and seek to explain a criminal lifestyle. In line with this, some of the themes they have identified (Canter, Kaouri, & Ioannou, 2003; Youngs & Canter, 2012a, 2012b) are rather different from the 'victim of circumstance' theme running through the life narrative. Maruna (2001) identifies within his persistent offenders. The relationship between the broader issues of lifetime narrative identity and the specific narratives revealed through Youngs and Canter's interviews is an important research question, but to find ways of answering it requires revisiting the origins of Youngs and Canter's model.

From offence actions to particular narratives

In essence, Ward (2012) considers the issues Youngs and Canter (2012a) raise from the perspective of therapeutic interventions, which is the domain in which the broader

narrative perspective has taken root. But although this complements the investigative psychology objectives that were the starting point for our work in this area, the issues he raises are not as problematic in the context of actual crimes especially when quantitative methodologies are used to explore them.

Youngs and Canter's theory emerged directly out of the need to understand offenders' actions in a crime and the aspects of an offender that were salient in his or her criminal activity that could be used to contribute to investigative decision making. The idea here is that making inferences about offenders from their actions required some theoretical modelling. The proposal that this process of inference ('profiling') was more than a matter of deriving statistical relationships from a database was first sketched out by Canter (1994). Subsequently, Investigative Psychologists (cf. Canter & Youngs, 2009) have always been interested in understanding the specific, precise, and direct processes that shape criminal actions. Canter made clear that the possibility of making inferences about the characteristics of the offender from his offence actions relies upon making sense of the psychological processes implied by a particular pattern of offending behaviour. In that work he also argued that the coherence that studies identified in criminals' detailed actions implied a narrative. For example, in one of the earliest studies in this domain, Canter and Heritage (1990) indicated that themes may be discerned in the rapist's comments that suggest he thinks he has a relationship with the victim, or in the serial killer's dismemberment of his victims' bodies that shows a distant objectifying of them as part of the killer's own 'adventure' (Canter, 1995). These considerations were the first steps towards identifying what the different narratives might be for different offences.

In subsequent developments, Canter and Youngs (2009) were able to propose particular narratives derived from the groupings or themes of co-occurring actions that investigative psychology studies were observing in the multivariate analyses of detailed offence behaviour. So, for example, they argued that rapes carried out with excessive violence, verbal insults, and demeaning language and an extensive range of acts of sexual exploitation could be understood in terms of the vindictive and avenging agenda at the heart of a Tragedy narrative. A rather different narrative was implied by rapes in which the offender apologized to the victim, performed oral sex, asked the victim to participate both physically and verbally, and complimented the victim. Canter and Youngs (2009) argue for an underlying storyline of Irony here; a narrative in which the offender seeks to position himself as the victim and does not fully acknowledge the violation he is committing. For Canter and Youngs, the underlying narratives that gave coherence to the empirical patterns of offence actions they were finding had much in common with the literary narrative themes that Frye (1957) had articulated, although clearly in profoundly destructive form. They draw upon his Quest (Romance), Tragedy, Adventure, and Irony narratives to make sense of the themes of behavioural coherence emerging across the full range of forms of criminality.

The conceptualization of criminal narratives in Youngs and Canter (2012a) has its roots then in their discovery that the empirical models of the different modus operandi or offending styles seen across a range of offence types, from arson and burglary to rape and robbery, were readily interpreted in terms of four narrative themes, each related to a definitive role: the Professional Adventurer, the Victim's Irony, the Revenger's Tragedy, and the Hero's Quest. Youngs and Canter's (2012a) theoretical paper drew on the same underlying narratives but argued that the Roles the offenders saw themselves playing would be slightly different from those derived from analysis of the actions, advancing a Tragic Hero role from the Tragedy narrative and a Revengeful Mission role from the Quest narrative. As we show though, Youngs and Canter's subsequent empirical examination

of the detailed components of each theme showed that the roles described by the offenders themselves could in fact be interpreted in line with the model derived from the offending actions (Youngs and Canter, 2012b).

Although the recognition of narrative themes within patterns of offending is not direct evidence that the themes actually generated the actions, the breadth of application of the framework is nonetheless encouraging, particularly the emergence of the same broad themes in the offenders' own descriptions of their narrative offence roles that Youngs and Canter (2012b) report.

Beyond motive and personality: Narratives of criminal action

The investigative psychology approach to understanding the coherence within offending actions assumes that this requires understanding the meaning of the crime as it makes sense to the offender. This builds upon Canter's (1994) early work drawing on the narrative approach to show how offenders' narratives provide a richer understanding of the meaning of their offending than dispositional or social theories. He argued that as part of a personal story or narrative, motivation and meaning necessarily become the intention to act; the dynamic process that is required to move the drama forward. By understanding the narrative then, we get closer to understanding the action, as Presser (2009) also pointed out. A crucial aspect of this is that, following McAdams (1985) and Canter (1994) made a clear distinction between the dynamic aspects inherent in any narrative, because narrative implies an unfolding series of episodes that the central protagonist moves through, and the more static aspects of personality traits that are regarded as enduring characteristics of the individual.

The distinction can be seen as that between the narrative mirroring a functional analysis of a process in which the individual is seen as an agent shaping and being shaped by his own personal story, and the structural components of the personality, on which trait theories and many models of identity focus. Within this framework narratives cannot be equated with a person's self-concept or identity, even if presented in narrative form. Identity is a larger scale concept that can embrace such broad notions as condemnation or redemption and may house many different day-to-day narratives and many subidentities.

Offence narratives emerge out of specific aspects of a crime. In particular, stories emphasize interactions between the protagonist and others. They thus recognize the fundamentally interpersonal quality of crime that it is an interactive, implicitly, or explicitly social event. Ward (2012) does note that one of the key features of a narrative is that it is told in social relationships, so criminal actions that are lived narratives also imply that crime is an interpersonal transaction. The conception of the self in criminal narratives is necessarily, then, concerned with interpersonal self-awareness rather than introspective issues. In this way, in contrast to the general narratives that have been at the heart of the field of narrative theory and research, the narrative themes that Youngs and Canter illustrate relate to the psychological processes that an offender draws on when committing any given crime.

Although narratives embrace issues that are considered within the realms of personality theory, it is important to emphasize the inherent temporal, processing aspects of offence narratives. This makes their conceptualization closer to popular ideas of 'motive' than to personality studies and a therapeutic focus on identity. However, the ambiguity of the meaning of criminal 'motives' ranging as it does from explanation, to objective, or even unconscious drive, and the assumption that there is one fixed motive for any

crime, make the concept untenable for systematic use. Nonetheless, the implications of movement inherent in the root of the term 'motive' is a useful component of this concept that is much more richly encapsulated in the idea of a criminal narrative. The narrative concept, furthermore, adds the implication of intention, whereas motive implies some driving force within the individual that has a less agentic quality than the idea of being hero or a professional, for example.

Legal systems recognize that agency is central to evaluating a person's action. Legal decision making is based upon understanding what an individual was seeking to do. Yet, as Canter (2008) has argued in some detail, most psychological and social explanations of crime remove agency from the offender. His or her biology, personality or upbringing is seen as the causes of crime rather than the decisions an offender takes. The narrative perspective identifies the person as the agent of his/her own actions. Personal criminal narratives help us to understand the deliberative, defined, criminal activity by drawing attention to the processes that particular actions were part of at particular points in time. In the absence of agency-based theories, we cannot explain why those actions are not committed at other points or by other individuals with similar background potentiating factors. Personal narratives, created by individuals in relation to their understanding of their own characteristics and circumstances, provide insight into what leads some people to pursue criminal activities whilst others are able to draw on protective factors that make them able to see their actions in a different light.

Furthermore, the dynamic, unfolding nature of narratives allows for a complex pattern of consistency and development of offending behaviour. Any consideration of personal narratives assumes change over time and therefore predicts that any underlying consistency in an offender's actions will draw on the themes to his personal, crime-related narrative, rather than some fixed, unchanging pattern of behaviour.

The challenge of investigative psychology is to understand the underlying coherence to detailed, specific patterns of offending actions. This leads to a focus on the offender's meaning and intention, the unfolding development of the offence event, and the interpersonal significance of the victim. These challenges are met by adopting a narrative approach to the offence, with the focus on agency, dynamic process, and social roles that this allows.

Narrative roles: A methodological breakthrough

A particularly important aspect of Ward's commentary is the attention he draws to the definitional vagueness and methodological weaknesses inherent in the 'broader field of narrative theory and research'. Canter (1994) made clear, some time ago, that he was aware of these challenges and considered various ways of resolving them. He realized that by focusing on offence narratives we narrow the area of exploration enough to be able to find a proxy for the actual storyline - roles. Influenced by Goffman (1958) and the considerations of role theory within social psychology (Sarbin & Allen, 1968), Canter argued that the concept of role, drawn as it is from the dramaturgical approach within psychology, carries with it the implications of a storyline. When considering whole life narratives, there will be many different roles a person plays, but in the limited 'action scene' of an offence, he argued that the particular role played in the crime is a reasonable summary of the storyline for that particular crime.

The assertion is that people can recognize and identify these roles without the complexity inherent in developing the full storyline. This opens up the possibility of a standard, quantitative measure of narrative themes, using Roles as a proxy for narratives.

Pilot work demonstrated that offenders could reliably recognize the roles they played as part of a crime and an initial study (Canter *et al.*, 2003) gave meaningful results. Development of this approach has produced the Narrative Roles Questionnaire (NRQ) (Youngs & Canter, 2012b) that is now in use as part of a multinational study of criminal narratives. This is a 32-item instrument that provides descriptions of possible roles (as illustrated in Table 1) that the offender may have felt s/he was taking on when carrying out a particular crime. The offender is asked to indicate on a 5-point scale how much the statement describes the offending experience.

Offence event roles provide a medium through which implicit narrative processes are given tangible form and can be related to a given context through descriptions that capture the quality of the agency that is underpinning the detailed action in that event. Early indications are that such abbreviations work well with offending behaviour perhaps because they capture the egocentric focus at the heart of criminal action. This readily allows exploration of the distorted, self-centred, simple, and clichéd perspectives that often characterize offending activity. Furthermore, a measure that focuses on the role experienced within an offending event encourages a non-threatening summary of a criminal narrative theme.

The focus on the direct descriptions of an offender's experience of the event does not require overt justification or even readily allow the respondent social desirability interpretation or conscious positioning across items. Such techniques, rather than an overt life story interview, may be particularly useful in narrative research as they do not require the individual to make explicit the underlying themes within their narrative or to provide a coherent 'life story' account. Indeed, the roles technique may help reduce the rewriting of narratives and reveal the presence of narrative themes of which the individual may not be fully aware. In studies of criminals' experience, where those themes may be less socially acceptable or where respondents may be less articulate, such techniques have proven particularly powerful. The NRQ provides a more objective

Table 1. Indicative statements that define narrative roles taken from Narrative Roles Questionnaire (Youngs & Canter, 2012b)

Professional	'I was like a professional' 'For me, it was like a usual days work' 'I was doing a job' 'It was routine'
Hero	'I was looking for recognition' 'I couldn't stop myself' 'It was like I wasn't part of it' 'It was a manly thing to do'
Victim	'I was a victim' 'I was helpless' 'I was confused about what was happening' 'I just wanted to get it over with'
Revenge	'I was trying to get revenge' 'I didn't care what would happen' 'It was my only choice' 'I had to do it'

account of the dominant theme in a criminal's actions, when completed to describe the role being played when carrying out a specific crime, than a qualitative analysis of the motifs that emerge from a free-flowing account, even though such qualitative material can enhance theory and enrich understanding as Youngs and Canter (2012a) show.

Multivariate analyses of responses from many offenders (Canter *et al.*, 2003; Youngs & Canter, 2012b) support the identification of the four dominant narrative themes that were illustrated from the qualitative interviews drawn on in Youngs and Canter (2012a). The scales derived from these analyses give a more precise operational definition of the narrative themes to which the roles relate than is possible from qualitative analysis of open-ended interviews. So, for example, the item in the NRQ 'I was trying to get revenge', is not highly correlated with items such as 'it was a mission' but is correlated with 'what was happening was just fate'. This helps to operationalize the idea of a doomed 'Tragedy' narrative as being part of the Revenger role rather than that of a Heroic mission. By contrast the Quest narrative appears to be reflected in items such as 'It was a manly thing to do' that implies the offender sees his/her role as that of a Hero, not someone on a Revengeful Mission as Youngs and Canter (2012a) had postulated from the qualitative analysis of interviews. The key statements that define each role are shown in Table 1.

The exemplar statements in Table 1 illustrate how the NRQ allows a more precise definition of each of the narrative themes that were illustrated with case studies in Canter and Youngs (2011). For instance the feelings of helplessness that are associated with seeing oneself as a 'Victim', the recognition that the 'Revengeful' role is interpreted as being the only action available to the offender and what is called the 'Hero' role being considered as manly and a quest for recognition.

A high proportion of the items in the NRQ relate to the general theme of being a 'professional' offender. Given the origins of these items in interviews with offenders, this is perhaps to be expected. Yet, this large number of items does allow some differentiation within the 'Professional' theme. This differentiation draws attention to a subset of the 'Professional' theme that deals with 'excitement' and 'adventure', the criminal activity being 'fun' and 'interesting'. So for some offenders who see themselves as involved in a routine, professional activity, this is nonetheless an adventure, whereas for others there is more emphasis on being in control.

These refinements illustrate the value of this more quantitative approach, especially when combined with multidimensional analysis, in facilitating the elaboration of themes. Such elaboration is more difficult when open-ended qualitative material is the only source, which is part of the reason why Ward sought clarification of the definitions in the original Youngs and Canter (2012a) paper. As so often in psychology more precise definitions are tied into more specific data collection methodologies. So, the NRQ provides an increase in clarity as well as offering a methodology that is now in use as part of an international research project.

The multivariate analysis of the NRQ reported in Youngs and Canter (2012b) shows that the items are unevenly distributed across the dominant narrative themes. In line with the facet approach (Canter, 1985) from which this methodology is derived, this allows development of the pro forma by adding further items that it is hypothesized will enhance the number of items in any particular theme, allowing a direct test of the central thematic hypotheses with new datasets. Such tests help further to clarify the central concepts and ways of studying them.

Psychological aspects of narrative themes

The specification of offence narratives also reveals the psychological influences operating during offending. The four narrative themes elaborated using the NRQ help to clarify the range of psychological processes inherent in criminal actions. Youngs and Canter (2012a) elaborate these implicit psychological processes. These include criminal thinking styles such as justification and harm minimization, illustrated for example by the 'Professional' offence being presented as one that underplays the harm to the victim and presents the activity as a routine job. They also incorporate self-concepts and other aspects of identity in relation to a particular crime, clarifying the issue Ward raises about the link between identity and narratives. In the context of a particular crime, there is an identity that comes from the dominant narrative theme, such as the offender being a 'manly' Hero, or 'helpless' Victim.

Careful consideration of the structure of offence narratives indicates that they carry affective components as well. This answers the question Ward raises about the links between narratives and emotions. As for any dramatic plot, there are distinct emotions associated with it. In the narratives considered here it is hypothesized, for example, that the Professional, especially one with a strong Adventure component would be associated with positive emotions, but in contrast the Victim would involve negative affect. Preliminary tests of this hypothesis (Canter & Ioannou, 2004) not only reveal the strong emotions experienced by a criminal during their crimes, as Katz (1988) proposed, but also that a methodology similar to the NRQ can be feasibly used with offenders to describe his or her emotions when committing their crimes. This thus provides a clear method for exploring the links between emotions and narratives, which is currently in use.

Potential contributions of offence narratives

We see the emphasis on offence narratives as providing some distinct, additional content to the understanding of the psychological processes inherent in criminal actions. This draws directly from the literary exploration of major narrative themes, such as those discussed by Frye (1957), Booker (2004), or Herman (2009). The relevance of these considerations to psychological explanations can be shown by reference to one central analytic stance within literary explorations. At its most elementary, literary criticism commonly accepts that the difference between comedy and tragedy is that in comedy the person overcomes circumstances but in tragedy the circumstances overcome the person. In psychological terms, these two poles imply a difference in locus of control running over a set of related episodes, the comic reflecting an internal agency and the tragic an external one. In the criminal context, we have argued that the positive, controlling narrative is best described as a professional adventure. The negative, external imposition is reflected in victim narratives.

Narratives also incorporate aspects of justification, cognitive distortion, and other criminal thinking styles (Walters, 2003). As Youngs and Canter (2012b) show in some detail, when criminal actions are seen as part of a personal narrative then, for example, justifications are given a clear dynamic. An offender who says 'it's a tragedy really, the fates were against me' or 'I just had to make clear I was in charge' is recounting a way of exonerating his behaviour by drawing on implicit narratives intrinsic to his/her culture.

In other words, we are not offering the narrative perspective as some entirely new way of conceptualizing criminal actions but as a framework that integrates many

of the existing psychological approaches and concerns relating to criminal activity. In particular, the narratives suggest particular ways in which the specific emotions, cognitions, and interpersonal tendency that have been implicated in criminality by diverse authorities (Bandura, 1990; Katz, 1998; Sykes & Matza, 1957) may combine. Interestingly, the core distinctions identified in these different criminological domains do appear to map on to the four preliminary narrative themes articulated thus far (Youngs & Canter, 2012a, 2012b). These narrative themes articulate the quality of the agency that activates these various psychological components of offending. In so doing, they offer an approach to explaining what Presser (2009) referred to as the 'here and now' of crime that criminological thinking usually lacks. We suggest offence narratives are also the basis for understanding the 'how' of offending; explorations that move us beyond general issues of 'why' or broad causal factors on to considerations of the meaning of the specific unfolding actions for the protagonist.

Further contributions of offence narrative framework

This focus on criminal variants of narratives and on narratives as they are revealed in specific events, in other words, the Narrative Role, has a broader potential contribution to thinking in criminology and narrative psychology generally. Youngs and Canter (2012b) showed how these narrative themes capture the core psychological distinctions in emotion, offenders' cognitions, and aspects of interpersonal self-awareness that have been established previously. In the cognitive domain, two basic distinctions have been specified as underpinning offenders' justifications (Maruna & Mann, 2006). Youngs and Canter tie the four combinations of distorted thinking produced by these into their four distinct narrative themes. Within the emotional domain, two core dimensions of Arousal/Non-arousal and Pleasure/Displeasure have been delineated. Arguing that with a few exceptions, which general criminal activity varies from highly dis-pleasurable to neutral or mildly pleasurable, Youngs and Canter show that their four offence narratives capture the four combinations of highly aroused/highly dis-pleasurable, Non-aroused/highly dis-pleasurable, highly aroused/neutral, and Non-aroused/neutral.

Youngs and Canter also show how the fundamental distinctions delineated in interpersonal tendency are captured by the different narratives. They use this to differentiate the offender's offence-specific identity implied by the narratives. Based upon the view that offending is a fundamentally interpersonal activity, the victim of which may be implicit or explicit (Canter, 1989), they focus on those aspects of identity that concern the offender's self-awareness relative to the victim. Youngs and Canter show how these are reflected in variations in the offence narratives as perceptions of themselves as strong or weak relative to the victim (whether implicit or explicit) and as variations in the extent to which the victim is significant for the offender. The integration of psychological components implied by the narrative themes is summarized in Table 2.

Integrating different aetiological factors

Beyond the rich psychological aspects of the narrative perspective on criminal actions as revealed through the NRQ, the particular combinations of the psychological processes that interact to produce the offence roles provide interesting insights into the potential relationships between distinct constructs that come from fundamentally different

Table 2. Narrative integration of affective-, cognitive-, and offence-specific identity components of offending

Narrative role	Offence identity	Cognitive distortions	Emotional state
<i>Quest narrative</i> The proposed <i>Hero</i> role that emerges from a <i>Quest</i> narrative is hypothesized to be comprised of the following:	Strong; others significant	Present own alternative Evaluations of actions; refocus impact in terms offender's own objectives	Calm; displeasurable
<i>Tragedy narrative</i> The proposed <i>Revenge</i> role hypothesized to emerge from the <i>Tragedy</i> narrative, is further hypothesized to have the following components:	Weak; others not significant	Responsibility attributed to others; minimize impact	Aroused; neutral
<i>Adventure narrative</i> The proposed <i>Professional</i> role, rooted in an <i>Adventure</i> narrative, is hypothesized to emerge out of the following:	Strong; others not significant	Present own alternative Evaluations of actions; minimize impact	Calm; neutral
<i>Irony narrative</i> The proposed <i>Victim</i> role is hypothesized to emerge out of the <i>Irony</i> narrative and to comprise following:	Weak; others significant	Responsibility attributed to others; refocus impact in terms offender's own objectives	Aroused; displeasurable

criminological schools. They draw together aspects of the emotional experience of crime emanating from Katz's (1988) innovative writings on the affective 'seductions of crime', with the cognitive focus of Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization and Bandura's (1990) theory of moral disengagement, as well as aspects of criminal identity that can be tied into the subcultural perspectives of Cloward and Ohlin (1960) and others.

The roles suggest some specific relationships between the cognitive, affective, and identity concepts that have previously been studied in isolation. They suggest, for

example, that through the Hero role, a tendency to distort cognitive interpretations of crime by focusing on one's own objectives only and presenting one's own evaluation of events rather than attempting to minimize the harm, will tend to co-occur in criminal activity underpinned by a negative, non-aroused emotional state during which the offender will have a strong sense of self-awareness and where the others involved are significant. Many other refutable hypotheses can be derived from the narratives of criminal actions as summarized at the end of this paper.

Reaching out to therapy

A particularly interesting contribution of Ward's comments is his proposal that the narrative themes we have identified have potential in treatment interventions with offenders. A better understanding of the detailed, substantive nature of the different narratives that underpin offence action opens the way for more refined utilization of narrative ideas in treatment. Our approach proposes that it is not only the broad lifetime narratives that are relevant when treating offenders, such as the *condemnation* and *redemption* frameworks proffered by Maruna (2001), but the detailed consideration of actual criminal events and whether the offenders see themselves as Victims, Heroes, Professionals, or on a Revengeful mission in that crime. The particular nature of the narrative themes carries direct intervention implications. For example, an intervention focus in respect of a Victim Role may be the rewriting of past disappointments, while for the Revenger issues of anger management may be more pertinent. Furthermore, the articulation of the problem (the offence) in a narrative form opens up the possibility of treatment in the form of direct counternarratives, in much the same way that Ward's Good Lives model focuses on developing positive general life stories.

In preliminary explorations of this approach with actual clinical interventions, it has been found fruitful to use the NRQ as a starting point for discussions with offenders. This allows consideration of the many forms of psychological process that are inherent in the narrative themes of particular crimes. However, framing the therapeutic intervention within the narrative perspective is less threatening and invasive for offenders than a direct confrontation over thought patterns and beliefs. It also allows the therapist to embed the intervention in the cultural storylines with which the offender will be familiar.

Conclusions and a research agenda

The development of the NRQ was aimed specifically at dealing with the sorts of concerns Ward (2012) expressed as 'evident within the broader field of narrative theory and research', namely 'definitional vagueness, lack of clarity concerning the nature of the self and its relationship to narrative roles, and methodological problems involving reliability and validity'. By developing a systematic research instrument that uses groupings of roles as summaries of narrative themes, it has been possible to provide more precise definitions as well as reliable measurement that validly captures accounts given in much fuller open-ended interviews.

The nature of the self-revealed within these narrative roles has also been clarified through careful consideration of the complex mixture of psychological processes captured by the NRQ. Youngs and Canter (2012b) show that the four narrative themes map readily onto the two axes of Potency and Intimacy that McAdams (1985) argues

underpin all personal narratives measures; the Victim, for instance, being Low Potency and High Intimacy, whereas the Hero is High Potency and High Intimacy. Further, each narrative theme also carries implications about (1) the cognitive interpretation the offender has of the offence, (2) the emotional aspects of the involvement in the offence, and (3) the interpersonal identity. In other words, narrative roles reflect the relationship the offender sees himself having with others, as shaped by his cognitions and emotions. There is thus no simple relationship between a person's identity in general and the narrative roles that are actualized in a crime. Indeed, the presence of narrative roles relating to particular crimes does raise the question of whether general identity or self-concept is always an appropriate focus for considering offenders. Ward opens up what he calls a post-modern view of a person having multiple identities, but it is not necessary to go that far, merely to recognize the different roles a person may play in different situations. How the experience of these episodes gives shape to a self-concept is an interesting and important area for further study.

Elaborating substantive themes

The four narrative themes described by Youngs and Canter (2012a, 2012b) were derived from interviews with offenders followed up by the development of standard questionnaires. However, the analysis and careful consideration of the results does indicate that the Hero, Victim, Professional, and Revenger narrative themes are only the essence of crime narratives and many refinements are possible. They provide four cardinal points but research to elaborate and develop them will be of great value.

The dynamic quality of the whole notion of narrative provides a particular challenge for research. The question of what is consistent and what varies in an offender's unfolding crime narratives requires careful research design and analysis to answer. Indeed, it may be expected that some narratives may be more consistent across crimes for an offender than others. For example, it is a reasonable hypothesis that the Professional narrative implies a particular pattern of activities that would be repeated from crime to crime. The Revenger on the other hand may see himself as more buffeted by the fates and behave very differently in different circumstances. The tools are now in place to explore such issues.

How exactly do offence actions relate to the Narrative Roles? The models of different patterns of offending style can be interpreted in terms of the four narrative themes. But research has not yet been published that establishes clear relationships between the offenders' descriptions of their offence Narrative Role and their offence actions in those crimes. Some quite complex relationships might be expected because of the implications that the narrative role has for interactions with others and the significance of the particular situation.

Influences on narrative roles

The Narrative Roles that Youngs and Canter (2012a, 2012b) posit were identified with incarcerated offenders who had been convicted for the crime they described. It is reasonable to assume that this context may have had an influence on the themes described, although the meaningful differences within this sample do point to a general validity. But research does need to establish the impact of various post offence events, including conviction and treatment on the accounts offenders give of their crime experience.

We see the assertion that offenders' accounts of their Narrative Roles as simply post offence rationalizations as less problematic. In describing the role that was dominant in an offence an individual has to draw upon narratives s/he regards as plausible. So even if they are implicit justifications, respondents are demonstrating that storyline they consider the most relevant to their own understanding of their circumstances. It is that personal account that forensic psychologists have to work with either in investigations or in therapeutic interventions.

Offence narrative roles and life narratives

Any life story consists of many episodes. There may be an overarching theme to it as revealed in Maruna's (2001) explorations of desisters and persisters, or there may be many different aspects to it in a more complex set of distinct incidents. There is thus an interesting research question as to the ways in the four narrative themes operate in relation to larger scale life narratives.

Correlates of the narrative roles

Offenders' crime narratives, especially as revealed through the NRQ encapsulate many aspects of the psychological processes underpinning criminal actions. They add a strong dynamic to the consideration of illegal behaviour and place the agency for the crime firmly with the criminal. In this way, they give rise to many and varied hypotheses about the psychological characteristics and backgrounds of offenders showing different forms of this agency. Indeed, crime narratives offer a rich framework for considering many aspects of criminality, different forms of agency generating different hypotheses about the emergence of offence forms, their development, maintenance, and decline.

One particularly interesting possibility is that distinct narrative roles may relate to different diagnostic categories. Psychopathy and depression would be expected to be expressed in different narrative roles and the forms that other aspects of psychosis take when expressed as narrative accounts of crimes would also be hypothesized to be distinct. Intriguingly, research in its early stages has indicated that psychiatric patients are able to complete the NRQ and produce meaningful answers.

In conclusion, then, the offence narrative framework as encompassed in the NRQ, focuses on what happens in a crime and how the offender makes sense of that. This provides methodological and definitional clarity to the study of criminals' narratives that is difficult to achieve when drawing on the broad life narratives that are central to Ward's critique of the utilization of the narrative approach. This development opens up many areas for research, spawning many testable hypotheses.

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