

# Facilitating 'hope' for people with criminal records

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## Research Questions

How do individuals convicted or cautioned as children or young adults subsequently:

1. Rationalise the process of stigmatisation and discrimination arising from their criminal record? (i.e. as deserved, as unjust, as legitimate, as harmful or traumatic?)
2. (Re-)construct their identity *post-sentence* to develop a defensible ‘sense of self’ in response to external judgements arising from their criminal records?
3. Develop strategies to mitigate the effects of stigma and thus negotiate the potential for stigma and discrimination based on their criminal record? (i.e. through non-disclosure, avoidance of situations where disclosure might be required, or by over-compensating/hyper-conforming?)

## Narrative Criminology

Through the process of narrating experience, an individual is able to establish order and coherence to life events making sense of them and giving them meaning (McAdams, 1996; McAdams and McClean, 2013).

When creating and sharing a narrative identity with others, an individual is able to convey to others 'who they are now, how they came to be and where they think their lives may be going in the future' (McAdams and McLean, 2013: 233). Subsequently, The 'narrated self' works for the individual like 'a map' which functions to direct us moving forwards, connect us to other people and, to establish morality (Denzin, 2000).

For those working with narratives, storytelling is viewed as a communicative, emotion provoking, educational and entertaining, meaning-making device *fundamental to the human condition* (Sandberg and Ugelvik, 2016).

Engaging with  
participant narratives

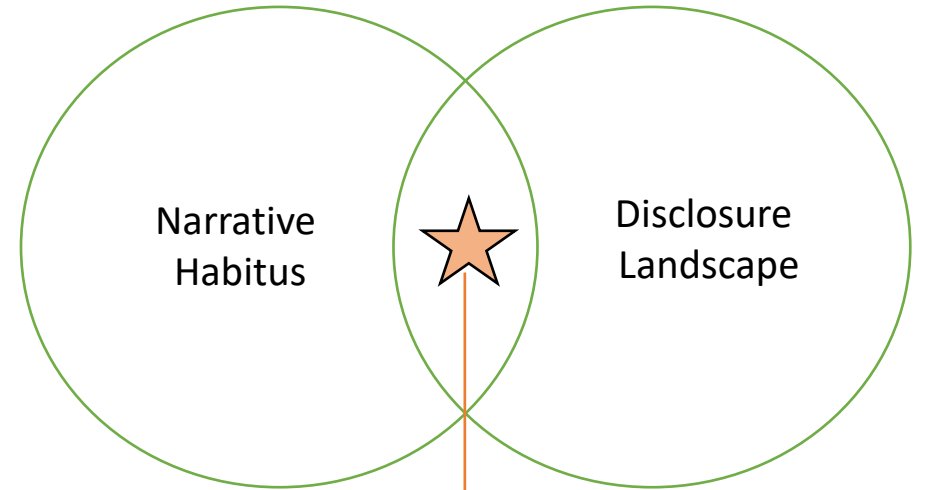
Narrative analysis asks '*why was the story told that way?*'

1. How does the social setting influence narrative?
2. How does the individual construct their narrative using discourse?

Reissman, 1993 cited in Fleetwood, 2016

**Narrative Habitus**

**Disclosure Landscapes**



Story shared

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## Narrative Habitus

‘[T]he narrative habitus conveys the way that narratives are *natural and logical* – the sense that the story could never have been otherwise.’

(Fleetwood, 2016: 174)

‘...the concept of narrative habitus draws attention to how social class, gender, ethnicity and so on shape the narrative construction of the world. Particular social fields are home to narratives about how the world is, and how we can and should act upon it. An array of discourses, idioms, genres, subject positions and vocabularies and so on pertaining to social fields are embodied in the habitus as storied and storytelling dispositions. If habitus generates a particular ‘feel for the game’, narrative habitus sums up our embodied sense of what makes a good story’

(Fleetwood 2019: 1713)

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### **From Social Field/Setting to Disclosure Landscapes**

The social, cultural, political, institutional (etc.) make up of a particular space where criminal record disclosure might take place.

- Within these spaces some stories are more/less permissible than others.
- Traversing these landscapes is often a highly motivated activity.
- Disclosure landscapes are where power, agency and the reconstructive capability on the part of individuals can be found.
- The setting for shame management.

## Megan

I was very aware of being able to *try to balance* explaining the context that all this had happened in but then *I didn't want them to think that I wasn't taking responsibility* [R: yeah] for what I'd done and saying "oh well I done this because this happened to me" [R: sure] umm because I like I say I'm aware that uh pe- some people have quite black and white views of um people that have committed offences basically.

[I]t's just having to *manage trying to be professional* about it and then trying to explain it but then also not wanting to give the impression that I don't take responsibility either.

## Louise

I've been with my partner for two years and he doesn't know any of it [laughs]. I have been meaning to tell him um all of that that I've told you today about, you know, childhood experience and upbringing and stuff and um, he doesn't know about my mental health or that cos' it all ties in. So I have been meaning to go through all that with him and tell him about the criminal record stuff but it's just um [sighs] it is a bit of kind of embarrassment that stops me and I know it's not gonna' effect anything but it's more picking the right time. And you know, I *so* enjoy being with him and I don't want to ruin an evening by bringing up all this horrible depressing stuff that's happened but I know that I've gotta' tell him.

We'd gone out celebrating on the Saturday cos' we were so happy about how I'd had the offer on my house so that wasn't the right time and then Sunday wasn't the right time because I was just I was just so upset. I'm still planning on telling him but it's just picking the right moment but now Game of Thrones has finished [laughing] we've got nothing to do on Monday [both laugh].

## What does this help us to understand?

1. Stories are unique – shaped by NH and DL at that particular time.
2. Disclosure landscapes are a catalyst for identity work - the process of ‘...producing, maintaining and strengthening a sense of coherence of self’ (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003 cited in Gilmore, 2018: 93).
3. Narrative labour (Warr, 2019). What about the moral and emotional labor associated with traversing disclosure landscapes?
4. Different narratives ‘work’ more or less in different disclosure landscapes – unequal access to opportunities?