Travelling Down the Bumpy Road to Self-Forgiveness:

Narration as a Vehicle for Offenders "Working Through"

a Recent Interpersonal Wrongdoing

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Abstract

Interpersonal wrongdoings are upsetting. They involve offenders violating the norms or values of a relationship in ways that harm or hurt others, and they can also have negative implications for offenders and their relationships. If left unresolved, wrongdoings can lead to problematic rumination, pervasive feelings of shame, reduced relationship satisfaction or relationship termination altogether. In contrast, if offenders undertake the cognitive effort of "working through" their wrongdoing and feelings of guilt, they can achieve genuine self-forgiveness and greater personal and relational wellbeing. Despite the proposition that "working through" guilt is essential to offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes, this concept (and the mechanisms involved) remain vague.

In this thesis, I argue that narrating the story of what happened may be part of what it means for offenders to "work through" their wrongdoing. Using real-life narrative data, I take a bottom-up, mixed-methods approach to develop a conceptual and theoretical framework for how offenders may naturally use narration (and re-narration) to "work through" a recent interpersonal wrongdoing; differentiating between narration that benefits genuine self-forgiveness and narration implicated in less adaptive processes of defensiveness and self-condemnation.

Across seven studies, using a combination of qualitative, cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental methodologies, a conceptual framework of offenders' narration is developed together with a quantitative tool to assess these narrations. This research is guided by three questions: (1) What types of narration do offenders naturally use to story their wrongdoing? (2) Do these narrative types reflect, or influence, offenders' self-forgiveness processes, including how they develop over time? (3) Does narration serve an emotional processing function that affords the "working through" of guilt?

Overall, findings suggest that self-selected offenders – individuals from the United States who declare having committed a wrongdoing against another – narrate in four conceptually distinct ways, which have differential implications for offenders' self-forgiveness processes. *Redemptive narration,* which centres moral learnings, may promote the acknowledgement of shame and guilt by

facilitating cognitive empathy and increasing offenders' beliefs they are capable of change. *Self-trust* that offenders can act differently next time is, in turn, associated with genuine self-forgiveness and a greater willingness to make amends. *Past-contextualisation* may contribute to offenders' moral learning through causal explanations and understanding of their behaviour. *Self-distancing* narration, which abstracts from the incident and considers the bigger picture, may downregulate offenders' feelings of shame and guilt in a way that promotes (rather than reduces) moral engagement. *Self-contextualisation*, which relates the wrongdoing to offenders' self and values, appears to have ambivalent implications: instructions to explore how the wrongdoing relates to their values reduced offenders' defensiveness; but when arising naturally, such narration was implicated in a defensive doubling down on one's actions as congruent with the self. Overall, this work (a) highlights that narrative engagement may be key to the "work" required in "working through" wrongdoing, (b) provides an initial framework for offenders' narration, and its different functions, soon after a wrongdoing and (c) suggests future research in the field may benefit from more experimental, prospective and dyadic studies that employ experience sampling and person-centred transitionary analyses.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university

2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and

3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and

4. has been completed without the use of generative artificial intelligence tools.

Signed..

Date........6th of June 2025..

Publications

Other Publications During Candidature

Woodyatt, L., de Vel-Palumbo, M., Barron, A., **Harous, C.,** Wenzel, M., & DeSilva, S. (2025). What Makes Self-Forgiveness So Difficult (For Some)? Understanding The Lived Experience of Those Stuck in Self-Condemnation. *Self and Identity*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2025.2513878

Wenzel, M., **Harous, C.,** Cibich, M., & Woodyatt, L. (2023). Does Victims' Forgiveness Help Offenders to Forgive Themselves? The Role Meta-Perceptions of Value Consensus. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 105, 104433.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104433.

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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

I invite you to take a moment and think back to a time when you may have transgressed against another person. Perhaps it was someone close to you, perhaps you unintentionally hurt them by something you did or did not do. You may have been quick to anger, used harsh words, lied, broken a promise, betrayed their trust or neglected them in some way. Interpersonal wrongdoings such as these are commonplace in personal relationships, and they can lead to challenging self-conscious emotions such as guilt and shame (Tangney et al., 2007), which signal threats to an offender's psychological need for moral integrity, control and social belonging (Leary, 2021; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008, 2015). Feelings of shame and guilt can be uncomfortable to sit with, but they can also prompt offenders to reflect on several difficult yet important questions relating to their moral-social identity: If I have transgressed and I was in control of my actions, how can I be a good and moral person? If I accept responsibility for having done wrong, will I still be worthy of acceptance and belonging – or will it be used against me? If I do not accept responsibility, will I not lose all moral credibility? To reconcile these psychological threats in a way that restores psychological needs, leads to self-forgiveness and increases the likelihood of interpersonal reconciliation, offenders are required to "work through" what they have done (Fisher & Exline, 2006; Holmgren, 1998; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a, 2014; Woodyatt et al., 2017a) – but what does it mean for offenders to "work through" their wrongdoing?

Research on people's responses to their own transgressions suggests that there is some degree of effort required to process or make sense of one's wrongdoing, often colloquially referred to (in some English-speaking settings) as "working through" one's guilt and the associated responsibility for harm. Indeed, researchers in self-forgiveness who examine these processes have used the term "working through" as an essential part of the process of genuine self-forgiveness; which is more than a restoration of positive self-regard, but a process by which one is able to take responsibility for wrong, acknowledge (and sit with) the resultant uncomfortable self-conscious emotions, and then transform self-condemning thoughts and feelings into self-compassionate ones

(Hall & Fincham, 2005; Holmgren, 1998; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). But how does this "work" occur? And what is the mechanism of transformation in thinking? Despite the proposition that working through guilt is a key part of offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes, this concept of "working through" is currently vague (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2020).

In this thesis, I aim to explore the notion of "working through" from the lens of self-narration, arguing that narrative processes may be part of what it means for offenders to work through wrongdoing. Specifically, I argue that narration and re-narration may help offenders reconcile their guilt with their needs for moral-social identity by facilitating meaning making and helping to manage emotions. While the proposition that narration may be a tool in working through life events is not novel (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Freud, 1914; Schafer, 1976; White & Epston, 1990), there is limited understanding of what types or features of narration align with genuine self-forgiveness that restores moral identity without downplaying one's guilt, and which may be counter-productive and implicated with self-condemnation (i.e., self-punishment and low self-acceptance) or self-exoneration (i.e., low self-condemnation and self-acceptance via the deflection of responsibility; Cornish et al., 2018). Given that humans have a narrative mode of thought (Bruner, 1986, 1990), whereby we commonly tell and re-tell our experiences in narrative form (e.g., when thinking, journalling, venting or sharing stories with others; Pasupathi et al., 2009; Rimé, 2009; Schafer, 1976), examining offenders' narration and re-narration of a recent interpersonal wrongdoing may highlight the ruminative-reflective processes of offenders and develop our understanding of what it means for individuals to "work through" wrongdoing, including what types of narrative processes may act as a vehicle (and which may act as barriers) to offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes.

In the following sections of this introduction, I will outline the psychological threats posed by transgressions to demonstrate why "working through" wrongdoing is proposed to require "work" (i.e., time and cognitive effort). I will then explain what self-narration is, including how narration and re-narration can be used to make meaning, achieve coherence and regulate feelings of shame and guilt following interpersonal wrongdoings. Thereafter, I will propose some potentially

detrimental aspects of offenders' narration, such as using narration to downregulate self-conscious emotions too soon, before finally proposing one specific type of self-narration that may benefit offenders' "working through" for genuine self-forgiveness.

The Challenging Task of "Working Through" Shame, Guilt and Responsibility for Harm

In interpersonal wrongdoings, offenders transgress the shared values of their relationship with another person (Okimoto et al., 2008). As a result, offenders may experience threats to their moral-social identity, which signifies their sense of being a good and moral person who is a valued and accepted relational partner (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Self-forgiveness is a process of restoring one's moral-social identity and positive self-regard; but for it to be *genuine*, offenders must not downplay their responsibility for wrongdoing (pseudo self-forgiveness), but rather they must accept responsibility and acknowledge their feelings of guilt (Wenzel et al., 2012). However, this is a challenging task because accepting responsibility means offenders' confirming that they have indeed violated the values they (and their relational partner) deem important; thus, responsibility-taking may exacerbate the risk of rejection or ostracization from others, as well as the risk of experiencing self-condemnation (i.e., self-punishing perceptions of worthlessness; Cornish et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2018; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a, 2013b). In contrast, if offenders avoid their guilt and shame, or fail to take responsibility, this can invalidate the victim's experience and lead to greater self-exoneration that poses a barrier to moral repair (Cornish et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2018; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Wenzel et al., 2020; Wenzel et al., 2021; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a, 2013b). Thus, it is imperative to offenders' *genuine* self-forgiveness, and victims' forgiveness of the offender, that offenders take responsibility for wrong and "work through" their feelings of guilt and shame, along with their associated concerns for belonging and acceptance.

But fears of ostracization or rejection that arise from taking responsibility can create painful and distressing emotions (Boden & Eatough, 2020; Dickerson et al., 2004; Eisenberger et al., 2003; Karlsson & Sjöberg, 2009). To acknowledge and work through feelings of guilt and shame, offenders must have the skills to simultaneously engage distress tolerance and undertake the process

of self-reflection; to explore how and why they transgressed, how their actions have impacted the victim (and their relationship), and what the wrongdoing means for their sense of moral integrity and agency over their behaviour (Gilbert & Woodyatt, 2017; Shnabel & Nader, 2008, 2015). I argue that self-narration may be part of what it means for offenders to achieve this challenging balancing act, whereby narration may allow offenders to (a) explore notions of agency and (b) provide explanations for their actions in a way that accepts responsibility *and* restores their sense of what it means to be a good and moral person.

Self-Narration and Narrative Meaning Making

Self-narration is the process of recounting personal experiences to relate them to one's present sense of self or identity, and make sense of life events (McAdams, 1985, 2001; Singer, 2004). Narratives of life experiences typically outline the concrete details of what happened (e.g., when was it, who was there, where it took place, who said what), and in some cases, abstraction will ensue to further describe how events reflect a person's self-concept or identity (e.g., what does the wrongdoing say about me as a person, what have I learned; McAdams et al., 2011; McLean & Pasupathi, 2012). When engaging in self-narration, individuals may explicate the emotional aspects of the event; explaining how they or others were feeling during or leading up the event, and making links between these emotions and the intentions, desires, beliefs or values of the narrator and those involved. In turn, the contextual information generated by narrative is used to ascribe meaning to the event and subsequently create a 'complete' story that explains what happened and what it means to the narrator (Bruner, 1990).

After a foundation of concrete details have been outlined, some narrators may then engage in a process of abstraction (Baumeister & Newman, 1994), which is referred to by some scholars as 'narrative meaning making' (Bruner, 1990). While all individuals have a psychological need to find meaning in their personal experiences (Baumeister, 1991), individuals will not engage in narrative meaning making for *all* life events. Instead, narrative processes are particularly well suited to making meaning from events such as interpersonal wrongdoings because they are non-normative (Bruner, 1990), as they involve offenders transgressing the moral norms or shared values of a relationship (Okimoto et al., 2008). For this reason, wrongdoings require a form of moral commentary, such as explanations or justifications, to make sense of how an individual could transgress the norms or values of their relationship (Bruner, 1990) and what this means for the persons' sense of moral integrity or social belonging (i.e., their moral-social identity; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Furthermore, narratives allow narrators to hold two contradictory bits of information at once (Bruner, 1990), which may be particularly helpful for offenders who are struggling with notions of agency and morality, asking themselves how they could have had agency yet not acted morally. Thus, self-narration is not just how people describe their wrongdoing, but it may indicate how individuals potentially process and transform their thoughts, feelings and motivations over time.

Narration and Re-Narration

It seems that narrative meaning making processes are naturally engaged in by offenders (and victims) in the early stages of processing their wrongdoing. Some research has found that interpersonal wrongdoings are commonly shared with others the day they occur (Pasupathi et al., 2009), and then often repeatedly re-narrated over several days following the event (Rimé, 2009). Here, the act of re-narrating may indicate individuals attempting to make meaning. Indeed, narrative expression provides a fluid method for constructing and re-constructing meaning in relation to thoughts, feelings and behaviour, whereby narration may function as a re-appraisal tool to change the emotional or cognitive evaluation of an event (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1985, 2001; Pals, 2006; Pennebaker & Ferrell, 2013; White & Epston, 1990). The act of re-construal may be particularly

beneficial for offenders, as re-constructing meaning can help resolve discrepancies between an event and a person's core beliefs or assumptions about themselves (Pennebaker, 1997; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Here, the original understanding of an event may be retrospectively shifted or reframed in light of new context or perspectives, and this process may take time and thus re-narrations. Interestingly, making inferences and shifting meaning requires more informational processing, or cognitive effort, than the creation of mere concrete details alone (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Thus, re-narration and the subsequent gradual shifts in meaning that can ensue, may reflect part of the effort or "work" involved in offenders' "working through" their wrongdoing towards genuine self-forgiveness.

Narrative Therapy and the Re-Authoring of Personal Stories

From a therapeutic perspective, the process of narration and re-narration may be well-suited to offenders' task of "working through" feelings of guilt and transforming self-condemning thoughts and feelings into self-compassionate ones. Most psychotherapies (i.e., talk therapies) are built upon the premise that self-narration, or the way one interprets and re-counts events in relation to the self, can change how clients view themselves, make meaning and manage or understand their emotional experiences (Angus & McLeod, 2004; Beck, 1976; Gilbert, 2009; Greenberg, 2004; White & Epston, 1990). Of the psychotherapies, Narrative Therapy, which is an empowering, person-centred and non-blaming approach to counselling, is most closely tied to narrative meaning making theory.

In Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990), emphasis is placed on the stories of a person's life to highlight how telling and re-telling stories in different ways impacts how a person constructs their identity, views themselves and subsequently composes themselves in the world. Through therapy, the client and clinician focus on shifting life narratives from problem-based (i.e., focus on pathology and personal deficits) to strengths-based (i.e., focus on strengths and locating problems within contexts). Two key principles of Narrative Therapy are externalization and re-authoring. Externalization encourages clients to explore the social and historical context surrounding their problem, including external or mitigating factors that have influenced their

behaviour. Re-authoring then encourages clients to create new narratives of their problems. These new narratives aim to highlight the person's strengths and incorporate context to challenge stereotypes relevant to their problem (e.g., the idea that offenders are innately flawed, evil or unchangeable; Christie & Duggan, 2018), which, in turn, empowers people to get 'unstuck' (Duvall & Berés, 2007; White & Epson, 1990). Narrative Therapy seems to be effective in working with couples impacted by infidelity (Duba et al., 2008) and in reducing conflicts between parents and children (Besa, 1994) – both of which likely involve offenders' acknowledging and "working through" feelings of guilt and shame.

It seems that Narrative Therapy, and narrative meaning making processes, are beneficial to working through emotional events. Yet limited empirical research has explored the emotional processing mechanisms underlying self-narration (see Habermas, 2019). Recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Conti et al., 2022; Ekinci & Tokkaş, 2024; Ghavibazou et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2024) suggest that Narrative Therapy, and specifically techniques of externalization, may be useful in reducing psychological distress and helping individuals with clinically diagnosed mental health challenges manage feelings of guilt. However, most of these reviewed studies are qualitative case studies, and they have not tested exactly *how* these narrative techniques may achieve a reduction in psychological distress, nor how self-narration may impact offenders' "working through" feelings of guilt following a recent interpersonal wrongdoing.

How Self-Narration May Function as a Tool in Offenders' "Working Through" Processes

Self-narration may be a useful tool for offenders "working through" a recent interpersonal wrongdoing because it may provide reconstructive potential to transform self-condemning thoughts and feelings into self-compassionate ones. Self-narration can allow narrators to explore the context surrounding their wrongdoing, affirm their values and restore their self-worth (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Subsequently, the way offenders interpret and explain their wrongdoing may allow them to construct a positive and moral version of themselves, which may help to reposition offenders as good and moral people (Maruna & Copes, 2004; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010; Sommer et al., 2012), thus meeting their needs for moral integrity (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). If offenders can

clearly explain what happened, why it occurred and how their wrongdoing relates to their sense of self, they may feel they have understood the event, achieving a sense of narrative coherence (Bruner, 1990; Reese et al., 2011). Developing an understanding of what occurred can then facilitate affective adaptation that reduces emotional reactivity and distress, and thus may allow offenders to deal more productively with their guilt and shame (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008).

While re-narrations of emotional events show indications of abstraction, understanding and affective adaptation, it is unclear whether re-narration is responsible for these changes, or, whether it provides a mere window into other cognitive/affective processes. Indeed, there is empirical evidence that individuals tend to narrate past emotional events with more abstractions, resolutions, emotional closure and understanding when re-narrating the event a few months (or several years) after it has occurred (Habermas & Berger, 2011; Pals, 2006). However, it is unclear by which mechanism these individuals arrive at greater coherence, closure and affective adaptation. Some scholars have argued that coherence, afforded by narration, may function as an emotional regulation tool; whereby narrative is theorised to organise and consolidate stories of events (and their associated emotions) into autobiographical memory in a way that leads to emotional closure and less psychological distress upon re-call (Habermas, 2019; Bluck & Habermas, 2000). However, there is presently limited empirical evidence to support the causal ordering (or underlying mechanism) of these proposed effects. Thus, it is unclear whether re-narration may represent a window into (or outcome of) these processes, or whether it may afford coherence and affective adaptation.

The Risk of Downregulating Guilt and Shame Too Soon: Self-Exoneration

For processes of *genuine* self-forgiveness, it is important that offenders engage with their feelings of shame and guilt to "work through" these feelings and the associated accountability for wrongdoing (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Holmgren, 1998; Fischer & Exline, 2006; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). In this sense, it would be problematic if an affective adaptation facilitated by narration were to down-regulate guilt and shame too soon, for these emotions need to be engaged with to drive moral learning. That is, it may be expected that offenders' first few telling's of their

wrongdoing *should* be laden with guilt, as this may indicate that they are appropriately engaging with the cognitive "work" of thinking through the implications of their actions, such as their responsibility for harm (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). However, for some offenders, acknowledging uncomfortable emotions such as guilt and shame may be too distressing or threatening, particularly if they are struggling with their need for agency and belonging (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014). As a result, these individuals may deflect blame and deny responsibility, restoring their sense of self-acceptance by stating that their actions *were* in alignment with their values (King, 2023), thus responding defensively and morally disengaging from their actions (Bandura, 1999). This process reflects self-exoneration or *pseudo* self-forgiveness: whereby offenders' self-acceptance is restored, and self-condemning thoughts and feelings alleviated, via the rejection of responsibility and accompanying guilt (Cornish et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2018; Wenzel et al., 2020).

In these cases, if offenders form a coherent narrative – whereby they have restored their self-acceptance by responding defensively and denying responsibility for their actions – this may lead to affective adaptation by downregulating feelings of guilt and shame *before* adequate "working through" has occurred. In turn, this may short-cut the "working through" process and lead to a premature renewal of self-acceptance or *pseudo* self-forgiveness (Cornish et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2018; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Here, offenders' wrongdoing narratives that are implicated with self-exoneration may make reconciliation with the victim less likely, as pseudo self-forgiveness is associated with reduced empathy for the victim (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Subsequently, this story could, with rehearsal, be embedded into memory as 'fact' (Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). Indeed, part of Bruner's (1990) narrative meaning making principles state that stories are persuasive, irrespective of the ultimate 'truth' – and some scholars have argued that self-narration may have the capacity to change the way a memory is formed and subsequently stored (e.g., Pennebaker & Ferrell, 2013). Thus, understanding how wrongdoing narratives are constructed and re-constructed is important, as the meaning offenders create from their wrongdoing may lead to affective adaptation in ways that could cement offenders' stories of moral

disengagement into memory, acting as a barrier to offenders' genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile with the victim.

Furthermore, it has been proposed that self-serving biases in offenders' narratives of past events may reflect flaws in offenders' memory rather than flaws in their character (Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). Research has shown that the more an emotional memory is retrieved, the more regions of the brain that were active at initial encoding are reactivated (Buchanan, 2007). This suggests that memory retrieval, such as re-narrating personal stories, may lead to the recoding of memories in a way that can strengthen these stories as 'facts'. Thus, understanding the story offenders ascribe to their memory of wrongdoing early on is important: it provides the earliest opportunity to store the memory in an adaptive way that promotes genuine self-forgiveness, and can thus benefit offenders' intrapersonal functioning (i.e., self-esteem, self-trust, self-acceptance, self-compassion) and interpersonal reconciliation (i.e., empathy toward the victim, desire to make amends; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a) – and may have implications for long-term reconciliation efforts, particularly in more enduring or chronic cases of unresolved conflict (Thai et al., 2024).

Consequences of Failing to Achieve Affective Adaptation: Self-Condemnation

In contrast, some offenders may fail to make sense of their wrongdoing and, thus, do not achieve affective adaptation nor the adaptative "working through" of guilt and shame. In these instances, offenders may accept responsibility but fail to reconcile their need for agency. Instead, these individuals may ruminate on their actions, beat themselves up and experience excessive feelings of self-blame. This process reflects self-condemnation or self-punitiveness, whereby offenders may experience reduced self-acceptance and heightened self-critical thoughts and feelings (Cornish et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2018; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Instead of "working through" these thoughts and feelings, offenders may ruminate over the concrete details of their actions (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995), obsess over concerns of social devaluation (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Tangney, 2002) or conclude that they are inherently bad or immoral people (Lilgendahl et al., 2013; Mansfield et al., 2015) – all of which may lead to reliving excessive feelings of guilt and shame rather than affective adaptation. Experiencing self-condemnation can

also lead to feelings of anger that may be directed inward (self-punishment) or outward (defensiveness, resentment or shame-rage spirals; Elison et al., 2014; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007). In these instances, offenders will experience heightened self-concern, which can act as a barrier to genuine self-forgiveness and interpersonal reconciliation and leave offenders 'stuck' in a state of self-condemnation; struggling to achieve self-forgiveness, regulate feelings of guilt and shame, make meaning from their wrongdoing or even engage with the person they hurt (Behrendt & Ben-Ari, 2012; Davis & Oathout, 1992; Fischer & Exline, 2010; Rangganadhan & Todorov, 2010).

Accepting Responsibility and "Working Through" Guilt: Genuine Self-Forgiveness

While some offenders may be able to engage in the process of genuine self-forgiveness following wrongdoing, others may struggle to get there and instead experience excessive self-condemnation or pseudo self-forgiveness (i.e., self-exoneration). Evidently, this process of achieving *genuine* self-forgiveness involves working through challenging self-conscious emotions, and this can be hard work! However, the ability to integrate 'shameful' events, such as wrongdoings, into a coherent personal narrative is imperative to identity reconstruction (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012) – and similarly, the ability to accept oneself in spite of one's failures is essential to genuine self-forgiveness (Griffin et al., 2018; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). But how can offenders achieve a coherent personal narrative that accepts responsibility, restores their moral-social identity, reinforces feelings of agency and facilitates "working through" feelings of guilt in an adaptive way?

One type of narration that may help offenders integrate their wrongdoing and associated feelings of guilt and shame into their broader self-understanding (and simultaneously restore their psychological need for morality and agency), is growth-oriented or 'redemptive' narration (even if this may be subject to cultural influences; see Blackie et al., 2023 and McAdams, 2006). Redemptive narratives are defined as stories that move from bad to good. In the context of wrongdoings, a redemptive story would transform the transgression into a meaningful event that facilitates personal growth and learning from difficult or challenging experiences (Adler et al., 2015; Maruna, 2001; Maruna & Ramsden, 2004). Some redemptive stories may even state that the negative event was *needed* to become the person that one is today (Stone, 2016). In this way, redemptive stories can transform wrongdoing acts, and the associated feelings of guilt and shame, into positive learnings; whereby harmful behaviour can be acknowledged, evaluated and integrated into one's identity, or sense of self, in the name of personal growth (Maruna, 2001; McAdams & Bowman, 2001; McAdams et al., 2001). This may facilitate a smoother re-construction of moral-social identity by reducing the painful contradiction between agency and morality, allowing offenders to preserve self-worth in the face of moral failure (Maruna & Ramsden, 2004). Here, there would be a clear functionality of redemptive narration for genuine self-forgiveness; to achieve genuine self-forgiveness offenders must acknowledge responsibility for harm and commit to acting differently in the future (Griffin et al., 2018; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a), which implies a transformation from negative events to positive, growth-oriented learnings.

Empirical Approach of the Present Thesis and Contribution of Knowledge

The present thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature on self-narration and self-forgiveness by using real-life narrative data from self-selected offenders who have recently committed an interpersonal wrongdoing (i.e., within the last 48-hours). This empirical approach allows authentic exploration of offenders' stories, providing greater ecological validity than hypothetical vignettes (Hofmann & Grigoryan, 2023). Studying offenders within 48-hours of committing a wrongdoing also allows us to examine their narration in the early stages of processing the event, thus shedding light on how they may use narration, and re-narration, to "work through"

an event before it has been consolidated into autobiographical memory (Bluck & Habermas, 2000; Nelson & Fivush, 2020). Furthermore, taking a longitudinal approach provides a wider window of investigation, and allows us to determine the prospective direction of influence between variables to further examine whether change in narration over time may be a predictor, or correlate, of offenders' self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile processes (Hamaker et al., 2015; Hofmann & Grigoryan, 2023). The study of narrative also highlights how individuals may seek or make meaning (Sommer et al., 2012). Given that "working through" is a type of meaning making process, a narrative approach seems well suited to further develop our understanding of this concept.

Findings from this research will contribute to the evidence base on narrative techniques by exploring some of the potential underlying mechanisms of narrative types; including how these types may lead to, or reflect, individuals' present-state coping processes when it comes to reconciling the guilt and shame related to one's wrongdoing with a positive, moral self. While there is evidence that self-forgiveness interventions can help offenders to work through their wrongdoing and achieve genuine self-forgiveness (e.g., Cornish & Wade, 2015a, 2015b; Griffin et al., 2018; Wenzel et al., 2012; Woodyatt et al., 2017b), it is likely not all individuals will be motivated to seek support for self-forgiveness. Some individuals may naturally achieve self-forgiveness on their own, without intervention, via thinking independently or discussing their wrongdoing with a trusted other (Rimé, 2009), particularly for less severe transgressions. Thus, the present thesis aims to develop a deeper understanding of the mechanisms involved in less intensive and more self-directed "working through" – of which self-narration may be one. Furthermore, it seems that many individuals already have narrative skills (Bruner, 1986, 1990). Therefore, understanding offenders' self-narration and how it reflects, or influences, their self-forgiveness processes may allow individuals to build upon skills they already possess.

In addition, these findings may provide further insights to counsellors or therapists working with clients who may be struggling with responsibility taking and/or self-forgiveness; by providing more precision to understanding how different narrative types may reflect defensive or self-condemning processing compared to that of adaptive working-through for genuine self-forgiveness. This may be particularly useful to early-career clinicians who may have less experience in identifying narrative markers in their clients (Angus & McLeod, 2004), and may similarly be useful in informing therapeutic AI tools. Indeed, with the recent advancement of AI, it appears that some individuals are seeking free advice or support in managing personal relationships from AI chatbots such as ChatGPT (McLennan, 2025). However, it is unclear how these chatbots have been trained, including how they may guide the narration or thinking of consumers interacting with these tools (American Psychological Association, 2024).

Research Overview

In sum, it is important to offenders, and their relationships, that offenders "work through" their wrongdoing and associated guilt to achieve genuine self-forgiveness – and self-narration may be one way that offenders can achieve this "work", particularly in the early stages of processing. To explore this proposition, the present thesis will take a bottom-up, mixed-methods approach to build a conceptual and theoretical framework for offenders' naturalistic narration, detailing how offenders may narrate and re-narrate their wrongdoing in the early stages of processing, including how different narrative types may be implicated in, or reflective of, offenders' differentiated self-forgiveness processes (i.e., self-punitiveness, pseudo self-forgiveness, genuine self-forgiveness; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a), and how these processes may develop over time.

In Chapter 2, I take a qualitative approach to explore the differential, nuanced and unguided narration of offenders who have recently committed an interpersonal wrongdoing, using thematic analysis to identify distinct features of narration that are observable in offenders' stories. In this chapter, an initial theoretical framework for offenders' narration, re-narration and its relationship to their working through for self-forgiveness is proposed.

In Chapter 3, I develop the operational and conceptual clarity of the identified narrative types, using subthemes and qualitative excerpts from Chapter 2 to create a quantitative tool for assessing offenders' narration (The Interpersonal Offender Narrative Meaning Making Scale; IONS). The IONS is first validated using third-party raters, under the premise that offenders' narration is manifested in the narrative that can be read by an observer. Thus, validating the scale from an observer perspective establishes narrative types objectively and validates narration as mechanism rather than something that exists solely in the minds of offenders. Thereafter, the IONS is validated from a first-person offender perspective, as this is how the scale is then used; as an empirical tool, for offenders to self-assess their own narration. In these studies, I test for measurement invariance across multiple time points (from both third-party and first-person perspectives), and explore relationships between offenders' narration, re-narration and self-forgiveness processes; using linear mixed modelling to further develop the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 4, the correlational findings from Chapter 3 are extended to an experimental paradigm to determine the causal effect of narration on offenders' self-forgiveness processes and their willingness to reconcile with the victim. These findings further refine the theoretical framework, providing an indication of how prompting offenders to narrate with certain techniques may influence their self-forgiveness processes, or have no effect.

In Chapter 5, I explore the emotional processing functions of identified narrative types to further clarify the theoretical framework of offenders' narration and its relationship to self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile. This is done by conducting secondary analyses on data from Chapters 3 and 4; first using random-intercept cross-lagged panel modelling to examine bidirectional and prospective effects between narration and emotion, moral-social image threat and self-perceived victimhood, before then exploring mediation models to further examine the mechanisms underlying narration's proposed emotional processing function.

Finally, in Chapter 6, the theoretical framework for how offenders may use narration, and re-narration, in the early stages of processing a recent interpersonal wrongdoing – including how

different narrative types may benefit, or hinder, offenders' self-forgiveness processes and willingness to reconcile with the victim – is summarized, considering the empirical evidence acquired throughout this thesis. Implications and limitations of these findings are discussed alongside generative ideas for future research.

CHAPTER 2.

How Do Offenders Naturally Use Narration to Story a Recent Interpersonal Wrongdoing?

Narrating the story of wrongdoing may be part of what it means for offenders to "work through" their wrongdoing and achieve genuine self-forgiveness (i.e., adaptive working through). However, it is likely not *all* narration is beneficial. Instead, the types of narration offenders use may change whether narration benefits or hinders their genuine self-forgiveness processes. With this in mind, how do offenders use narration to story a recent interpersonal wrongdoing? Before we can understand how narration may affect offenders' "working through" for self-forgiveness, we first need to differentiate the kinds of narration that offenders engage in. Thus, the present chapter will explore the different ways in which offenders may naturally narrate a recent interpersonal wrongdoing to identify what features of narration can be observed within their stories. Findings will be used to generate hypotheses regarding how different narrative types may reflect, or influence, offenders' self-forgiveness processes – informing an initial conceptual and theoretical framework for how offenders may naturally use narration to "work through" an interpersonal wrongdoing and achieve genuine self-forgiveness.

"Working Through" Wrongdoing to Achieve Genuine Self-Forgiveness

To achieve genuine self-forgiveness after committing a wrongdoing, offenders must take responsibility for their actions and simultaneously transform feelings of self-condemnation into a renewed state of self-acceptance (Hall & Fincham, 2005). However, embarking on this process can be difficult, especially when offenders are responsible for having hurt another person. One reason for this difficulty is wrongdoings call into question an offender's moral integrity, which can pose a threat of social exclusion or stigmatization (Baumeister et al., 1994; Leary, 2005; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Okimoto & Wenzel, 2009). As a result, this threat may heighten offenders' fundamental need to belong, resulting in a greater need for acceptance and validation from others to re-establish they are a good person with moral integrity (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Offenders may additionally feel threats to their agency and control, being unable to undo what they did, possibly perceiving their wrongdoing as a lack of self-control or social

incompetence, whilst being dependent on others to satisfy needs for acceptance and belonging (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015; Woodyatt et al., 2017b). Distressing self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt (Tangney et al., 2007) may also arise as offenders attempt to take responsibility and simultaneously reconcile threats to their basic psychological need for control and agency, moral integrity and belonging.

Thus, to "work through" wrongdoing and move toward self-forgiveness, offenders must reconcile threats to their basic psychological needs in a way that transforms feelings of shame and guilt into self-acceptance. Prior research suggests that offenders may engage in three differentiated processes when faced with these psychological threats (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). (1) Offenders may defend their moral integrity and deny accountability, deflect blame or downplay harm caused. Through this process, termed 'pseudo self-forgiveness', offenders restore their self-acceptance by responding defensively and rejecting responsibility for their actions. (2) Offenders may accept accountability and the associated guilt and shame, but rather than working through these emotions they may engage in a ruminative process of 'self-punitiveness.' Here, excessive self-punishment diminishes agency and prevents renewal of self-acceptance. (3) Offenders may accept accountability and "work through" their guilt to authentically restore their moral integrity and positive self-regard. In this way, offenders may endeavour to learn from their wrongdoing, re-affirm their commitment to transgressed values and make a genuine commitment to act differently in the future, thus undergoing personal growth and achieving genuine self-forgiveness (Griffin et al., 2018; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a, 2013b; Woodyatt et al., 2017b). Of these three processes, only the latter is considered a process of *genuine* self-forgiveness because it involves offenders' accepting accountability for wrong while at the same time transforming feelings of self-condemnation into self-acceptance.

Narration as a Self-Reflective Tool in "Working Through" Life Events

One way that offenders might make sense of their wrongdoing, "work through" feelings of guilt and shame, restore a sense of moral integrity and renew self-acceptance is via self-narration. Certainly, many scholars have proposed that narration may benefit the "working through" of life events (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Freud, 1914; Schafer, 1976; White & Epston, 1990), yet there is limited empirical research on the natural narration of offenders' working through wrongdoing for self-forgiveness. Despite this lack of research, there is a body of research suggesting narration can benefit individuals who are working through other difficult or challenging life events. The reflective-integrative nature of narration has been hypothesised as a mechanism for stress-related growth (also referred to as adversarial growth, post-traumatic growth and adaptive growth; e.g., Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; Pals, 2006; Park et al., 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and the formation of Narrative Identity (McAdams, 1985, 2001; Singer, 2004). Narration has been found useful for emotion regulation (Pasupathi, 2003; Pasupathi, et al., 2017; Pasupathi et al., 2023), promoting self-reflection (Pals, 2006) and facilitating the refinement of meaning in relation to how past events relate to one's present self (McLean et al., 2007; Pasupathi et al., 2007). Although these findings are not directly related to offenders of interpersonal wrongdoing, if narration can promote self-reflection and emotional processing whilst helping individuals re-frame and integrate what their experience means for their future self, it is possible narrating the story of wrongdoing may also benefit offenders' working through wrongdoing for self-forgiveness.

Offender Stories as Excuses, Justifications and Downplaying of Responsibility

However, past research on offenders' narration has generally been dominated by a view of offenders restoring self-acceptance and moral integrity via defensiveness, whereby different narrative techniques have been distinguished along these lines. For example, Sykes and Matza (1957) proposed that when offenders use narration to deny responsibility, downplay inflicted harm, deflect blame, negate the existence of a victim or justify behaviour, this language serves to neutralise wrongdoing and encourage further transgressive behaviour. Following this theory, a large portion of research in criminology has used coding schemes of defensive justifications and excuses

as a lens in which to explore offender stories (e.g., Müller, 2024; Pershing, 2003; Pogrebin et al., 2006; Presser, 2003; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Schönbach, 1980; Scully & Marolla, 1984; Ugelvik, 2014) – and these coding schemes have also been used to examine offender accounts in social psychology, albeit to a lesser extent (e.g., Gonzales et al., 1992). Employing pre-defined coding schemes such as these, without considering the potential constructive function of narration, means researchers are solely examining offenders' stories from the perspective of offenders' defensiveness.

Further research using this outlook is seen in a seminal paper from Baumeister and colleagues (1990), who compared the ways in which victims and offenders storied an important or memorable wrongdoing incident. Unlike Sykes and Matza who proposed narration was a causal mechanism in facilitating transgressive behaviour, Baumeister and colleagues proposed that the way offenders narrate may indicate their underlying motivations to save face and influence others' perceptions of their moral character. To test this theory, they asked participants to write about a time they were the victim, and another time they were the offender, of a memorable wrongdoing incident. The authors then conducted a content analysis of participants' stories, and found that, compared to victims, offenders more often justified their behaviour and stated their actions were caused by external or mitigating factors, yet also blamed themselves and stated they felt regretful. These findings have since been replicated by other scholars examining offenders' stories of particularly memorable or important events, and have been extended to indicate offenders, compared to victims or narrators who made someone happy, more often said their actions were inevitable, blamed victims, denied intentions to cause harm and provided more contextual background information (Schütz & Baumeister, 1999; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Interestingly, despite the different theoretical approaches of criminology and social psychology, both lines of research point toward a dominant view that offenders tend to story their wrongdoing in a way that reflects a defensive desire to downplay responsibility and deflect blame.

The Constructive Function of Narration: Narrative Therapy and Redemption

Somewhat ignored is that offenders may also narrate as a way to work through their wrongdoing and move toward genuine self-forgiveness. Indeed, it has been proposed that neutralisation language (or contextual explanations) might do more than contribute to moral disengagement, and might instead be used by offenders to make sense of what happened and re-position themselves from immoral to moral (Maruna & Copes, 2005). From a clinical perspective, some Narrative Therapists might argue that contextual explanations are *key* to helping individuals' re-story challenging events in their lives, such as wrongdoings. Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990) is a talk therapy that places emphasis on the stories one tells to highlight how telling and re-telling stories in different ways can impact how a person constructs their identity, views themselves and composes themselves in the world. While Narrative Therapy involves multiple techniques, externalisation – which involves exploring the context surrounding one's problems – is considered the 'key ingredient' (e.g., Hawkins et al., 2019; Lock et al., 2005), and is theorised to help individuals get 'unstuck' by reducing excessive shame and empowering individuals to face their behaviour.

In Narrative Therapy, externalisation is achieved by (a) reflecting on how a person's past context has shaped their identity and subsequent behaviour, and (b) discussing the factors that have influenced behaviour as separate from identity. For example, if someone speaks of themselves as '*an angry person*' they will be directed to reframe this as behaviour-oriented rather than identity-oriented – '*anger is a problem that influences my behaviour*' (Augusta-Scott & Brown, 2007; Duvall & Berés, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). From the lens of neutralisation, one might view this process as self-distancing to diminish responsibility (Bandura, 1999). However, Narrative Therapy proposes that discussing how contextual factors have influenced behaviour can help reduce feelings of failure and thus provide a less threatening way to discuss problems that have implications for identity (White & Epston, 1990), such as when one has perpetuated harm against another person. Through this re-authoring process, externalisation allows problems that have previously been viewed as pathological or 'fixed' (e.g., narcissism, neuroticism, attachment style) to become malleable and fluid, and hence easier to critically examine, de-construct and modify. For these

reasons, I suggest that externalisation techniques may be a useful tool in helping offenders work towards genuine self-forgiveness following wrongdoing. Specifically, externalisation may help offenders gain distance from perceived threats to their moral integrity; affording more objectivity when reflecting on difficult aspects of their wrongdoing behaviour, such as their accountability for harm.

Another narrative technique that may indicate offenders are narrating in order to "work through" their responsibility and move toward genuine self-forgiveness is redemptive narration, which involves revising one's story of 'bad' events (i.e., past mistakes or perpetuation of harm) to transform them into 'good' outcomes (i.e., learning or personal growth; McAdams, 1999, 2006). Redemptive offender stories were first reported in criminology by Maruna (2001), who conducted an empirical investigation into the differences in which persisting versus desisting criminalised offenders storied their lives. Maruna employed a semi-structured Narrative Identity interview methodology (i.e., *The Life Story Interview,* see McAdams, 2008), and found that offenders who had successfully desisted from criminalised activity had redemptive characteristics in their stories. Specifically, these individuals (a) transformed their low point of engaging in criminalised activity as a necessary precursor to their newfound purpose and commitment to the 'straight road', and (b) used context to re-position themselves as inherently good and moral people who were influenced by external factors. Interestingly, from the lens of Baumeister and colleagues (1990), or Sykes and Matza (1957), this provision of context could be interpreted as excuses or justifications – yet from the lens of Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990), it could be viewed as an act of externalisation to restore moral integrity and facilitate meaning making for future-oriented growth and learning.

Limitations of the Existing Research: We Don't Know How Offenders *Naturally* Narrate

Thus, it appears that narrative techniques of redemption and externalisation may benefit offenders' "working through" for genuine self-forgiveness – however, it is unclear whether these narrative types may *naturally* arise in offenders' narratives of a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. Researchers have either provided specific and detailed narrative prompts (at times, aiming to prompt specific types of narration; e.g., Mansfield et al., 2015), employed semi-structured interview methods (e.g., Maruna, 2001), or used pre-defined coding schemes that aim to capture specific types of narration (e.g., McAdams, 1999; Syed & Nelson, 2015). Specific prompts and semi-structured interview methods provide detailed narratives, but questions asked by researchers can guide the thinking and subsequent narration of participants (Davis, 2003; Schwarz, 1999). Pre-defined coding schemes allow researchers to assess the specific constructs they are interested in, yet they also place limitations on what narrative constructs are observed in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Therefore, these findings highlight how offenders use narration to tell the story of a past wrongdoing event when asked specific questions – rather than how they may *naturally* use narration whilst processing a recent wrongdoing.

Another limitation is that much of the literature has explored narration of important or significant events that occurred several years ago (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990; Maruna, 2001; Pals, 2006), rather than narration in the early stages of sense making. As a result, these findings may reflect the narration of offenders who have embedded the event into autobiographical memory (Bluck & Habermas, 2000; Nelson & Fivush, 2020). Hence, it is unclear whether these findings may also relate to self-narration in the early stages of processing, where the narrator is still getting the story straight and is dealing with the immediate threats to their social-moral needs (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008, 2015; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014).

Study 2.1

To understand whether different types of narration may benefit offenders' genuine self-forgiveness, we first need to identify how offenders may naturally narrate. Thus, to develop a clearer understanding of the narrative types offenders may employ naturally (i.e., unprompted), a qualitative pilot study was conducted. Qualitative research is well-suited to exploring new or understudied constructs by providing a less-restricted avenue to (a) identify differential experiences of participants and (b) develop theories that can subsequently be tested with quantitative methods (Levitt, 2021). Using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022), the aims of the present study were threefold: (1) inductively identify qualitative features of offenders' narration, (2) deductively assess whether themes of externalisation and redemption are among those features, and (3) develop initial hypotheses regarding the function of offenders' narration in their "working through" for self-forgiveness. Thereafter, narrative types identified will form the basis for further research, their quantitative measurement and relations to self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile variables.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) via TurkPrime (Litman, Robinson & Abberbock, 2017) and were required to be 18+ years of age and proficient in English. Sixty-seven individuals commenced the study; 16 participants exited the survey on their own accord and 32 participants did not meet eligibility criteria (see below), so were excluded. The final sample included 30 adults from the United States aged 26 – 66 years (M_{age} = 37.41, SD_{age} = 9.82; 9 females, 1 non-binary; 67% White/Caucasian, 20% Black/African American, 7% Asian, 3% Native American or Alaska Native and 3% Multiracial individuals). Informed consent was obtained prior to commencing the survey and ethical approval was granted from the University Ethics Committee (6443). Participants received a small honorarium for their participation.

Procedure

Participants wrote about a non-trivial interpersonal wrongdoing (i.e., an event that caused some degree of hurt, harm or conflict) that they, or someone else, felt they had committed within the last 48-hours. Before writing, participant eligibility was assessed: (a) had they experienced an interpersonal wrongdoing within the last 48-hours, (b) were they the offender (or both offender and victim), and (c) did they pass 4 out of 5 English proficiency questions (since participants had to write narratives in English). If deemed eligible, participants completed multiple-choice questions about the wrongdoing demographics (i.e., type of transgression, relationship between victim and offender, appraised wrongdoing severity). Thereafter, participants were instructed to "*please take a moment to think about the transgression. Now describe the story back to yourself, as if you were thinking to yourself or writing in a journal, in as much detail as you think is relevant*". The survey's next button was hidden for 2-minutes to prevent participants moving forward and encourage narratives of longer length. Accounts ranged from 7 – 324 words (M_{words} = 108, SD_{words} = 66.50). The study was not pre-registered.

Analytic Approach. The analytic approach employed a critical/realist perspective and conformed with guidelines for reflexive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2020, 2022). The first phase entailed familiarization with the data through repeated reading of participant narratives. This was spaced out over two weeks to allow re-reading with 'fresh eyes.' The second phase began with ascribing initial codes that highlighted the most basic aspects of the data. Initially, an inductive approach was taken to search for codes unrelated to concepts of defensiveness, externalisation or redemptive narration. The goal here was to look beyond the existing literature and explore for other aspects of narration that may have been missed by prior research frameworks. Furthermore, since defensiveness is not a narrative type, but an implicated motivational stance, I refrained from applying assumptions about motives to offenders' narration whilst creating codes (e.g., whether narrators were using context to defensively downplay responsibility versus develop a deeper understanding of their actions). I also refrained from applying valence to the narrative types (e.g., whether they were positive or negative) since some research has reported positive correlations

between positive and negative valence of the same narrative type (Lilgendahl et al., 2013). Phases 1 and 2 were then repeated from a deductive lens to ascribe codes conceptually related to externalisation and redemption. As Braun and Clarke (2020) argue, in reflexive thematic analysis inductive and deductive approaches are combinable; the inductive–deductive distinction should be viewed as a non-linear and iterative continuum rather than a dichotomy. This reflexive approach facilitated a more thorough understanding of the phenomena of narrative meaning making processes by expanding upon existing views of how individuals narrate, whilst also facilitating replication of prior ideas. In a third phase, initial codes were iteratively sorted into preliminary themes and subthemes following feedback and discussions with my supervisors. Next, in Phase 4, themes were refined, wherein some themes were collapsed, consolidated, re-conceptualized or removed altogether, before finally defining, and ascribing names to, themes (Phase 5).

Results

Transgression Demographics

The data reflected the following types of wrongdoings: 30% insults, 20% betrayals of trust, 10% neglect, 10% verbal fight or argument, 6.7% betrayal of confidence, 6.7% rejection, 3.3% infidelity, 3.3% physical harm and 6.7% other – and relationships between victim and offender: 33.3% significant other, 30% family member, 13.3% close friend, 10% stranger, 6.7% work colleague, 3.3% acquaintance. Eighty percent of participants reported they identified as sole offenders (20% reported feeling they were both victim and offender), and the mean reported wrongdoing severity was 5.07 ($SD = 1.25$), where a rating of 1 indicated 'not very severe' and a rating of 7 indicated 'very severe.'

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Three overarching themes of offenders' narration were identified within the data (see Table 1). Through the iterative process of theme refinement, it appeared codes related to 'externalisation' were not homogenous (Patton, 1990) and better reflected two differential themes of 'contextualisation' and 'self-distancing.' In narrative therapy, White and Epston (1990) speak of externalisation as contextualisation to gain a self-distanced viewpoint. However, it appeared that

contextualisation could be conceptually differentiated from self-distancing narratives; thus, these themes were conceptualised as distinct from one another. A third theme was identified as redemption.

Table 1

Theme Summary Table (Study 2.1)

Theme	Characteristics
Contextualisation	Considering contextual factors surrounding the wrongdoing such as the backstory, relational or emotional dynamics and how what happened relates to one's values or sense of self
Self-distancing	Reflecting on the wrongdoing from an unbiased, distanced viewpoint that considers the bigger picture (i.e., the opposite of self-focussed self-immersion); including linguistic shifts from self-immersed to self-distanced language
Redemption	Acknowledging harm and transforming the wrongdoing event from something shameful into something one can learn and grow from

In the following sections, themes will be defined, and subthemes will be discussed alongside direct quotations from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Levitt et al., 2018).

Theme 1: Contextualisation. When participants wrote about a recent time they wronged someone, they often placed the wrongdoing within a context to frame the story and its meaning in relation to the past, present or future. Here, individuals reflected on the backstory or events leading up to the wrongdoing, the relational or emotional dynamics surrounding what happened and/or how what happened relates to their values or sense of self.

The Backstory. When including a backstory, narrators placed the wrongdoing within a past context to "set the scene" of how things were leading up to the incident. For some individuals, this past context was a necessary precursor to understand or explain why they behaved as they did. For example, one participant stated she unfairly accused her partner of being unfaithful and referred to her backstory of trust issues with past partners:

> *I trust them, but because I have my own issues from others in the past, I brought up an accusation of being unsure of their fidelity. I felt bad afterwards, and probably apologized too. I know this person isn't like that, and I explained this to them too, it's just hard to have confidence in life and be so sure of everything* – Female, 37 years

In this example, the participant uses her backstory to explain her current insecurity in a way that allows her to take some degree of responsibility and re-affirm trust in her partner.

In contrast, some narrators used the backstory to embed the current wrongdoing within past victimisation – rather than reflect on their actions per se. In these instances, it appeared narrators had not yet worked through these prior victimisations, as they had merged with their current wrongdoing story. One example of this was observed in the narrative below, where the participant described expressing a passive-aggressive comment whilst serving coffee to his mother's friend at a family breakfast:

> *I had done some work for M in the past and she didn't pay me for it. So anyway, I got M her coffee and as I was setting the coffee down in front of her I said "that will be 30$", which is the exact amount she owed me for the work I had done* – Male, 39 years

In this example, it appears the individual's past victimisation has merged with the current wrongdoing story – and it is used to justify his rude remark. This type of contextualisation appears to place the incident in the context of an (unresolved) prior conflict (Thai et al., 2024), re-positioning the offender's actions as understandable.

The Emotional Dynamics. At times, the backstory also incorporated aspects of the emotional dynamics surrounding the incident. For example, one participant stated that he yelled and

screamed at his partner, and used narration to describe feelings, and different root causes, of his anger:

> *I was frustrated by how much we always see her family—in particular, that they make*
> *last-minute plans and expect us to just follow them [....] I was angry because I had*
> *just gotten back from grocery shopping with a bunch of supplies and food that we*
> *were going to cook at our house. We both hate grocery shopping, but I had agreed to*
> *go, while she relaxed at home. She already accepted her parents' invitation when I*
> *got back [...]I felt so resentful that we always do what she decides –* Male, 31 years

For this participant, unpacking the emotional dynamics surrounding the event *is* the wrongdoing narrative – he contextualises his anger in the backstory, moments leading up to the incident and as an afterthought whilst reflecting on what happened. Describing emotional dynamics may help offenders make sense of triggers such as unresolved emotions (Beck, 1976). For some, this type of contextualisation may indicate individuals are stuck in their emotional experience and thus unable to attend to other aspects of the incident (Kross & Ayduk, 2017) – possibly until they reconcile and work through these emotions. For others, the emotional context reflected a vacillation between acknowledging wrong and searching for reasons for their actions:

> *I blurted out something that my mom had previously told me in confidence, and*
> *specifically told me to keep secret, involving her feelings about how to handle dinner*
> *scheduling conflicts between the three of us. I immediately felt terrible for letting it*
> *out, but I also felt vindicated, because it was so pertinent and it felt like if I just put*
> *that information on the table, that everyone could work through the conflict and be*
> *better off. However, I realize it's really bad to break someone's confidence like that –*
> Non-binary person, 29 years

In this sense, narration that vacillates between emotions such as vindication and guilt might reflect 'active' engagement in sense making processes (Woodyatt et al., 2025), wherein offenders wrestle between accepting accountability and engaging in defensive rationalisation.

The Relational Dynamics. Some participants also described the relational context or dynamics between themselves and the person they harmed. In some instances, this process appeared to help offenders make sense of reasons for their behaviour. For example, one participant acknowledges she hurt her boyfriend by ignoring him when he arrived at her workplace with flowers, yet explains that her motivation for doing so was due to her disliking surprises (and having previously communicated this to him):

> *Yesterday I hurt my boyfriend. He came to my place of work with flowers as a surprise for my birthday. I have always told him that I am not fond of surprises and expected that he'd take that into account [...] . When I saw him emerge through the reception, I continued with my work unabated. When the secretary came over to inform me that I had a visitor, I asked her to tell him that I was busy* – Female, 31 years

Here, the relational context helps re-position the offender as less morally questionable because ignoring her boyfriend makes more sense within this context. However, while the narrator contextualises the relational dynamics in a way that could be perceived as making justifications, she takes some accountability by acknowledging she hurt her boyfriend. Therefore, providing context may do more than 'excuse' or 'justify' behaviour alone. Instead, it seems contextualisation might help offenders take responsibility *and* relieve threat to their moral integrity by providing an avenue to communicate their intentions were not malicious or without some reason, which re-positions themselves as moral people who committed wrong (Maruna & Ramsden, 2004).

The Narrator's Values or Sense of Self. Participants also contextualised by turning the lens on themselves to reflect on how their behaviour relates to who they are, their values or who they want to be. For some participants, this type of contextualisation was used to describe a conflict between acknowledging the values their behaviour transgressed and highlighting some morally beneficial function underlying their behaviour. For example, one participant reflected on the guilt she felt for initiating workplace gossip by contrasting a beneficial function of the behaviour (social connection) with behavioural outcomes that conflict with ideals of morality (e.g., being 'mean' and 'hypocritical'):

> *I just can't seem to stop gossiping! I guess it helps me connect with others, but I wish*
> *I could just stop [.....]. What I did was mean, and I'm certainly not the model*
> *employee all the time either, so it was also hypocritical. I feel really bad about this,*
> *and I don't want to be THAT person who talks behind others' backs and gossips. It's*
> *not who I want to be* – Female, 38 years.

Here, the participant identifies that, despite the 'positive' function of her gossiping, being someone who is insincere and talks about others behind their backs is not the type of person she would like to be. Again, it seems contextualisation may allow offenders to acknowledge wrong and simultaneously experience a 'buffer' that makes responsibility taking somewhat less threatening (White & Epston, 1990). This may help individuals reach conclusions that their wrongdoing behaviour does not align with their values or the person they want to be by providing a dialectical balance between actions that have some positive function and are, at the same time, morally questionable.

Theme 2: Self-Distancing. Some participants narrated with self-distancing by using self-distanced language or identifying an abstracted bigger picture perspective, while others narrated with self-immersion by focusing on specific concrete or emotionally arousing details.

Self-Distanced Language. Generally, participants used *I*-statements when referring to the self. However, at times, some participants shifted from using first-person *I*-statements to referring to themselves with second-person language (i.e., *you*). For example, one participant stated he yelled at his mother who has mid-stage dementia, and shifted between first-person and second-person language:

> *I continued to raise my voice and tell her that it was ridiculous that I have to keep*
>
> *saying the same thing over and over every day. I continued on and on. You could tell*
>
> *that she was obviously hurt by this as she sat and contemplated her memory*
>
> *loss. You could feel the sadness. I felt terrible, of course* – Male, 48 years

Here, the narrator uses first-person language to describe his actions and feelings of guilt, but switches to second-person language when acknowledging the hurt and subsequent sadness caused by his behaviour. One possibility for this language-shift could be that using *I*-statements when describing the implications of one's actions exacerbates threat to one's sense of being a good and moral person, thus self-distanced language might help alleviate the distress associated with moral-social threat (Kross et al., 2014). Similarly, self-distanced language was observed when another participant reported saying harsh words to his intoxicated sister, who came to stay with him following an instance of domestic violence with her boyfriend:

> *I told her she was a child basically, and that her boyfriend was a scum*
>
> *bag...... There was instant regret, but it was too late and the damage was done* –
>
> Male, 38 years

Here, instead of saying "*I felt instant regret*" the narrator shifts to impersonal language to say "*there was instant regret*". Although these differences in language are subtle, there is evidence that self-distanced second-person language can reduce emotional reactivity (Orvell et al., 2017; Orvell et al., 2019; Orvell et al., 2021; Kross et al., 2014). Here, self-distanced language may help narrators regulate their distress when discussing threatening elements of their wrongdoing, such as the guilt or regret associated with the hurt they have caused.

Looking at the Bigger Picture. Distancing was also perceived when participants identified the bigger picture surrounding their wrongdoing, such as the implications of their behaviour. For example, one participant stepped back to reflect on the potential harm their workplace gossiping could create for the respective victim, and took a broader perspective that included putting themselves in the other person's shoes:

> *This person I insulted and bad-mouthed has been nothing but nice to me. These comments would really hurt him, not only personally, but potentially professionally –* Female, 38 years

Here, taking a step back to view the bigger picture might have allowed this participant to think about the potential impact of her behaviour on the victim – which may help individuals reflect on their wrongdoing in a more balanced way by expanding the focus beyond their actions alone (Grossmann et al., 2021; Huynh et al., 2016). Indeed, research has found that taking a distanced perspective when reflecting on past emotional events can increase perspective-taking (Webb et al., 2012).

Self-Immersion. In contrast, some participant accounts were low in self-distancing, and instead implied a highly self-immersed perspective. For one participant, who did not fulfil his commitment to help his friend move house, the narrative was centred around his own viewpoint. Here, the narrator does not acknowledge a broader perspective, such as the perspective of his friend, nor any bigger picture implications outside his own experience:

> *I was helping a friend move oh, I really wasn't feeling well but it was time-limited and he needed my help desperately. So I drank lots of coffee and a few energy drinks and put as much effort towards helping as I could. Nothing was done when I got there so it was a bigger job than I had even planned. Toward the end of the day I started feeling really bad and I had to lay down for a couple minutes my blood sugar was dropping and I felt like I was dying. My friend gave me a bunch of s*** for sitting down and said he's on a time limit. I explained that I understood his time limit but I was trying not to die that I just needed a couple of minutes of rest to let the sugar take*

effect and then I would get back to working – Male, 35 years

In this example, the narrator uses emotional language while reflecting on his experience of helping his friend move house (e.g., stating he was *"trying not to die"*), which is antithetical to self-distanced talk (Kross et al., 2005; Kross & Ayduk, 2008). If individuals are too psychologically immersed in *their own* perspective of what happened it could suggest they are "caught up" in the emotionally arousing details of their experience, which may act as a barrier to adaptive self-reflection and instead reflect a more ruminative style of narration (Treynor et al., 2003).

Theme 3: Redemption. Some individuals exhibited redemptive narration by acknowledging wrong and using turning points in their narratives to transforms 'negative' aspects of what happened (e.g., harm caused) into 'positives' that signify personal growth (i.e., drawing a new insight or learning and communicating a desire to act differently in the future).

Acknowledging Harm. When narrating what happened, some participants acknowledged that their actions, such as insults or communication during an argument, created harm by being hurtful, unhelpful and/or unwarranted:

I said these in a way designed to hurt rather than help – Male, 38 years

Some scholars argue that this acknowledgement of harm is a necessary precursor to facilitate the re-construction of moral identity because it allows individuals to re-frame the negative event as *necessary* for new insight or transformation without "killing off" one's past, shameful actions (Maruna, 2001; Maruna & Ramsden, 2004). This suggests that taking responsibility for one's actions by acknowledging wrong may be the precursor to redemptive narration, since you cannot draw a lesson from an event you deny.

Turning Points. Turning points that transform the 'negative' aspects of what happened into a 'positive' were apparent within some participant narratives. For example, one participant incorporated multiple turning points in her story by explaining she and her partner had a good relationship until her infidelity:

we were always happy till i cheated and my relationship collapsed. I was angry at

first then i acknowledged my mistakes and kept on apologizing – Female, 30 years

Here, the participant contrasts an upsetting positive-to-negative turning point (i.e., contamination sequence; McAdams & Bowman, 2001) with a redemptive negative-to-positive one; she moves from experiencing anger toward the victim, to expressing remorse and seeking forgiveness. Although the story is not redemptive in an interpersonal reconciliation sense, it is redemptive wherein the offender moves from experiencing emotions that may act as barriers to self-forgiveness and interpersonal reconciliation (e.g., other-directed anger) toward expressing remorse, taking responsibility and trying to make amends (e.g., through apologising; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). According to McAdams and colleagues (2001), turning points, or shifts in the story, are integral to redemptive narratives because they allow individuals to accept the 'negative' aspects of one's story and transform them into something 'positive' or growth oriented.

>   ***Identifying a Learning or Desire to Change.*** Another type of turning point was observed when participants identified a growth-oriented learning and/or a desire to change. For example, one participant highlights a learning within an incident of calling his mother ignorant:

> *She took it to a personal place and I called her ignorant. This caused her to become*
> *even more enraged. What I said was true (and she knows it) but it was also unhelpful*
> *at the moment and perhaps uncalled for. I need to make sure that I'm more careful*
> *the next time we have an argument* – Male, 46 years

Here, the participant identifies that he would like to be more careful with his words the next time he argues with his mother – indicating a desire to grow and act differently next time. This identification of a new learning or insight is arguably one of the most important elements of offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes because it requires accountability yet provides offenders with a hopeful way forward (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a).

Discussion

The present study identified three ways in which offenders naturally narrated their own wrongdoing during the early stages of processing the event: *contextualisation*, *self-distancing* and *redemption*. Here, I review these narrative types and discuss their possible functions for offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes (forming a theoretical framework for further investigation in Chapter 3).

Contextualisation involves describing contextual factors surrounding the incident (e.g., the backstory, narrator's values, relational or emotional dynamics between parties). Typically, offenders' use of contextualisation has been conceptualised as a tool for justifying their actions, downplaying harm or mitigating responsibility (Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). From this perspective, contextualisation is akin to creating excuses and denying accountability, which is antithetical to genuine self-forgiveness (Cornish et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2018; Wenzel, et al., 2012; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a), instead reflecting pseudo self-forgiveness or defensive neutralisation techniques (Bandura, 1999; Sykes & Matza, 1957). However, providing context may be more than defensiveness, instead indicating an innate facet of the meaning making process.

Indeed, the present qualitative analysis illustrated that participants often used contextualisation to re-position themselves as moral *and* simultaneously acknowledge harm, at times vacillating between feeling justified (reflecting defensiveness) *and* feeling guilty (reflecting responsibility-taking). Providing contextual explanations that echo vacillation between defensiveness and responsibility-taking may indicate individuals who are *struggling* with self-forgiveness, torn between the virtue and distress of accepting responsibility (Woodyatt et al., 2025). In this way, contextualisation may be used by narrators to iron out contradictory thoughts or feelings (Bruner, 1990; Dimaggio & Semerari, 2004), and gain greater coherence or understanding of their actions (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Stein et al., 1997). Indeed, context is imperative for narrative coherence because it helps narrators (and listeners) understand the 'what, why and how' of an incident (Adler et al., 2018; Reese et al., 2011; Wilson & Gilbert, 2008), which simultaneously

provides an avenue for offenders to re-assert their moral worth (Bruner, 1990; Maruna & Copes, 2005). Although this contextualised re-positioning could be perceived as defensiveness, ironing out contradictions through contextualisation may be a necessary precursor that reduces moral-social identity threat and subsequently facilitates responsibility taking.

Whether contextualisation is beneficial to offenders' genuine self-forgiveness may depend on how contextualisation develops over time. At first, contextualisation may benefit offenders. Reflecting on the context could prompt individuals to think about reasons for their behaviour, increasing self-awareness and highlighting circumstances that contributed to their actions (White & Epston, 1990). This may create a self-compassionate buffer that restores moral integrity and encourages responsibility taking (Cornish et al., 2018; Cornish & Wade, 2015a, 2015b). However, if contextualisation is repetitive or increases over time, it might hinder genuine self-forgiveness by instead cementing contextual reasons for behaviour and transforming them into defensive excuses. This may explain why some research, which has asked individuals to narrate an important wrongdoing event from the past, considers the provision of context as indicative of defensive excuses (i.e., if explanations remain a predominant part of the story long after it has occurred; Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005). Certainly, individuals can minimise their actions and deflect responsibility by contextualising too much (Cornish, 2016), which may lead to greater pseudo self-forgiveness. Thus, whether contextualisation facilitates, or hinders, genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile may depend on how contextualisation develops over time.

Participants were also found to engage in *self-distancing* by employing self-distanced language or taking an unbiased, abstracted or bigger picture perspective. A substantial body of research has found reflecting on past events with self-distancing techniques (e.g., visualizing oneself as a fly-on-the-wall, imagining temporal distance[1], incorporating distanced self-talk; *you* instead of *I*) leads to more adaptive self-reflection, afforded by reduced distress and greater objectivity or perspective taking (see Kross & Ayduk, 2017 for a review). Interestingly, in the present study, participants used self-distancing techniques when discussing the more threatening

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[1] I.e., imagining how one will feel, or think, about the incident in the distant future

aspects of their wrongdoing, such as when acknowledging feelings of regret, identifying the implications of their actions or describing inflicted harm. This suggests participants may have utilized spontaneous self-distancing to cope with perceived threats and the associated distress (Ayduk & Kross, 2010a; Orvell et al., 2019; Orvell et al., 2021). While this body of self-distancing research has not examined whether self-distancing leads to adaptive self-reflection in interpersonal wrongdoings specifically (Kross & Ayduk, 2017), some research suggests self-distancing benefits may extend to offenders' interpersonal reconciliation processes. For example, adopting a temporally distanced (compared to self-immersed) perspective when reflecting on a recent relationship conflict led to lower other-oriented blame and greater self-insight/other-oriented forgiveness (Huynh et al., 2016). In contrast, individuals who adopted a self-focused perspective (i.e., low self-distancing) when reflecting on interpersonal problems failed to see the bigger picture and reported a more ruminative narrative style, predisposing to greater self-punitiveness or defensiveness (Lyubomirksy & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995).

While it thus seems that self-distancing might benefit an offender's genuine self-forgiveness processes, it has also been proposed that self-distancing can lead to moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999). Self-distancing from prosocial emotions, such as guilt, may reduce offenders' belief they have committed wrong, subsequently lowering threat alongside the perceived need to engage in reparative behaviour. Thus, if self-distancing reduces guilt and the downstream motivation to act pro-socially, it may reflect greater defensiveness (Baumeister, et al., 1994; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013b). Akin to the function of contextualisation, whether self-distancing benefits, or hinders, genuine self-forgiveness may depend on how self-distancing changes over time – self-distancing too soon may encourage moral disengagement by downregulating functional emotions such as guilt and shame (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Baumeister et al., 1994; de Hooge et al., 2010, 2018; Gilbert, 1997), but self-distancing that increases at later times may be beneficial by regulating persistent feelings of guilt and shame in a way that promotes objective self-reflection (e.g., perspective taking).

Finally, characteristics of *redemptive narration* were also observed, whereby narrators acknowledged harm and indicated growth-oriented turning points such as new learnings, attempts at making amends or desires to act differently. Some scholars have proposed redemptive narratives allow offenders to simultaneously take responsibility *and* restore moral agency, because to draw a lesson, offenders must admit wrong (Maruna, 2001). Learnings may then serve to reduce contradictions between agency and morality because to *genuinely* learn from past mistakes, one must gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to act in alignment with moral principles next time. Thus, learnings may restore one's sense of agency and control over future actions and outcomes (Maruna, 2001; Maruna & Ramsden, 2004; McAdams & Bowman, 2001; McAdams et al., 2001). Therefore, redemptive narratives may provide an avenue for offenders to transform and integrate feelings of guilt and shame *and* re-commit to values transgressed, both of which are imperative to genuine self-forgiveness (Griffin et al., 2018; Woodyatt et al., 2017b; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a).

In addition to being useful for intrapersonal restoration, redemptive narration might also benefit interpersonal reconciliation by increasing reparative intentions and behaviours. Indeed, offenders who have desisted from criminalised behaviour (compared to those persisting) have naturally redemptive stories (Maruna, 2001; Stone, 2016), and individuals who used redemptive narrative techniques to reflect on historical intergroup conflict reported greater willingness to make reparations with the victimised group (Rotella et al., 2015). Given redemptive narration requires offenders to draw learning from their behaviour, it follows that it might also facilitate or encourage behaviour change. Two separate studies found support for this claim whereby individuals who used redemptive narration whilst discussing challenging experiences also reported improvements in mental health and maintenance of sobriety over a 4-month and 4-year period, respectively (Adler et al., 2015; Dunlop & Tracy, 2013). Together, these findings suggest redemptive narration may promote genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile by encouraging responsibility taking, moral-social identity re-construction and guilt-integration via affirming (and perhaps sustaining) a commitment to apply one's learnings, reconcile with the victim and act differently in the future.

Conclusion

In sum, the present study identified the differential ways offenders naturally use narration to story a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. By taking a qualitative approach, I (1) identified narrative types of *contextualisation, self-distancing* and *redemption* as present in offenders' stories, (2) distinguished observable attributes of these narrative types and (3) developed hypotheses for the function of contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption in offenders' "working through" for genuine self-forgiveness; forming an initial conceptual/theoretical framework for the differential ways offenders may use narration to story a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. In the following chapters, identified narrative types will be used to create a quantitative tool to assess offenders' narration (Chapter 3), and examine how different narrative types may lead to, or be implicated in, offenders differentiated self-forgiveness processes and willingness to reconcile (Chapters 3 – 5).

CHAPTER 3.

The Relationship Between Offenders' Narration, Re-Narration and Self-Forgiveness

In Chapter 2, thematic analysis identified themes of *contextualisation, self-distancing* and *redemption* as observable in offenders' single time-point narratives of a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. Initial theorizing regarding how narration and re-narration may reflect, or influence, offenders' self-forgiveness processes also ensued. In the present chapter, I will extend the study of offenders' narration to a longitudinal design and develop operational and conceptual clarity of these narrative constructs. Specifically, I will (a) use subthemes and qualitative excerpts from Chapter 2 to create a quantitative scale of offenders' narration, (b) examine relationships between offenders' narrative and self-forgiveness processes, including how these processes may develop over time, and (c) use these findings to further refine the theoretical framework for how offenders may naturally use narration (and re-narration) to story a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. In the following sections, I will discuss how prior research has approached quantifying the qualitative nature of narration and use this discussion to justify the empirical approach of this chapter.

Coding for Narrative Types: The Narrative Identity Approach

Recently, there has been some debate in the literature regarding the reliability of methods used to quantify qualitative narrative data. Traditionally, the narrative identity field have had researchers code the degree to which participants demonstrate specific types of narration. Coders tend to either rate participants' narration on likert scales (e.g., 0 = no evidence of the construct, 1 = some evidence but vague, 2 = evidence and some insight, 3 = insight that can be applied broadly to one's life; McLean & Pratt, 2006) or use a presence/absence approach (e.g., 0 = absent, 1 = present[2]; McAdams, 1999). Typically, these schemes include elaborate criteria for coding narrative types to guide researchers in making attributions about the complexity or sophistication of meaning present in specific narrative types. The field has used these approaches over the past 25 years and has contributed a significant body of knowledge that highlights how North American individuals

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[2] McAdams (1999) coding scheme for redemptive narration also provides bonus points for narratives that link redemptive techniques with themes of agency and belonging

use specific types of narration to story significant life events, including how these life stories influence, and maintain, aspects of personality and wellbeing.

Interestingly, many of these studies examine narrative constructs based on researchers' coding of participants' narration alone, with no input from participants themselves. More recently, some scholars have queried the reliability of this approach. For example, Pannattoni and McLean (2018) highlight that some studies report low correlations between researchers' coding and participants' self-ratings of similar narrative constructs – and even when ratings between researchers and self-raters align, researchers can miss characteristics that self-raters identify (Dunlop et al., 2020). Is this a problem? Pannattoni and McLean argue that it may not be if researchers are clear on the assumptions underlying their method for quantifying qualitative data.

Assumptions Underlying Ratings from Third-Party Observers VS First-Person Narrators

One proposition of the assumptions underlying different types of raters is that having individuals rate their own experiences may better capture narrators' conscious aspects of narration – whereas having researchers code for narrative types may capture a mixture of aspects the narrator is aware of, alongside educated assumptions of the underlying motives of the narrator (where the latter is based upon psychological theory; Pannattoni & McLean, 2018). Indeed, prior research using researchers as coders has studied offenders' narratives by making appraisals about the motives underlying narration (Baumeister et al., 1990). In the present research, I endeavour to highlight more basic types of narration by viewing narrative constructs as separate from the underlying motivations of narrators[3]. Taking this into consideration, would third-party observers or first-person narrators be more suitable coders? Some empirical research suggests that self-raters may form better judgements than third-party observers when it comes to their own thoughts and feelings, but observers may generate more accuracy when it comes to observable qualities, such as behaviour (Vazire, 2010). But which one is narrative?

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[3] Of course, narration can be used in different ways based on different motivations. I am not suggesting that narrative exists in complete isolation from the narrator's motivations. Rather, I am hoping to construct a scale that examines the narrative construct as its own separate entity, free from assumptions about corresponding motives. Thereafter, in Study 3.3, I will explore how narrative types influence, or reflect, the different thoughts or feelings of offenders (i.e., their differential self-forgiveness processes and willingness to reconcile)

On the one hand, narration is an observable piece of information – the narrative content can be seen, read (or heard) and interpreted by the observer. Yet on the other hand, narration reflects a person's own thoughts and feelings, and individuals may self-rate their narrative qualities based on internalized information that has not been expressed via narration. In the case of this thesis, I argue that self-narration may be an internal meaning making process, one that often gets shared with others but occurs inside the narrator. At the same time, I argue that narration may be a mechanism in, or byproduct of, meaning making. This proposition assumes that narration is something concrete that can be observed, particularly once internal narrative thought is externalized or expressed via written or spoken words. From this perspective, narration may be both an observable quality *and* an internalized meaning making process.

Empirical Approach of the Present Studies

For this reason, I will develop measurement items based on observable narrative qualities. The factor structure of the quantitative narrative scale will first be examined, refined and tested using third-party raters (Study 3.1 and 3.2), before extending this validation to the first-person perspective (Study 3.3). Specifically, a third-party approach will be used first to quantify narrative processes based on observable narrative data. That is, if observers can identify narrative processes within offenders' written narration, this objective observability will provide further validation of narration as mechanism rather than existing solely in offenders' private, un-storied cognitions and emotions. Thereafter, the scale will be validated from the first-person perspective, wherein self-selected offenders will use the scale to rate their own wrongdoing narratives, given that the primary focus of this thesis is offenders' experience of narration and self-forgiveness (rather than observers' appraisals of these processes).

Study 3.1

The aim of Study 3.1 is to develop a narrative coding scale for quantitative assessment of *contextualisation, self-distancing* and *redemption*. Specifically, measurement items will be developed based on subthemes and qualitative exerts from Chapter 2; their factor structure will be explored using third-party observers and scale items refined to gain conceptual and operational clarity (here and Study 3.2). Subsequently (Study 3.3), the scale will be further validated with first-person narrators to then quantitatively assess how narration (and re-narration) may hinder, or facilitate, offenders' self-forgiveness processes.

Method

Participants

Sample size considerations were generated as per rule-of-thumb recommendations for exploratory factor analysis (see Kyriazos, 2018 for a review), which suggest a ratio of $n = 10$ per indicator variable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Wang & Wang, 2012). For this reason, I aimed to recruit 390[4] individuals via MTurk.

Four-hundred and twenty-seven individuals self-selected to participate, whereby 37 were excluded for (a) failing an English proficiency test ($n = 6$; see procedure) or (b) dropping out on their own accord ($n = 31$). This left a final sample of 390 individuals aged 19 – 71 ($M_{age} = 40.11$, $SD_{age} = 11.31$; 160 female, 2 non-binary, 2 preferred not to say; 76% White/Caucasian, 11% Black/African American, 9.2% Asian, 2.5% Multiracial, 1% Native American or Alaska Native and 0.3% Pacific Native). Participation was voluntary and participants received a small honorarium for their time. Ethical approval was obtained from the University's ethics committee (4986).

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[4] In this thesis, I report 30-items – however, the study originally included 39-items (hence a sample of 390 participants was estimated). Originally, an additional 9 items were included in the present study to measure narrative 'coherence'. The construct was dropped after Study 3.2, as no relationships between coherence and self-forgiveness items were found. For economy of presentation, I have omitted these items from this report.

Design

Participants were randomly assigned to one of five narrative conditions, whereby each condition included one narrative stimulus. Five narratives from Study 2.1 were chosen as stimuli for Study 3.1 to ensure high ecological validity (see Appendix A for narrative stimuli). Narratives were selected based on two criteria: (a) adequate word length (i.e., >100 words) and (b) diversity in narrative strategies employed (i.e., those coded with multiple subthemes in Study 2.1). To maintain participant anonymity, the narrative stimuli were slightly modified (e.g., identifiable information such as names and locations were changed). Word length ranged from 184 to 321 words per narrative stimulus. This study was not pre-registered.

Procedure and Materials

Once assigned to a condition, participants read an information sheet, provided consent and completed an English proficiency test. Thereafter, participants read the narrative stimulus and rated their appraisal of the narrative's characteristics using the interpersonal offender narrative meaning making scale (see below).

The Interpersonal Offender Narrative Meaning Making Scale (IONS). A set of 30 items were created to reflect themes of *contextualisation, self-distancing* and *redemption*. The *contextualisation* subscale included nine items designed to measure when narrators provided context relating to the backstory, explained events leading up to the incident, relational or emotional dynamics, implications for the future or how what happened related to their sense of self or values; the *self-distancing* subscale included 14 items designed to assess when narrators used self-distanced language (*you > I*), identified the abstracted bigger picture (over concrete details) or took an objective, unbiased perspective (over emotional self-immersion); the *redemption* subscale included seven items designed to capture when narrators acknowledged wrong, shifted from the bad event to a positive insight or indicated a desire to learn, grow or change. All items were rated on a 7-point scale; for 29 items, 1 indicated 'strongly disagree' and 7 indicated 'strongly agree', and for one self-distancing item (*'the narrator speaks in a negative way about: themselves --- their behaviour'*), 1 indicated 'themselves' and 7 indicated 'their behaviour' (see Table 2 for all items).

Table 2

Preliminary 30 Items of the Interpersonal Offender Narrative Meaning Making Scale (IONS)

Construct	Item
Contextualisation	
	I understand the context around what happened
	The narrator has provided a backstory to what happened
	The narrator has described the relationship dynamics between themselves and the person they've wronged
	The narrator has described the emotional dynamics around what happened
	The events leading up to what happened have been described
	The narrator has linked what happened to their sense of self (e.g., who they are as a person)
	The narrator has considered what the event means for the future
	The narrator has provided an explanation for their actions
	The narrator has thought about how what happened relates to their values
Self-distancing	
	The narrator uses a lot of "*I*" statements (r)
	The narrator sometimes speaks of themselves in the second/third person (*you/he/she*)
	The narrator discusses the event as a problem to be solved
	The narrator discusses the event with a lot of emotion (r)
	The narrator takes an unbiased perspective
	The narrator speaks rationally about what happened
	The narrator has a self-centered perspective of what happened (e.g., egocentric) (r)
	The narrator has stepped back from the event
	The narrator has gained distance from the event
	The narrator reflects on the bigger picture
	The narrator seems stuck in what happened (r)
	The story was focused on the specific concrete details of what happened (r)
	The story was focused on the abstract, larger scheme of things

The narrator speaks in a negative way about: themselves vs.
their behaviour

Redemption

It feels like a story of redemption (e.g., the narrator made amends for
their wrongdoing and showed they are a good person)
It feels like a story of personal growth
There was a shift from the bad event to a positive learning
The narrator acknowledged that what they did was wrong
The narrator identified a lesson or insight
It seems that the narrator wants to change for the better
The story only focused on what went wrong in the past (r)

Results

An exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood with promax rotation was run in SPSS v29 to examine whether the 30 items loaded onto the predicted three-factor structure. The initial analysis extracted seven factors (see Appendix B for initial factor analytical results). Eight of the nine items meant to represent contextualisation predominantly loaded onto two factors, which indicated two subtypes of contextualisation: contextualisation of the *self* (4 items, e.g., linking what happened to one's values or identity) versus contextualisation of the *past* (4 items, e.g., describing a backstory or the relational/emotional dynamics). All seven redemption items loaded onto the redemption factor, however three items cross-loaded onto an additional subcategory. Three items designed to measure self-distancing loaded onto the self-distancing factor, and the remaining eight self-distancing items loaded onto two factors that were either conceptually ambiguous (5 items) or had item loadings <.40 (3 items). To manage these issues, items that cross-loaded onto multiple factors, failed to load onto any factors, had factor loadings below .40 or were not theoretically meaningful as stand-alone factors were removed in a stepwise process. This produced a final 18-item scale. A renewed factor analysis extracted four factors explaining 68.8% of the variance (KMO = .88, Barlett's test of sphericity <.001): past contextualisation (4 items; a = .86); self-contextualisation (4 items; a = .78); self-distancing (5 items; a = .76); and redemption (5 items; a = .94; see Table 4 for final factor analytical results across all studies).

Discussion

      The present aims were to develop measurement items for *contextualisation, self-distancing* and *redemption,* and gain further operational and conceptual clarity. Through exploratory factor analysis, items designed to measure *contextualisation* reflected two sub-types of contextualisation: *past contextualisation* (i.e., how the wrongdoing relates to context set in the past such as the backstory or relational dynamics between parties) and *self-contextualisation* (i.e., how the wrongdoing relates to the narrator's self-context, such as their values or identity). After reviewing the face-validity of the new four factor structure, it became apparent one self-contextualisation item (*the narrator has provided an explanation for their actions*) could conceptually reflect either type of contextualisation (past *or* self). For this reason, the item was dropped. As this would have left the self-contextualisation subscale with three items, the dropped item was replaced with a new item that better reflected *self*-contextualisation (i.e., *the narrator has thought about how the event fits with their worldview*). This left 18 items and four subscales: *past contextualisation* (4 items)*, self-contextualisation* (4 items)*, self-distancing* (5 items) and *redemption* (5 items). The present study provided initial factor analytical evidence for the IONS at a single time point (though requiring further confirmation and validation). However, I hypothesised the function of narration in "working through" for self-forgiveness may change depending on how narration fluctuates over time. Thus, the IONS also needs to be shown to be time-invariant.

Study 3.2

The primary aim of Study 3.2 was to test the IONS across multiple time points. Similar to Study 3.1, third-party observers were used to confirm its measurement of observable narrative qualities (before testing the scale using first-party narrators in Study 3.3). In addition, linear mixed models were run to explore the theoretical framework (from an observers' perspective) and examine whether attributions of offenders' self-forgiveness processes could be made by observers based on the narratives they read. As this secondary objective was exploratory, there were no specific hypotheses about observers' appraisals of offenders' narration.

Method

Design

As per Study 3.1, participants were randomly assigned to one of five narrative conditions. Each condition included a different narrative stimulus of one wrongdoing event narrated by a crowd-sourced offender across three time points. For this study, a new set of narrative stimuli were generated through a pilot study (see Appendix C and D), which used the same narrative instructions as Study 2.1 for Time 1 and adapted these instructions for Time 2 and 3.

Procedure

After being randomly assigned to conditions, participants read an information sheet, provided consent, and completed an English proficiency test. Participants were then shown the first narrative (Time 1: within 24-hours of the event) and asked to rate (a) narrative qualities using the IONS, and (b) their appraisal of the narrator's self-forgiveness processes, based on the narrative they read, using the Differentiated Self-Forgiveness Processes Scale (the scale was adapted to an observer perspective; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Throughout this process, the narrative stimulus was displayed at the top and bottom of the screen to ensure participants could easily refer to the story whilst providing ratings. Once complete, this procedure was immediately repeated for the second and third narrative stimuli; that were written 48 and 72-hours after the event, respectively. Six attention checks were included within the survey. If participants failed three or more checks, they were excluded.

Participants

Participants from the United States were recruited from MTurk and were ineligible to participate if they had previously participated in Study 3.1. In alignment with Study 3.1, sample size considerations were based on rule-of-thumb recommendations for structural equation modelling (i.e., $n = 10$ per indicator variable; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Wang & Wang, 2012) – thus, I aimed to recruit 240[5] participants.

Three-hundred and fifty-seven individuals self-selected to participate, of which 111 were excluded for (a) failing the English proficiency test ($n = 68$), (b) exiting the survey on their own accord ($n = 37$), (c) failing three or more attention checks ($n = 3$), (d) selecting the same response for every question ($n = 3$) or having an incomplete dataset ($n =1$). This left a total sample of 245 individuals aged 21 – 74 ($M_{age} = 40$, $SD_{age} = 11.47$; 106 females, 2 non-binary/third-gender, 1 preferred not to say). Participation was voluntary and participants received a small honorarium for their time. Ethical approval was granted from the University ethics committee (4986). The study was not pre-registered.

Measures

All items were rated on a 7-point scale based on agreement with each item (1 = strongly disagree – 7 = strongly agree).

The Interpersonal Offender Narrative Meaning Making scale (IONS). Observers rated characteristics of offenders' narratives using the 18-item scale, which included four subscales: past contextualisation (4 items), self-contextualisation (4 items), self-distancing (5 items) and redemption (5 items).

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[5] This thesis reports a scale of 18-items, however the original study included 24-items (i.e., 6-items measured the 'coherence' construct that has been excluded from this thesis as discussed in footnote 4).

The Differentiated Processes of Self-forgiveness Scale (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a).

Observers rated their perception of offenders' differentiated self-forgiveness processes using a 19-item scale[6] (adapted from Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a) with 3-subscales: (1) genuine self-forgiveness, indicative of engagement in adaptive "working through" (7 items – e.g., '*The narrator has tried to think through why they did what they did*' and '*The narrator has spent time working through their guilt*'; a = .91/.89/.87, for Time 1–3 respectively); (2) pseudo self-forgiveness, indicative of defensiveness (6 items – e.g., '*The narrator thinks the other person was really to blame for what they did*' and '*The narrator feels the other person got what they deserved*'; a = .76/.85/.82); and (3) self-punitiveness, indicative of 'beating-the-self-up' (6 items – e.g., '*The narrator keeps going over what they have done*' and '*The narrator believes what they have done is unforgivable*'; a = .88/.88/.85).

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

First, an EFA was conducted in SPSS v29 to confirm the factorial structure of the IONS. Results confirmed the new self-contextualisation item ('*the narrator has thought about how the event fits with their worldview*') loaded onto the self-contextualisation factor across all three time points (.57 – .82). In addition, it appeared the reverse-coded items in the self-distancing factor produced factor loadings below .40. A reliability analysis confirmed the self-distancing subscale would achieve higher reliability if reverse-coded items were dropped. After removing these items, the redemption subscale had more items (5 items) than other subscales (3–4 items). For this reason, the redemption item with the lowest factor loading across time points was removed to achieve similar quantity of items across subscales. This condensed the scale to 14 items: measuring past contextualisation with 4 items (a = .81/.80/.85, for Time 1–3 respectively), self-contextualisation with 3 items (a = .80/.78/.83), self-distancing with 3 items (a = .63/.62/.57), and redemption with 4 items (a = .91/.91/.91).

Longitudinal Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): Test of Measurement Invariance

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[6] The original scale included 20-items. One self-punitiveness item was accidentally excluded from this study (*The narrator doesn't understand why they behaved as they did*)

A longitudinal CFA, which tests for measurement invariance to ensure consistent measurement and meaning of constructs over time, was then run in R using the lavaan and semTools packages (Jorgensen, 2012; Rosseel, 2012). To test measurement invariance, two nested models were tested and compared: a configural model (i.e., the same factor structure across waves) and a metric model (i.e., factor structure and factor loadings constrained to be equal across waves). The metric model establishes that items do not become more or less representative of latent constructs at different measurement occasions, and the meaning of constructs is stable (Widaman et al., 2010). More stringent forms of invariance (scalar or residual invariance) were not required because the present statistical approach to testing change in narration variables and its relationship used aggregate scores by averaging items (it did not involve latent means).

To determine acceptability of model fit and compare models, alternatives to the χ^2 test were used as criteria. The χ^2 test as an indicator of model fit is known to be sensitive to sample size and model complexity, and this also extends to tests of invariance using χ^2 differences (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Therefore, given models in the present study were complex (e.g., 739 parameters in the configural model), criteria of change in CFI of less than -.01 and change in RMSEA of less than .01 when comparing the metric to the configural model were used to indicate invariance (Rutkowski & Svetina, 2014). Using these criteria, the IONS showed metric invariance over time (see Table 4). The overall model fit was satisfactory, with RMSEA ≤ .60 and SRMR ≤ .80 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) and confirmed the 4-factor structure. The item loadings on their respective factor are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

EFA (Study 3.1) and Metric Model CFA (Study 3.2 and 3.3): Standardised Loadings of the 14 IONS

Items on their Respective Factors

Subscale and Items	*Study 3.1* EFA Loadings	*Study 3.2* CFA Loadings	*Study 3.3* CFA Loadings
Past contextualisation			
The narrator has provided a backstory to what happened	.70	.83	.85
The narrator has described the relationship dynamics between themselves and the person they've wronged	.81	.64	.67
The narrator has described the emotional dynamics around what happened	.75	.72	.69
The events leading up to what happened have been described	.77	.85	.85
Self-contextualisation			
The narrator has linked what happened to their sense of self (e.g., who they are as a person)	.56	.80	.77
The narrator has thought about how what happened relates to their values	.95	.81	.91
The narrator has thought about how the event fits with their worldview[a]	--	.80	.89
Self-distancing			
The narrator takes an unbiased perspective	.53	.53	.64
The narrator has gained distance from the event	.73	.38	.63
The narrator reflects on the bigger picture	.55	.81	.78
Redemption			
It feels like a story of personal growth	.66	.88	.91
There was a shift from the bad event to a positive learning	.76	.87	.90
The narrator identified a lesson or insight	.83	.85	.83
It seems that the narrator wants to change for the better	.95	.88	.88

Note. [a] = item added in Study 3.2.

Table 4

Model Fit Statistics and Comparison Between Models (Study 3.2)

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	AIC	BIC	RMSEA	SRMR
Configural	1448.76 (739)***	.89	.87	33094.58	33815.84	.06	.07
Metric	1495.35 (767)***	.89	.87	33085.17	33708.40	.06	.08
Difference	46.59 (28)*	.00	.00			.00	.01

Note. For all analyses, *** $p<.001$.

Linear Mixed Modelling (LMM)

Linear Mixed Modelling (LMM) was used to examine (1) whether observers' perceived change in offenders' narrative or self-forgiveness processes, and (2) whether observers' appraisals of offenders' narration (initial level and within-person change in narrative types) were associated with their perceptions of offenders' self-forgiveness processes. To assess appraisals of change in narration and self-forgiveness over time, I ran seven models in SPSS v29; one for each dependent variable (i.e., 4 narrative types and 3 self-forgiveness processes), with Time entered as a fixed and random effect (see Table 6). Next, I examined an additional three models that included narrative types as predictors of observers' appraisals of offenders' differential self-forgiveness processes (genuine self-forgiveness, pseudo self-forgiveness and self-punitiveness; see Table 7). Time (centred) was entered into the model as a fixed and random effect, and narrative types as fixed effects. Specifically, each narrative type was disaggregated into an intercept, as participants' initial (Time 1) rating of each type (grand-mean centred), and within-person change, as each timepoint's difference score from the Time 1 rating (Wenzel & Coughlin, 2020; Willett, 1988). This modelling thus allowed us to test whether observers' appraisals of (a) initial levels of offender engagement in a narrative type (intercept) and/or (b) temporal change relative to initial levels of a narrative type (within-person change) were related to perceived self-forgiveness processes. See Table 5 for all descriptive statistics.

Observers' Appraisals of Change in Offenders' Narration and Self-Forgiveness Over Time. Offenders' engagement in self-contextualisation, self-distancing, redemption, self-punitiveness and genuine self-forgiveness were appraised to increase over time, whereas offenders'

pseudo self-forgiveness was appraised to decrease over time. Observers did not appraise any change over time for past contextualisation (see Table 6).

Table 5

Means (and Standard Deviations) for Observers' Appraisals of Main Variables (Study 3.2)

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Past contextualisation	5.26 (1.13)	5.24 (1.14)	5.30 (1.16)
Self contextualisation	4.28 (1.46)	4.53 (1.46)	4.97 (1.23)
Self-distancing	3.72 (1.28)	4.20 (1.21)	4.63 (1.12)
Redemption	3.70 (1.63)	4.29 (1.59)	5.03 (1.44)
Genuine self-forgiveness	4.09 (1.39)	4.50 (1.21)	5.08 (1.09)
Self-punitiveness	3.24 (1.32)	3.39 (1.30)	3.67 (1.25)
Pseudo self-forgiveness	4.25 (1.19)	4.19 (1.39)	3.69 (1.28)

$N = 245$ for all variables.

Table 6

Simple Linear Mixed Effects Model (with Time as only Predictor) for Observers' Appraisals of Change in Offenders' Narrative and Self-Forgiveness Processes Over Time (Study 3.2)

Dependent Variable	B	SE	t
Past contextualisation	.02	.05	.35
Self contextualisation	.34	.05	6.63***
Self-distancing	.46	.05	9.68***
Redemption	.67	.06	10.74***
Genuine self-forgiveness	.50	.06	8.95***
Self-punitiveness	.22	.04	6.00***
Pseudo self-forgiveness	-.28	.04	-6.47***

*$p <.05$, ** $p <.01$, ***$p <.001$.

What Attributions Do Observers Make About Offenders' Self-Forgiveness Processes Based on Their Appraisals of Offenders' Initial Narration? When observers perceived narratives to incorporate high initial levels of past contextualisation or self-distancing, they attributed offenders to be engaging in greater genuine self-forgiveness; narratives perceived to

incorporate high initial levels of self-contextualisation were attributed to reflect greater offender self-punitiveness, defensiveness and genuine self-forgiveness; and narratives perceived to incorporate high initial levels of redemption, were attributed to reflect greater offender self-punitiveness and genuine self-forgiveness, and lower offender defensiveness.

What Attributions Do Observers Make About Offenders' Self-Forgiveness Processes Based on Their Appraisals of Change in Offenders' Narration? When observers perceived offenders to increase in past contextualisation, they perceived offenders to show less genuine self-forgiveness and more self-punitiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness; when observers appraised increases in self-contextualisation, they perceived offenders to be less self-punitive and less defensive; when observers appraised an increase in self-distancing, they perceived offenders to show less self-punitiveness; and when observers appraised increases in redemption, they perceived offenders to show less defensiveness. Table 7 displays all inferential statistics.

Table 7

Linear Mixed Effects Model for Third-Party Perceptions of Offenders' Narration and Re-Narration and Their Effects on Third-Party

Appraisals of Offenders' Self-Forgiveness Processes (Study 3.2)

Predictor	GSF			SP			PSF		
	B	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*
Time	.08	.09	.86	-.08	.08	-.99	.99	.11	.93
Past context – time 1	.18	.04	4.78***	-.09	.06	-1.51	.03	.07	.46
Self-context – time 1	.09	.04	2.44*	.23	.06	4.16***	.13	.06	2.08*
Self-distancing – time 1	.10	.04	2.51**	.12	.06	1.92*	.13	.07	1.91
Redemption – time 1	.47	.03	13.67***	.36	.05	7.11***	-.24	.06	-4.06***
Past context – change [a]	-.11	.04	-3.13**	.18	.06	3.07**	.17	.07	2.62**
Self-context – change	.05	.04	1.41	-.13	.06	-2.22*	-.16	.06	-2.47**
Self-distancing – change	-.03	.04	-.80	-.18	.06	-2.85**	-.11	.07	-1.58
Redemption – change	.04	.03	1.22	-.09	.05	-1.69	-.16	.06	-2.84**

[a] change = within-person change over time; *p <.05, ** p <.01, ***p <.001.

Discussion

  The aims of the current study were to (1) test the four-factor structure and measurement invariance of the IONS across three time points using third-party raters, and (2) explore whether observers could (a) identify change in offenders' narration and (b) make appraisals about an offender's differentiated self-forgiveness processes based on their initial narration (and within-person fluctuations in re-narration). Through longitudinal CFA, the four-factor structure of the IONS was confirmed, and the measurement instrument refined to a 14-item scale. Findings confirmed offenders' narrative processes of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption were observable by a new independent sample of third-party raters. Offenders' use of self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption (but not past contextualisation) were perceived to increase over time.

  Results also indicated that observers appraised different functions of offenders' narration based on how they perceived narration to develop over time, which partly aligns with what was proposed in Chapter 2. First, observers associated narratives with high initial levels of past contextualisation with a process of genuine self-forgiveness; but perceived increases in past contextualisation at later times to indicate less genuine self-forgiveness and greater defensiveness/self-punitiveness. This aligns with prior findings that observers tend to perceive contextual explanations as defensiveness or self-condemnation and, notably, the wrongdoings in those studies were further in the past (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990). Here, observers may recognize that describing the past context leading up to the wrongdoing could initially help offenders understand the wrongdoing incident (which helps with working through it), but observers may perceive increases in descriptions of the past context at later times as an inability to learn and develop their thinking, which may be seen as a downplaying of responsibility or ruminative engagement in excessive self-punishment.

Second, high initial levels of self-contextualisation were associated with appraisals of greater genuine self-forgiveness, self-punitiveness and defensiveness; but increases in self-contextualisation at later times was associated with lower perceived self-punitiveness and defensiveness. Given that self-contextualisation can involve reflecting on how one's actions are misaligned (or aligned) with one's sense of self, values or worldview, observers may appraise this type of narration as offenders' responsibility-taking (i.e., an acknowledgment of having violated one's values, as implied in genuine self-forgiveness and self-punitiveness) or as defensiveness (e.g., an insistence that one has been true to one's values). However, if narrative self-contextualisation is perceived to increase at later times, it may signal to observers a greater coming to terms with one's responsibility.

Third, high initial levels of self-distancing were associated with perceptions of greater genuine self-forgiveness; and self-distancing that was appraised to increase at later times was associated with a perceived reduction in self-punitiveness. This suggests observers may appraise offenders who take an abstracted or bigger picture perspective to be actively working through their wrongdoing (for similar effects for victims, see Wenzel & Coughlin, 2020); and as this increases at later times it may reflect an emotional dis-investment or unburdening of excessive self-punishment.

Finally, high initial levels of redemption were perceived to indicate greater genuine self-forgiveness, greater self-punitiveness, and lower defensiveness; and redemption that was perceived to increase at later times was again associated with appraisals of less offender defensiveness. Here, appraisals that offenders have drawn some learning from their wrongdoing may indicate to third-parties an engagement in responsibility-taking that conveys low defensiveness (since you cannot learn from an event you deny) and greater responsibility-taking that signals offenders do not take what they have done lightly (implied by genuine self-forgiveness and self-punitiveness). When observers appraise increases in redemptive narration at later times, they may perceive offenders' openness to learning and development of moral insights as indicative of low defensiveness.

In sum, offenders' narrative strategies (and within-person fluctuation in strategies) could be objectively assessed by third-parties using the IONS. Observers' inferred appraisals of offenders'

self-forgiveness processes, which were made based on the narratives they read, provided initial validation of the identified narrative types and their theoretical relevance. This initial stage of scale development focused on third-parties' assessments of offenders' observable written narration (since third-parties are unaware of offenders' private emotions or cognitions); Studies 3.1 and 3.2 confirmed that offenders' narrative processes are observable by third-parties, which provides further support for narration as mechanism (rather than some private, un-storied thought process).

Study 3.3

The present study aimed to test the four-factor structure of the IONS from the first-person perspective across three time points. Participants recalled *their own* interpersonal wrongdoings and then rated their own narrations using the IONS. Relationships between offenders' narration, change in narration and self-forgiveness processes were also examined to further refine the theoretical and conceptual framework. Hypotheses were developed based on initial theorising in Chapter 2 alongside findings from Study 3.1 and 3.2. In Study 3.1, factor analysis indicated the contextualisation factor was better represented by two factors (i.e., past contextualisation and self-contextualisation). Hypotheses for past contextualisation align with what was proposed in Chapter 2, and a brief rationale for the predicted function of self-contextualisation (and change in self-contextualisation) will be outlined below. The study was pre-registered at the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/vp74j).

Hypotheses

Predictions were as follows:

1. *Past Contextualisation*

    (a) high initial levels of past contextualisation will be associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness

    (b) increases in past contextualisation at later times will be associated with greater pseudo self-forgiveness and less genuine self-forgiveness

2. *Self-Contextualisation*

(a) high initial levels of self-contextualisation will be associated with greater self-punitiveness (i.e., since taking a self-focus soon after wrongdoing can highlight incongruence between actions and one's ideal self, increasing feelings of shame/guilt and self-punishment; Tangney et al., 2007)

(b) increases in self-contextualisation at later times will be associated with greater self-punitiveness (i.e., if individuals continue to ruminate on incongruence with one's ideal self; Treynor et al., 2003) and greater genuine self-forgiveness (i.e., if individuals approach feelings of shame/guilt and commit to continued engagement in self-reflection; Cibich et al., 2016)

3. *Self-Distancing*

(a) high initial levels of self-distancing will be associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness

(b) increases in self-distancing at later times will be associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, and lower self-punitiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness

4. *Redemption*

(a) high initial levels of redemption will be associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness, self-punitiveness and willingness to reconcile and lower pseudo self-forgiveness

(b) redemption that increases at later times will be associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, and lower self-punitiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness

Method

Participants

Sample size requirements for linear mixed modelling were estimated via simulation using 'lme4' and 'simr' packages in R v4.3 (Bates et al., 2015; Green & MacLeod, 2016). The model included all narrative variables and one dependent variable across three time points and specified fixed effects for the narrative predictors and their interactions with time; random effects for intercept and time; and residual variance. To detect small to medium coefficients of narration on self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile ($\beta = .17 - .37$) and narration x time on self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile ($\beta = .01 - .08$) using standard .05 alpha probability, a sample size of 320 participants yielded power of .80 (effect size estimates were based on data from a prior pilot study not reported here; see Appendix F for power analysis code and output). To account for potential data loss due to attrition and exclusion of participants, an additional 25% of the intended sample was recruited (n=400). In the pre-registration, interactions between time and narration on self-forgiveness were predicted. However, no interactions between time and narration were found in Study 3.2 or 3.3. Therefore, the interaction hypotheses and results have been excluded from the present thesis for the sake of economy (see Appendix E and G for these hypotheses and results).

Participants were recruited via an advertisement on the CloudResearch Connect platform (Hartman et al., 2023). Eight-hundred and seventy-six participants self-selected to participate, whereby 481 participants were excluded due to: (a) failing to select they had experienced an interpersonal wrongdoing ($n = 257$), (b) selecting the wrongdoing occurred more than 48-hours ago ($n = 52$), (c) selecting they were the victim ($n = 144$) or an observer ($n = 12$), (e) exiting the survey on their own accord ($n = 11$) or (f) failing to write about an interpersonal wrongdoing ($n = 5$). This left 396 participants at Time 1. At Time 2, 22 participants did not sign-up for the survey, and 10 participants were excluded for failing to remember or write about the same wrongdoing from Time 1. At Time 3, 15 participants did not sign-up for the survey. This left a final dataset of 349 participants aged $18 - 72$ ($M_{age} = 37.52$, $SD_{age} = 11.43$; 44.4% females, 1.1% non-binary, 0.9%

preferred not to say). Participation was voluntary and participants received a small honorarium for their time. Ethical approval was granted from the University's ethics committee (7523).

Procedure

The procedure was equivalent to Study 3.2 – except participants wrote about (and rated) their own narratives about an interpersonal wrongdoing they recently committed (i.e., within the last 48-hours). Participants were asked to write about their wrongdoing using the same prompt from Study 2.1. After writing about their wrongdoing, participants reported the wrongdoing characteristics (i.e., type of wrongdoing, relationship to the victim, wrongdoing severity), completed measures of self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, and rated the features of their own narration using the IONS. With 24-hour time intervals in between, participants wrote about their wrongdoing two more times and completed measures of self-forgiveness/willingness to reconcile and the IONS each time.

Materials

All items were rated on a 7-point scale based on agreement with each item (1 = strongly disagree – 7 = strongly agree).

The Interpersonal Offender Narrative Meaning Making Scale (IONS). Offenders rated their narratives using the 14 item IONS, which included 4 subscales; past contextualisation (4 items; a = .80/.83/.87, for Time 1–3 respectively), self-contextualisation (3 items; a = .86/.87/.89), self-distancing (3 items; a = .74/.68/.68) and redemption (4 items; a = .90/.91/.93).

The Differentiated Processes of Self-forgiveness Scale (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Engagement in self-forgiveness processes (scale adapted from Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a) was measured using a 19[7] item scale with 3 subscales; genuine self-forgiveness (7 items; a = .89/.90/.92), self-punitiveness (6 items; a = .91/.91/.93) and pseudo self-forgiveness (defensiveness) (6 items; a = .84/.85/.84).

Willingness to Reconcile (adapted from Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Offender willingness to reconcile with the victim was measured using 4 items adapted from Woodyatt &

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[7] The original scale includes 20 items – however, one self-punitiveness item was excluded from the study (*I don't understand why I behaved as I did*) to align with the scale used in Study 3.2

Wenzel (2013a) – e.g., *I want to make amends for what happened, I want to reconcile with the other person* (*a* = .93/.92/.94).

Results

Wrongdoing Characteristics

Participants reported wrongdoings of moderate severity (*M* = 4.28, *SD* = 1.48), reflecting 29.5% verbal fights or arguments, 19.8% insults, 16.3% betrayals of trust, 14.3% acts of neglect, 7.4% rejection, 5.7% betrayals of confidence, 4.3% other (e.g., doxing, medical malpractice), 1.7% physical harm and 0.9% infidelity. Participants mostly reported wrongdoings towards an individual they tended to rate as close to them (*M* = 5.46, *SD* = 1.96; 30.1% close friend, 27.2% family member, 24.9% significant other, 7.2% work colleague, 5.4% stranger, 3.7% acquaintance and 1.4% other – e.g., ex-partner), and 85.1% identified as sole offenders (with 14.9% identifying as both victim and offender).

Longitudinal Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): Test of Measurement Invariance

To test for measurement invariance, I set up a series of nested model comparisons, as per those reported in Study 3.2. Measurement invariance was again tested by sole comparison of configural and metric models (see Table 8 for model fit statistics). There was an equivalent fit between metric and configural models as change in CFI was less than -.01 and change in RMSEA less than .01 (Rutkowski & Svetina, 2014), confirming metric invariance. The overall model fit was also acceptable (see Table 3 for factor loadings).

Table 8

Model Fit Statistics for the Configural and Metric Model (Study 3.3)

Model	χ2 (df)	CFI	TLI	AIC	BIC	RMSEA	SRMR
Configural	1676.20 (739)***	.92	.90	44679.00	45473.14	.06	.08
Metric	1720.07 (767)***	.92	.91	44666.86	45353.07	.06	.08
Difference	43.87 (28)*	.00	.01			.00	.00

Note. For all analyses *p*<.05; **p*<.01; ***p*<.001.

Linear Mixed Modelling (LMM)

The current study employed the same LMM approach as in Study 3.2 to examine whether offender's appraisals of their own narration (and within-person change in re-narration) was associated with self-ratings of their self-forgiveness processes. To aid comparison with Study 3.2, models were specified in the same way (see Table 9 for all descriptive statistics).

Change in Offenders' Narration and Self-Forgiveness Processes Over Time. First, whether offenders' narration and self-forgiveness ratings changed over time was examined (see Table 10). Ratings of self-contextualisation, self-distancing, redemption and genuine self-forgiveness increased over time, whereas ratings of self-punitiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness decreased over time. There was no change over time for ratings of past contextualisation or willingness to reconcile.

Table 9

Means (and Standard Deviations) for Main Variables (Study 3.3)

	Time 1	*Time 2*	*Time 3*
Past contextualisation	5.39 (1.08)	5.18 (1.18)	5.34 (1.20)
Self-contextualisation	4.29 (1.49)	4.43 (1.45)	4.52 (1.45)
Self-distancing	4.60 (1.28)	4.80 (1.19)	5.03 (1.15)
Redemption	4.18 (1.58)	4.52 (1.50)	4.80 (1.52)
Genuine self-forgiveness	4.81 (1.23)	4.93 (1.29)	4.96 (1.34)
Self-punitiveness	3.22 (1.49)	3.09 (1.52)	2.91 (1.60)
Pseudo self-forgiveness	3.00 (1.39)	2.91 (1.43)	2.90 (1.44)
Willingness to reconcile	5.60 (1.50)	5.58 (1.53)	5.54 (1.61)

Note. n = 349 for all variables.

Table 10

Simple Linear Mixed Effects Model (with Time as only Predictor) for Change in Offenders'

Narration and Self-Forgiveness Processes Over Time (Study 3.3)

Dependent Variable	*B*	*SE*	*t*
Past contextualisation	-.02	.03	-.88
Self contextualisation	.12	.03	3.42***
Self-distancing	.22	.03	6.82***
Redemption	.31	.04	8.82***
Genuine self-forgiveness	.07	.02	2.95**
Self-punitiveness	-.16	.03	-5.44***
Pseudo self-forgiveness	-.05	.03	-1.94*
Willingness to reconcile	-.02	.02	-1.00

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

How Does Offenders' Narration Relate to Their Self-Forgiveness Processes? Next, the relationships between the four narrative types (decomposed into intercept and within-person change) and self-forgiveness/willingness to reconcile processes were tested (see Table 11).

Relationships Between Offenders' Initial Narration and Self-Forgiveness Processes. The more offenders rated their narratives to incorporate high initial levels of past contextualisation, the more they reported greater genuine self-forgiveness, greater willingness to reconcile and lower pseudo self-forgiveness, aligning with the hypothesised beneficial function of initial engagement in past contextualisation. As expected, the more narratives displayed high initial levels of self-contextualisation, the more offenders reported greater self-punitiveness, but also, unexpectedly, greater pseudo self-forgiveness and lower willingness to reconcile. In contrast to the predictions, high initial levels of self-distancing were not related to greater genuine self-forgiveness or greater pseudo self-forgiveness. Instead, high initial levels of self-distancing were related to lower self-punitiveness. As predicted, the more offenders incorporated high initial levels of redemption, the more they reported greater genuine self-forgiveness, self-punitiveness and willingness to reconcile, and lower pseudo self-forgiveness.

Relationships Between Narrative Change and Self-Forgiveness Processes. Contrary to the hypothesis, an increase in past contextualisation at later times was not detrimental to offenders' self-forgiveness, but was again associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile. Increases in self-contextualisation at later times was related to greater self-punitiveness (as predicted), but also, unexpectedly, greater pseudo self-forgiveness and no relationship to genuine self-forgiveness. As predicted, an increase in offender self-distancing at later times was indeed related to lower self-punitiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness. Contrary to predictions there were no relationships between self-distancing at later times and genuine self-forgiveness or willingness to reconcile. As hypothesised, increases in redemption at later times was related to greater genuine self-forgiveness, greater willingness to reconcile and lower pseudo self-forgiveness (but not self-punitiveness).

Table 11

Linear Mixed Effects Model for Offenders' Narration and Re-Narration and Their Effects on Offenders' Self-Forgiveness Processes

(Study 3.3)

Predictor	GSF			SP			PSF			WTR		
	B	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*
Time	.01	.03	.39	-.15	.03	-4.96***	-.01	.03	-.33	-.05	.03	-2.02*
PCX – time 1	.24	.06	4.21***	.10	.08	1.38	-.21	.07	-2.88**	.28	.07	3.79***
SCX – time 1	-.05	.05	-1.09	.21	.06	3.45***	.30	.06	5.18***	-.15	.06	-2.46**
SD – time 1	-.03	.06	-.42	-.18	.09	-2.07*	-.02	.08	-.19	.00	.08	.01
RD – time 1	.38	.05	7.42***	.28	.07	4.08***	-.28	.06	-4.37***	.37	.07	5.56***
PCX – change [a]	.06	.03	1.99*	.07	.04	1.80	-.00	.03	-.02	.09	.03	2.95**
SCX – change	.03	.03	1.01	.08	.03	2.41*	.06	.03	2.01*	.00	.03	.16
SD – change	.01	.03	.30	-.13	.04	-3.37***	-.10	.04	-2.83**	.03	.03	.80
RD – change	.18	.03	6.65***	.05	.03	1.42	-.09	.03	-2.86**	.07	.03	2.59**

[a] change = within-person change over time; *$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Discussion

The current study confirmed a four-factor structure of the 14-item IONS, distinguishing between four narrative types offenders may use following interpersonal wrongdoing: past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption. Measured across three time points, this study provided partial support for hypotheses concerning relationships between offenders' narration and their differentiated self-forgiveness processes and willingness to reconcile.

The present findings confirmed it may benefit offenders to construct their wrongdoing story within a past context that explains how their behaviour relates to a larger backstory. Contrary to predictions, these benefits of past contextualisation may extend over time; initial engagement and subsequent increases in past contextualisation over time were associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile. This relationship was stronger at Time 1, with initial engagement in past contextualisation also being associated with reduced defensiveness – suggesting past contextualisation may be particularly beneficial when initial awareness or understanding of the wrongdoing is being developed (Cornish, 2016; Cornish & Wade, 2015a, 2015b).

For self-contextualisation (i.e., relating what happened to one's values, worldview or identity), results aligned with predictions. Both initial and increased engagement in self-contextualisation over time was associated with greater feelings of self-punishment. Unexpectedly, self-contextualisation was also associated with greater defensiveness (for initial and increased narration) and lower willingness to reconcile (for initial self-contextualisation). Given self-contextualisation may highlight an incongruence between one's actions and ideal self, it makes sense this type of narration could either (a) increase excessive self-punishment, if narrators dwell on an identity-conflict (Treynor et al., 2003), or (b) lead narrators to double-down and respond defensively (King, 2023), similar to a process of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Interestingly, these relationships were found to extend over time, with subsequent increases in self-contextualisation furthering these effects (excluding willingness to reconcile). However, the effect appeared to be stronger at Time 1. Together, these findings suggest engagement with the past context surrounding one's actions may benefit working through for genuine self-forgiveness and

interpersonal reconciliation (especially early on), but reflecting on how one's wrongdoing relates to the self may increase self-punishment and defensiveness, and decrease conciliatory motivations, particularly when offenders engage in self-focused reflection soon after the wrongdoing.

Both initial and increased engagement in self-distancing (i.e., taking a distanced perspective) was associated with reduced self-punitiveness, partially aligning with predictions. This relationship became stronger with increases in self-distancing over time. This aligns with findings from Kross and Ayduk (2017, for a review), wherein self-distancing helps narrators gain a more balanced, less emotional perspective, thus reducing ruminative, brooding thoughts implicated in self-punitiveness (vanOyen-Witvliet et al., 2011). As predicted, increased self-distancing at later times was also found to reduce defensiveness, suggesting bigger picture abstractions may decrease (rather than increase) moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999).

Finally, when offenders engaged in more redemptive narration (i.e., identifying a new insight or desire to act differently), they reported greater feelings of self-punishment, genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, and less defensiveness. These effects (excluding self-punitiveness) were furthered with increased redemptive narration over time, aligning with the hypotheses. Some research suggests individuals who narrate their wrongdoings with personal growth and resolution experience gains in self-compassion (Mansfield et al., 2015) and render these events less central to identity (Pasupathi et al., 2015), which may help offenders create a healthy distance between their wrongdoing and moral-social identity. At the same time, drawing a learning may help offenders take accountability for their actions and integrate feelings of guilt in a less threatening way (Maruna, 2001, 2004), thus facilitating adaptive "working through" for self-forgiveness.

<center>**General Discussion**</center>

The present chapter advances our conceptual and theoretical understanding of how offenders naturally use narration (and re-narration) following a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. In Chapter 2, thematic analysis facilitated an inductive and critically deductive identification of ways in which offenders may narrate their wrongdoing. In the present chapter, quantitative investigations further corroborated the conceptual distinction of identified narrative types, going hand in hand with the development of the Interpersonal Offender Narrative Meaning Making scale (IONS). In Study 3.2 and 3.3, linear mixed models validated the narrative types as being implicated in both third-party perceptions, and first-person experiences, of offenders' "working through" processes (indicated by the differentiated self-forgiveness processes and offenders' willingness to reconcile; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). The findings from these studies afforded further refinement of the theoretical framework for how offenders may naturally use narration (and re-narration) to story a recent interpersonal wrongdoing.

Past Contextualisation

While prior research has typically viewed offenders' provision of contextual explanations as a tool for justifying their actions, downplaying harm or mitigating responsibility (Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002), the present findings provide support for a different view. Providing contextual explanations (such as describing events leading up to the wrongdoing or the emotional and relational dynamics between offender and victim) may be initially useful in reducing offender defensiveness and increasing responsibility-taking. Contextual explanations describe *why* one behaved as they did, and may help offenders develop a greater understanding of their actions (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008). In turn, this contextualised understanding may pave a less threatening (and more self-compassionate) avenue for offenders to make sense of their actions and responsibility for wrong (Maruna & Copes, 2005). Indeed, Cornish's (2016) self-forgiveness counselling manual recommends that clients write down all external factors, needs or desires that influenced their wrongdoing behaviour *before* discussing notions of responsibility. By developing

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greater awareness of how or why one committed wrong, contextualisation may also meet offenders'
needs for moral agency by helping to re-position them from immoral and powerless to moral and in
control (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010; Maruna & Copes, 2005). It is interesting that this may be a
natural process offenders engage in – and that observers may also appraise initial inclusion of the
past context as indicative of offenders' genuine self-forgiveness.

Contrary to predictions, offenders increased use of past contextualisation at later times may
also be beneficial, as it was positively associated with offenders' genuine self-forgiveness and
willingness to reconcile. Thus, developing understanding of the context surrounding one's actions
may be an important facet of coming to terms with one's responsibility, and transforming self-
condemnation into self-acceptance. However, here it is important to note the present sample reflects
crowd-sourced offenders who were willing to be self-reflective, and had self-identified as offenders
(thus, had already taken some degree of responsibility; Thai et al., 2024). It is unclear whether the
beneficial function of contextualisation would persist for individuals who are yet to admit wrong in
the first place. Furthermore, it is interesting that observers who identify increases in past
contextualisation over time may make appraisals of defensiveness, self-punishment and less self-
acceptance. These findings align with prior research wherein observers have tended to view
offenders' inclusion of context as both a downplaying of responsibility and indicative of self-blame
(Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002).

Self-Contextualisation

Offenders' self-contextualising, whereby they reflect on whether their actions align with
their values, worldview or identity, appears to have contradictory implications. Initial and
increasing self-contextualisation over time were associated with self-punishment *and,* unexpectedly,
defensiveness. Self-contextualising narration may highlight incongruence between one's actions
and idealised self-concept, which can lead to distress and self-anger, but also to avoidance or
defensiveness (Stichter, 2020). Here, some individuals may experience excessive self-punishment
by acknowledging incongruence between their actions and internalised norms or values, perceiving
damage to their self-concept, betrayal of their values and overwhelming or irreparable shame

(Cibich et al., 2016; Lilgendahl et al., 2013; Mansfield et al., 2015). Others may become defensive to protect their moral integrity by doubling-down on their behaviour as congruent with the self, thus rejecting accountability for harm caused (King, 2023). Interestingly, observers' appraisals mostly align with self-ratings from offenders, indicating that third-parties might perceive offenders to initially link the wrongdoing with their sense of self in different ways – to either take responsibility (as indicated by genuine self-forgiveness or self-punitiveness) or deflect it.

It is also possible that self-contextualisation may lead to vacillation between feelings of self-punishment and defensiveness within the same individuals – and this may be what third-parties observe. Indeed, rather than being necessarily detrimental to adaptive working through, it is possible such vacillation reflects that offenders are engaging in the difficult task of acknowledging, and making sense of, feelings of shame and guilt. For example, in therapy it is common for clients to, at first, experience heightened emotions such as anxiety before moving through them toward affective adaptation (e.g., Kooistra et al., 2024). That is, they experience emotions that are uncomfortable and this may make them resentful and defensive but, for the therapeutic work to succeed, these emotions need to be acknowledged. Thus, while offenders are thinking about what the wrongdoing means for their sense of moral integrity, they may need to first wrestle with feelings of perceived threat, which are implicated in expressions of self-punishment and defensiveness (Woodyatt, 2023).

Self-Distancing

Taking a self-distanced viewpoint (i.e., an unbiased or bigger picture perspective) when narrating one's wrongdoing appears to downregulate feelings of self-punishment and defensiveness. Such associations were found for self-distancing occurring early on and increasing over time, and this was also observed by third-parties. This finding aligns with a body of prior research highlighting that self-distanced thinking can help individuals take a more neutral vantage point (Kross & Ayduk, 2017), which can reduce reliving emotional aspects of events such as anger (Ding & Qian, 2020). The present study suggests self-distanced narration achieves this without leading to moral disengagement but rather, on the contrary, at the same time diminishing defensive

downplaying. While self-distancing did not have direct associations with genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, the present findings suggest it may still be useful in promoting adaptive self-reflection. Self-distancing might function to reduce self-punitive distress, and possibly increase objectivity by broadening one's perspective in a way that lowers defensiveness and hostility towards the victim (Ayduk & Kross, 2010b; Huynh et al., 2016). These downregulatory effects appear to be more pronounced when self-distancing increases over time, which aligns with prior research that abstracted thinking may be most beneficial with the passing of time (cf. Wenzel & Coughlin, 2020, for victims' thinking).

Redemption

Drawing a new insight or learning when narrating (and re-narrating) one's wrongdoing appears to facilitate adaptive "working through", with both initial and increasing redemptive narration being associated with genuine self-forgiveness, willingness to reconcile and reduced defensiveness. These findings are consistent with Maruna's (2001) view that redemptive narratives may help offenders restore their moral integrity. Specifically, drawing a learning may help offenders regain moral agency because identifying how one can act differently next time allows offenders to simultaneously (a) take responsibility, and (b) think about what is needed for behaviour change. Indeed, this aligns with the dominant idea that learning from past mistakes is necessary for personal development and general wellbeing (e.g., Carlson et al., 2024; Kandasamy et al., 2021; McLean et al., 2007; Pals, 2006), and prior research highlighting the benefits of growth-oriented narration across a range of well-being and moral repair contexts (Dunlop, 2021; Mansfield et al., 2010; Mansfield et al., 2015; Pasupathi et al., 2015; Pasupathi et al., 2017; Rotella et al., 2015). Interestingly, observers may also appraise offenders who identify learnings as acknowledging their guilt, engaging in responsibility taking and committing to act differently in the future – particularly in the North American context (McAdams, 2006).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present research found that the effect of narration on self-forgiveness processes was relatively stable, with few differences between the effects of offenders' narration and re-narrations.

However, it is difficult to estimate what time intervals would best capture change in offenders' re-narrations to test its implications for offenders' self-forgiveness processes. One limitation of the present research is that it did not measure whether individuals may have engaged in re-narrations before, or during, the study (either individually or with others). Thus, despite aiming to assess initial narration and re-narrations (i.e., within 48-hours of wrongdoing), the present research may not have captured offenders' very first narrations, nor the change in re-narration that may arise from dyadic interactions between narrators and listeners (Pasupathi et al., 2009). Future research may benefit from using prospective methods to capture individuals even sooner after the event, alongside experience sampling methods to assess whether the quantity (and type) of re-narrations may change offenders' self-forgiveness trajectory.

Additionally, I sought to examine narrative processes within the early stages of processing (i.e., within 24–48-hours of the event) since most research on offenders' narration has used retrospective studies that ask participants for significant or stand-out events (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990; Mansfield et al., 2015). However, this results in less severe events being reported, meaning the reported findings may not generalize to more severe or enduring interpersonal wrongdoings. The present research also reflects narration of a broad range of wrongdoing and relationship types. While this diversity of wrongdoing categories allows us to apply narrative meaning making principles to wrongdoings more generally, the function of narration (and re-narration) may differ depending on the wrongdoing category, type or closeness of the relationship, and history of cumulative conflict between the pair (Thai et al., 2024). Indeed, some research indicates that redemptive narration may have detrimental effects on interpersonal reconciliation for specific wrongdoing types such as infidelity (Wilkinson & Dunlop, 2021).

Another key limitation is that the sample were primarily white participants from the United States. Different cultures have different social norms (i.e., cultural master narratives; Hammack, 2008; McLean et al., 2018) for the way specific events should be narrated (e.g., Najibzadeh et al., 2019; Synnes & Malterud, 2019). In the United States, it is common for individuals to narrate adversity with redemptive characteristics (McAdams, 2006). However, other cultures and countries

may have different norms for how to narrate adversity (e.g., Blackie et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). Given that narration appears to be implicated in offenders' self-forgiveness processes, future research should expand upon these findings to examine whether, and how, offenders' narration following interpersonal wrongdoing may vary in different cultures, depending on the master narratives (or norms) of other cultures in different geographical locations.

While further research needs to be done, the present work has created a scale (the IONS) that will facilitate the study of offenders' narrative "working through" processes. To date, most research that examines how offenders (or victims) of interpersonal wrongdoing use narration has required highly effortful approaches, wherein multiple researchers read and code participant stories (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990; Dunlop et al., 2021; Lilgendahl et al., 2013). Furthermore, some scholars have found poor reliability between observer and first-person ratings of the same narrative content (Panattoni & McLean, 2018). The IONS involves offenders rating their own narratives (or permits third-party raters to do so), thus offering a more economical, standardized, and validated approach. While the present research compared first-person and third-party ratings of offenders' narratives (and found some similarities in ratings), these comparisons were not of the same offender stories. It would be useful for future research to examine whether first-party and third-party ratings align, or differ, when using the IONS to rate the same narrative content.

Finally, because the present research examined offenders' natural narration, the findings are correlational and do not permit causal inferences. It would be interesting to examine whether the effects of offenders' natural self-narration processes are the same when not purely spontaneous but based on intervention, to explore whether participants can be successfully guided to narrate in ways that align with the different beneficial narrative types.

Conclusion

In sum, the present chapter provides a conceptual and theoretical framework for how self-selected offenders may naturally use narration (and re-narration) to story a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. Offenders may engage in four distinct narrative types: past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption. These narrative types have differential

implications for offenders' "working through" wrongdoing, including how effective narration may be in promoting genuine self-forgiveness and interpersonal reconciliation. In the following chapter, an experimental paradigm will be employed to test this theoretical framework and examine the causal effect of narration on offenders' processes of self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile.

CHAPTER 4.

Self-Narration Under Narrative Instruction

Chapter 2 highlighted the differential ways offenders used narration to make sense of a recent interpersonal wrongdoing, and Chapter 3 validated the identified narrative types as present in offenders' self-forgiveness processes. Findings from these chapters informed the theoretical framework for how offenders may naturally use self-narration in the early stages of processing an interpersonal wrongdoing. In the present chapter, I aim to extend the correlational findings from Chapter 3 to an experimental paradigm to establish whether narration has a causal effect on self-forgiveness. Specifically, I will examine (a) whether offenders can be guided to use techniques of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing or redemption when narrating a recent interpersonal wrongdoing, and (b) whether prompting offenders to narrate with these techniques will lead to the self-forgiveness processes that were associated with offenders' naturalistic narration in Chapter 3.

Thus far, I have examined offenders' unguided and naturalistic narrative processes, arguing that self-narration may reflect part of what it means for offenders to "work through" wrongdoing. I have observed offenders' non-directed narration, with the rationale that individuals may innately narrate to themselves when thinking about their wrongdoing or writing in a journal. However, offenders may also narrate their wrongdoing in response to specific questions, and this can occur independently or in social contexts. When alone, offenders may seek targeted journalling prompts to help them independently process their wrongdoing and work through feelings of shame and guilt. Alternatively, offenders may turn to others for help with working through, seeking input or guidance from close relational partners, counsellors, therapists or even AI chatbots. In the following sections, I will outline how specific questions and prompts can be used to guide narration and potentially influence offenders' self-forgiveness processes, and review existing self-forgiveness interventions that employ narrative prompts or questions. Thereafter, I will revisit the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 3 and outline the empirical approach of the present study.

Using Narrative Prompts to Guide Narration

Both journalling prompts and questions asked by others have the potential to influence what individuals are thinking about, which can subsequently influence how they narrate. Questions and prompts can guide individuals to adopt new perspectives (James et al., 2010; Muntigl et al., 2023), uncover elements of their situation they may not have otherwise considered (Karaturhan et al., 2024; Neipp et al., 2016) and alter the way meaning is ascribed to events (Hermans, 2004). Indeed, in many therapeutic contexts, the role of the therapist is to ask effective questions that can guide clients' in "working through" emotions and making sense of events in their lives (Angus & McLeod, 2004). In addition to narration in talk-therapy, many therapeutic modalities also incorporate narrative tools, such as writing, to help clients work through and process a range of emotional issues such feelings of shame (Voskanova, 2015) and excessive self-criticism (Kelly & Waring, 2018; Sweet al., 2023), or as a precursor to discussing challenging emotions (Pennebaker, 2010). In each of these examples, specific questions are used to facilitate clients' exploration of their thoughts, feelings, challenges, strengths and experiences via their narration (Beck, 1976; Greenberg, 2015; Young et al., 2021). As previously stated throughout this thesis, following wrongdoing, offenders need to engage in the cognitive effort of "working through" feelings of shame and guilt (Fischer & Exline, 2006; Holmgren, 1998; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a), of which narration may be part. Thus, it stands to reasons that narrating wrongdoing in response to specific questions, that mirror the beneficial narrative types highlighted in Chapter 3, may help offenders to make sense of their wrongdoing and "work through" feelings of guilt toward self-forgiveness.

Narrative Prompts that Lead to Genuine Self-Forgiveness

Indeed, there are a handful of self-forgiveness interventions that use therapeutic questions or narrative prompts (in addition to other therapeutic techniques) to help offenders work through their wrongdoing and achieve self-forgiveness. Some of these interventions are more intensive, requiring multiple therapeutic sessions with a counsellor (Cornish, 2016) or commitment to completing an intensive self-directed workbook (Griffin et al., 2015). In the workbook intervention, individuals are guided to "work through" their wrongdoing using a range of narrative prompts. In the counselling intervention, questions are used to prompt offenders' engagement in perspective-taking, and guide

exploration of feelings such as guilt, remorse and self-criticism (Cornish et al., 2020). Other interventions, such as value affirmation tasks (Woodyatt et al., 2017a), use narrative prompts but are less intensive. These tasks ask individuals to identify the values their wrongdoing transgressed and write about why this value is important to them, alongside a time they acted in alignment with this value. Both self-forgiveness interventions have been shown to increase offenders' self-forgiveness following a wrongdoing (Cornish & Wade, 2015a, 2015b; Griffin et al., 2015), and value affirmation tasks have been found to increase genuine self-forgiveness and reduce offenders' defensiveness (Wenzel et al., 2012; Wenzel et al., 2020; Woodyatt et al., 2017b). Thus, tailored narrative prompts and guided questioning seem to be effective in helping offenders to "work through" wrongdoing and achieve self-forgiveness. Given the insights about offenders' naturalistic narrative processes from Chapters 2 and 3 (i.e., their different forms and hypothesised functions for facilitating self-forgiveness), can offenders also be prompted to engage in these narrative types, and can they benefit offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes?

Examining the Impact of Guided Narration on Offenders' Self-Forgiveness Processes

If offenders' naturalistic narration is implicated in their "working through" processes, as Chapter 3 suggests, then instructing offenders to narrate in certain ways via prompts or questions should affect their self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile with the victim. The present chapter seeks to explore this proposition, and determine whether offenders' intrinsic narrative types (and associated self-forgiveness processes) can be elicited via narrative prompts to replicate the correlational findings reported in Chapter 3 and establish the causality of these effects.

Specifically, it is theorized that instructing offenders to provide contextual explanations (past contextualisation) may help them to develop an understanding of their behaviour (Cornish, 2016; Wilson & Gilbert, 2008) by highlighting external factors that have contributed to their actions. This narrative process may provide a self-compassionate buffer that facilitates responsibility-taking and restores self-acceptance and willingness to reconcile (White & Epston, 1990). Similarly, encouraging offenders to acknowledge the negative aspects of their behaviour, while identifying new insights about how they can act differently in the future (redemption), may

increase offenders' responsibility taking, self-acceptance and willingness to reconcile (Maruna, 2001). Taking a self-distanced lens, by reflecting on the bigger picture or unbiased perspective of what happened (self-distancing), might prompt offenders to take a more balanced perspective (Kross & Ayduk, 2017), and thus down-regulate feelings of excessive self-punishment. Finally, asking offenders to reflect on how their wrongdoing reflects their sense of self or worldview (self-contextualisation) may highlight an incongruence between their actions and values, leading to greater self-condemnation (Lilgendahl et al., 2013) or defensiveness (Festinger, 1957). However, self-contextualisation also involves reflecting on how the wrongdoing relates to offenders' values – which may reflect engagement in value affirmation (Griffin et al., 2018; Woodyatt et al., 2017a). Therefore, instructing offenders to self-contextualise might alternatively reduce defensiveness and increase responsibility-taking and self-acceptance via value affirmation (Griffin et al., 2018; Wenzel et al., 2012; Wenzel et al., 2020; Woodyatt et al., 2017b).

Empirical Approach of the Present Study

To test the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 3 (and summarized above), the present study will employ an experimental design. Offenders' narration will be manipulated to align with the narrative characteristics of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption, and the effects of instructed narration on offenders' self-forgiveness processes and willingness to reconcile (compared to a control) will be examined. When seeking to collect narrative data, it is essential to design prompts that will generate the type of narrative data one aims to collect (Adler et al., 2017). Therefore, the question prompts for each condition will be designed based on the operationalization of each narrative type (i.e., the items from each subscale of the IONS). Since these items have been used to capture narrative types of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption in prior studies, it seems logical to assume that using these items as instructions or prompts may also elicit the respective narrative type, and thus facilitate replication of offenders' naturalistic narrative types (and their relationship to offenders' self-forgiveness processes).

Study 4

The purpose of Study 4 was to extend the previous correlational studies to an experimental paradigm to (a) explore whether participants could be instructed to adopt specific narrative types, (b) determine whether the function of offenders' self-narration in "working through" for self-forgiveness was consistent between unguided narration in Study 3.3 and instructed narration and (c) establish the causal effect of offenders' narration on their self-forgiveness processes. The study was pre-registered with the Open Science Framework (OSF; https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/XJC6G).

Hypotheses

Deviation from the Pre-Registration

The pre-registered hypotheses were not based on Study 3.3 (as it had not yet been conducted). Instead, these hypotheses were based on data from a prior underpowered pilot study (not reported here). Given the aim of the present study was to test whether offenders' self-narration led to the associated self-forgiveness processes identified in Chapter 3, it felt logical to update the present hypotheses to align with these findings. For this reason, hypothesis 2 and 3 (below) partially deviate from the pre-registered hypotheses.

Thus, it was hypothesized that:

1. Participants in the past contextualisation condition will report greater genuine self-forgiveness, greater willingness to reconcile and lower pseudo self-forgiveness when compared to those in the control condition.

2. Participants in the self-contextualisation condition will report greater genuine self-forgiveness, greater self-punitiveness and greater pseudo self-forgiveness than those in the control condition.

3. Participants in the self-distancing condition will report lower self-punitiveness when compared to those in the control condition.

4. Participants in the redemption condition will report greater genuine self-forgiveness, greater self-punitiveness, greater willingness to reconcile and lower pseudo self-forgiveness compared to those in the control condition.

Method

Design

A between-subjects single time-point experimental design was used. Participants were randomly allocated to one of five narrative conditions, whereby they were instructed to narrate in a certain way; either with characteristics of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing, redemption or a control (see Appendix H – I for narrative instructions). The control condition asked participants questions about concrete details alone (e.g., where were you, who was there). Participants in all conditions were asked "what happened" before being provided with condition-specific questions to reduce the possibility that they would discuss aspects of the wrongdoing outside specific narrative instructions.

Participants

Sample size requirements were estimated using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007). To detect medium effects using standard .05 alpha probability a sample size of 200 (40 per cell) yielded power of .80. To account for potential data loss due to exclusion of participants, I slightly oversampled and recruited 220 participants via MTurk (Litman et al., 2017).

Seven-hundred and ninety-nine individuals self-selected to participate, whereby 579 were deemed ineligible for (a) failing to select they experienced an interpersonal wrongdoing ($n = 304$), (b) selecting they were the victim ($n = 117$) or an observer ($n = 16$), (c) reporting the wrongdoing occurred more than 48-hours ago ($n = 63$), (d) failing the English proficiency test ($n = 74$) or (e) failing both attention checks ($n = 5$). Thereafter, 20 participants were excluded for providing nonsensical narratives or being detected as potential bots by Qualtrics. This left a final sample of 200 self-selected offenders from the United States aged 19 – 75 ($M_{age} = 39.85$, $SD_{age} = 12.45$; 101 females, 2 non-binary; 76% White/Caucasian, 15% Black/African American, 5% Multiracial, 4% Asian). Participation was voluntary, with participants receiving an honorarium of $1.40 or $1.60USD[8] for their time. Ethical approval was granted from the University's ethics committee (7523).

Procedure

[8] Participants who answered all scale items received a bonus of $0.20USD as an incentive for complete datasets

Once deemed eligible, participants were randomly assigned to condition. Thereafter, participants (a) wrote about their wrongdoing by following the specific narrative prompts and (b) completed measures of self-forgiveness[9]. Participants' narrative (i.e., their responses to the condition-specific questions, excluding answers to 'what happened') was then displayed at the top and bottom of the screen for easy reference while they rated their narrative characteristics using the IONS. As per the pre-registration, participants' scores on the IONS were used as a manipulation check of narrative condition on narrative rating.

Measures

All items were measured using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree – 7 = strongly agree). Responses of multi-item scales were averaged to obtain scale scores.

Interpersonal Offender Narrative Meaning Making Scale (IONS). Offenders' self-rated their narrative outcome qualities using the 14-item IONS, which includes four subscales of offenders' narration: past contextualisation (4 items – e.g., *'I have provided a backstory to what happened', 'I have described the relational dynamics between myself and the other person'*; $a =$ .84); self-contextualisation (3 items – e.g., *'I have linked what happened to my sense of self (e.g., who I am as a person)', 'I have described how the event fits with my worldview'*; $a =$ .87); self-distancing (3 items – e.g., *'I have taken an unbiased perspective', 'I have reflected on the bigger picture'*; $a =$ .70); and redemption (4 items – e.g., *'My story of what happened feels like a story of personal growth', 'I have identified a lesson or insight from what happened'*; $a =$ .90).

Differentiated Self-Forgiveness Process Scale (DSFPS; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Offenders' engagement in the differentiated self-forgiveness processes was assessed using a 19-item scale[10] with 3 subscales (adapted from Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a): genuine self-forgiveness (7 items– e.g., *'I have tried to work through why I did what I did', 'I have spent time working*

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[9] This measure was presented within a series of exploratory measures that were randomised, including the state self-compassion short-form (Neff et al., 2021), emotion state (guilt, shame, hope, anger), perceived threat to moral-social image (King, 2023), perspective-taking, self-understanding, feelings of closure (adapted from Quinney, Wenzel & Woodyatt, 2022), future-orientation, growth-oriented thinking and perceived deservingness of forgiveness; see Chapter 5 for secondary analyses on guilt, shame, self-compassion, perspective-taking and perceived threat to moral-social image.

[10] The original scale includes 20 items – however, one self-punitiveness item was excluded from the study (*I don't understand why I behaved as I did*) to align with the scale used in Chapter 3

through my guilt', 'I am trying to accept myself even with my failures'; *a* = .89); self-punitiveness (6 items – e.g., *'I deserve to suffer for what I have done', 'I want to punish myself for what I have done', 'I keep going over what I have done in my head'*; *a* = .90); and pseudo self-forgiveness (6 items – e.g., *'I feel the other person got what they deserved', 'I believe I wasn't the only one to blame for what happened', 'I am not really sure whether what I did was wrong'*; *a* = .86).

Willingness to Reconcile (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Offenders' willingness to reconcile was measured using 4 items adapted from Woodyatt & Wenzel (2013a) – e.g., *'I want to make amends for what happened', 'I want to apologise for what I did', 'I want to reconcile with the other person'* (*a* = .91).

Results

Wrongdoing Characteristics

The reported wrongdoings were, on average, rated as events of moderate severity (*M* = 4.59, *SD* = 1.35), including verbal fights or arguments (30%), betrayals of trust (21%), insults (18%), acts of neglect (9.5%), betrayals of confidence (6.5%), rejections (5.5%), other (e.g., emotional manipulation, bullying, public shaming; 4.5%), infidelity (3%) and physical harm (2%) – occurring between significant others (31.5%), family members (25%), close friends (22.5%), work colleagues (10.5%), acquaintances (7%) and other (e.g., service providers, neighbours; 3.5%). The sample reflected 82% of people who deemed themselves the sole offender of the wrongdoing and 18% of whom considered themselves both victim and offender.

Manipulation Check

To determine whether the manipulation of narration was successful, a one-way ANOVA was performed in SPSS (v30). Narrative condition was entered as the predictor and all four narrative ratings (past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption) were entered as dependent variables. The manipulation of narration was assessed by comparing narrative ratings between (a) the narrative condition of interest and the control, (b) the narrative condition of interest and other narrative conditions and (c) other narrative conditions and the

control. For significant results, Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons was run. Table 12 displays all descriptive statistics

Table 12

Means (and Standard Deviations) of Key Variables by Narrative Condition for the Complete Sample (Study 4)

Outcome Variable	Narrative Condition				
	Control	*Past context.*	*Self-context.*	*Self-dist.*	*Redemption*
Severity	4.15 (1.51)[a]	4.63 (1.21)[a]	4.78 (1.39)[a]	4.54 (1.41)[a]	4.85 (1.17)[a]
Genuine SF	4.65 (1.07)[b]	4.85 (1.18)[ab]	5.44 (1.12)[a]	5.19 (1.31)[ab]	5.48 (1.06)[a]
Self-punitiveness	3.06 (1.67)[a]	3.62 (1.40)[a]	3.70 (1.44)[a]	3.52 (1.54)[a]	3.68 (1.67)[a]
Pseudo SF	3.67 (1.35)[b]	3.80 (1.37)[b]	2.52 (1.32)[a]	3.28 (1.63)[ab]	3.31 (1.47)[ab]
Desire to reconcile	4.95 (1.37)[b]	5.26 (1.41)[ab]	5.71 (1.42)[ab]	5.74 (1.26)[ab]	5.80 (1.39)[a]
Past context.	4.92 (1.22)[b]	5.85 (.78)[a]	5.03 (1.22)[b]	5.16 (1.09)[b]	5.21 (1.21)[ab]
Self-context.	3.93 (1.63)[c]	4.78 (1.21)[b]	5.87 (.92)[a]	4.57 (1.54)[bc]	4.79 (1.22)[b]
Self-distancing	4.25 (1.25)[b]	4.66 (1.22)[ab]	5.10 (1.08)[a]	5.25 (.94)[a]	5.19 (1.03)[a]
Redemption	3.89 (1.60)[c]	4.55 (1.35)[c]	5.16 (1.14)[ab]	4.80 (1.54)[b]	5.61 (.80)[a]

Note. SF = self-forgiveness. All variables were measured on scales from 1 to 7; for all outcome variables: $n = 41$ for the control condition; $n = 40$ for past-contextualisation, self-contextualisation and redemption conditions; $n = 39$ for self-distancing condition. The means with different superscript letters in a row indicate conditions that are significantly different from one another.

For narrative ratings of past contextualisation, there was a significant difference between narrative conditions, $F(4, 195) = 4.20$, $p<.01$. Participants in the past contextualisation condition rated their narrative as significantly higher in past contextualisation compared to the control condition ($p<.01$, $d=.91$); and self-contextualisation ($p=.01$, $d=.80$) and self-distancing conditions ($p=.05$, $d=.73$), but only marginally higher than in the redemption condition ($p=.09$, $d=.63$). Self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption conditions did not differ significantly from the control. This suggests that past contextualisation ratings were higher in the past contextualisation

condition than all other conditions, albeit not significantly different when compared to the redemption condition.

For narrative ratings of self-contextualisation, there was a significant difference between narrative conditions, $F(4, 195) = 11.02$, $p<.001$. Participants in the self-contextualisation condition rated their narrative as significantly higher in self-contextualisation compared to the control condition ($p<.001$, $d=1.47$); and past-contextualisation ($p<.01$, $d=1.01$), self-distancing ($p<.001$, $d=1.02$) and redemption conditions ($p<.01$, $d=1.00$). In addition, participants in the past-contextualisation and redemption conditions rated greater self-contextualisation in their narratives than those in the control ($p=.04$, $d=.59$ and $p=.03$, $d=.60$, respectively). There were no differences between the self-distancing and control conditions. This suggests that self-contextualisation ratings were higher in the self-contextualisation condition than in all other conditions. However, the past contextualisation and redemption conditions included more self-contextualisation than the control, despite no explicit instruction to include self-contextualisation techniques.

For narrative ratings of self-distancing, there was a significant difference between narrative conditions, $F(4, 195) = 5.92$, $p<.001$. Participants in the self-distancing condition rated their narrative as significantly higher in self-distancing compared to the control condition ($p<.001$, $d=.90$); but there were no differences between the self-distancing condition and past contextualisation ($p=.13$, $d=.54$), self-contextualisation ($p=.98$, $d=.15$) or redemption conditions ($p=.10$, $d=.06$). Furthermore, ratings of self-distancing were significantly greater in the self-contextualisation and redemption conditions compared to the control ($p<.01$, $d=.73$, and $p<.01$, $d=.82$, respectively). There were no differences between the past contextualisation and control conditions. Thus, it seems that there was more self-distanced narration in the self-contextualisation and redemption conditions compared to the control – even though participants were not explicitly instructed to narrate with self-distancing in these conditions.

For narrative ratings of redemption, there was a significant difference between narrative conditions, $F(4, 195) = 9.78$, $p<.001$. Participants in the redemption condition rated their narrative with significantly higher levels of redemption when compared to the control ($p<.001$, $d=1.36$), past

contextualisation ($p<.01$, $d=1.36$) and self-distancing ($p=.05$, $d=.66$) conditions, but not the self-contextualisation condition ($p=.55$, $d=.46$). There were also higher ratings of redemption in the self-contextualisation ($p<.001$, $d=.91$) and self-distancing ($p=.02$, $d=.58$), but not past contextualisation, conditions compared to the control. This suggests that redemption ratings were higher in the redemption condition compared to the control, past contextualisation and self-distancing conditions – but there was no difference in redemption ratings between redemption and self-contextualisation conditions, and the self-contextualisation and self-distancing condition had higher ratings of redemption than the control.

In conclusion, the manipulation of narration appears to be adequate but not entirely 'clean' because the past contextualisation condition had higher levels of self-contextualisation than the control; the self-contextualisation condition had higher levels of self-distancing and redemption than the control; the self-distancing condition had higher levels of redemption than the control; and the redemption condition had higher levels of self-contextualisation and self-distancing than the control. Despite this overlap, the narrative condition of interest consistently scored higher on the corresponding narrative rating than the control, thus the manipulation of narration was deemed acceptable (as per the pre-registration). However, caution in interpreting the results of all narrative conditions will ensue whereby any muddiness in narrative ratings will be explicitly acknowledged and outlined in the discussion. Secondary analyses will also be run to further examine the effects of experimental manipulation while controlling statistically for the unwanted 'contaminations'.

Experimental Test: The Effect of Narrative Instruction on Self-Forgiveness

To determine whether there were differences in self-forgiveness ratings between narrative conditions, a one-way ANOVA was performed in SPSS. For significant results, Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons was run (see Table 12 for all descriptive statistics).

Results indicated that for genuine self-forgiveness there was a significant difference between narrative conditions, $F(4, 195) = 4.04$, $p=.004$. Multiple comparisons indicated that participants in the self-contextualisation and redemption conditions rated significantly higher levels of genuine self-forgiveness when compared to participants in the control condition ($p=.02$, $d=.72$

and $p=.01$, $d=.78$, respectively). There were no other significant differences in genuine self-forgiveness between narrative conditions.

For willingness to reconcile, there was a significant difference between conditions, $F(4, 195) = 2.94$, $p=.02$. Multiple comparisons showed participants in the redemption condition rated significantly greater willingness to reconcile when compared to those in the control condition ($p=.05$, $d=.62$). There were no other differences in willingness to reconcile between conditions.

For ratings of pseudo self-forgiveness, there was a significant difference between narrative conditions, $F(4, 195) = 4.91$, $p<.001$. Multiple comparisons indicated that participants in the self-contextualisation condition rated significantly lower pseudo self-forgiveness when compared to the control ($p<.01$, $d=.86$) or past-contextualisation condition ($p<.001$, $d=.95$). There were no other differences in pseudo self-forgiveness between conditions.

For self-punitiveness, there were no significant differences between narrative conditions, $F(4, 195) = 1.23$, $p=.30$.

Secondary Analyses: The Effect of Narrative Instruction on Self-Forgiveness While Controlling

for Measured Narrative Ratings

Given the manipulation of narration was not entirely 'clean', it is unclear whether the

ANOVA results reflect the experimental effect of instructing individuals to narrate in certain ways,

or the outcome of combined narrative types. For this reason, a series of simultaneous multiple

regressions were run in SPSS (as per the pre-registration) to further explore the isolated impact of

narrative instruction on offenders' self-narration. First, four regressions were run to conduct a

'purified' manipulation check and determine whether the experimental condition of interest had the

intended effects of increasing the respective narrative type whilst controlling for all other narrative

types. Each model included all experimental conditions (dummy coded), three measured narrative

variables as predictors and the fourth measured narrative variable as the outcome. Thereafter,

another series of regressions were run to examine the experimental effect of the condition of interest

(and relevant narrative type) on offenders' self-forgiveness processes while controlling for the

additional three narrative types. First, the 'purified' manipulation check will be reported, followed

by the experimental effect of narrative condition on self-forgiveness processes.

'Purified' Manipulation Check. When controlling for the 'noise' of additional narrative

types, the regression indicated that the past contextualisation condition (but *none* of the other

experimental conditions) led to greater use of past contextualisation compared to the control

condition (the self-contextualisation condition reduced it); the self-contextualisation condition (but

none of the other experimental conditions) led to greater use of self-contextualisation; the self-

distancing condition (but *none* of the other experimental conditions) led to greater self-distancing;

and the redemption condition (but *none* of the other experimental conditions) led to greater

redemptive narration (see Table 13). This indicates that, when removing the 'noise' of additional

narrative types, each narrative prompt uniquely led to greater use of the respective narrative type for

all conditions.

Table 13

Standardised Beta Coefficients and p Values for the 'Purified' Manipulation Check of Narrative Condition on Measured Narrative Ratings While Controlling for Additional Measured Narrative Rating Types

Variable	PCX ratings β	PCX ratings p	SCX ratings β	SCX ratings p	SD ratings β	SD ratings p	RD ratings β	RD ratings p
PCX condition	.19	.012**	.062	.367	-.04	.510	.07	.298
SCX condition	-.25	.003**	.393	<.001***	.00	.976	.12	.111
SD condition	-.06	.444	.030	.657	.17	.012**	.05	.477
RD condition	-.07	.404	.048	.505	.02	.781	.28	<.001***
PCX ratings	–	–	.43	<.001***	.14	.025*	.01	.845
SCX ratings	.43	<.001***	–	–	.20	.005**	.17	.015**
SD ratings	.19	.025*	.21	.005**	–	–	.51	<.001***
RD ratings	.02	.845	.18	.015**	.51	<.001***	–	–

Note. PCX = past contextualisation, SCX = self-contextualisation, SD = self-distancing, RD = redemption. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

'Purified' Effects of the Experimentally Instructed Narrative Type (While Controlling for Ratings of the Other Three Narrative Types. Instructing individuals to narrate the past context was not associated with self-reports of genuine self-forgiveness, self-punitiveness, pseudo self-forgiveness nor willingness to reconcile (see Table 14). Instructing individuals to reflect on how the wrongdoing relates to their sense of self or values (self-contextualisation) was associated with reduced pseudo self-forgiveness but no other self-forgiveness processes nor willingness to reconcile (see Table 15). Instructing individuals to take an abstracted, bigger-picture viewpoint (self-distancing) was not associated with any self-forgiveness processes nor willingness to reconcile (see Table 16). Instructing individuals to reflect on the negative aspects of what happened alongside their learnings (redemption) was associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, but not self-punitiveness or pseudo self-forgiveness (see Table 17).

Correlations Between Measured Narrative Ratings and Self-Forgiveness. There were some consistent results of participants' narrative ratings being associated with self-forgiveness processes and willingness to reconcile irrespective of the narrative condition (and relevant rating) being tested. Participants' ratings of past contextualisation were consistently positively associated with genuine self-forgiveness, self-punitiveness and willingness to reconcile; participants' ratings of self-contextualisation were consistently positively associated with self-punitiveness and defensiveness; participants' ratings of redemption were consistently positively associated with genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile (see Tables 14 – 17).

Table 14

Standardised Beta Coefficients and p Values for the 'Purified' Experimental Effect of the Past Contextualisation Condition on Self-Forgiveness

Processes While Controlling for Measured Narrative Ratings of Self-Contextualisation, Self-Distancing and Redemption

	Genuine Self-Forgiveness		Self-Punitiveness		Pseudo Self-Forgiveness		Willingness to Reconcile	
	β	*p*	β	*p*	β	*p*	β	*p*
PCX condition	**-.05**	**.528**	**.07**	**.451**	**.02**	**.861**	**.02**	**.799**
SCX condition	.03	.741	-.01	.916	-.37	<.001***	.09	.336
SD condition	.04	.616	.07	.415	-.10	.265	.13	.122
RD condition	.03	.685	.07	.475	-.07	.427	.06	.516
SCX ratings	.16	.042*	.32	<.001***	.21	.016*	-.02	.815
SD ratings	.04	.674	-.12	.222	-.03	.758	-.03	.765
RD ratings	.41	<.001***	.12	.198	-.14	.155	.41	<.001***

Note. The focal effects are bolded, representing the 'purified' effects of the experimentally instructed narrative condition while controlling for the ratings of the other three narrative types. PCX = past contextualisation, SCX = self-contextualisation, SD = self-distancing, RD = redemption. **p<.05,*
**p<.01, ***p<.001.

Table 15

Standardised Beta Coefficients and p Values for the 'Purified' Experimental Effect of the Self-Contextualisation Condition on Self-Forgiveness

Processes While Controlling for Measured Narrative Ratings of Past Contextualisation, Self-Distancing and Redemption

	Genuine Self-Forgiveness		Self-Punitiveness		Pseudo Self-Forgiveness		Willingness to Reconcile	
	β	*p*	β	*p*	β	*p*	β	*p*
PCX condition	-.10	.214	.05	.603	.06	.543	-.02	.786
SCX condition	**.11**	**.157**	**.13**	**.155**	**-.29**	**.001*****	**.10**	**.262**
SD condition	.06	.464	.09	.313	-.10	.277	.14	.096
RD condition	.05	.509	.09	.337	-.07	.462	.07	.453
PCX ratings	.27	<.001***	.26	<.001***	-.03	.687	.16	.028*
SD ratings	-.00	.983	-.10	.295	.05	.621	-.09	.342
RD ratings	.42	<.001***	.16	.085	-.09	.361	.39	<.001***

Note. The focal effects are bolded, representing the 'purified' effects of the experimentally instructed narrative condition while controlling for the ratings of the other three narrative types. PCX = past contextualisation, SCX = self-contextualisation, SD = self-distancing, RD = redemption. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Table 16

Standardised Beta Coefficients and p Values for the 'Purified' Experimental Effect of the Self-Distancing Condition on Self-Forgiveness Processes

While Controlling for Measured Narrative Ratings of Past Contextualisation, Self-Contextualisation and Redemption

	Genuine Self-Forgiveness		Self-Punitiveness		Pseudo Self-Forgiveness		Willingness to Reconcile	
	β	*p*	β	*p*	β	*p*	β	*p*
PCX condition	-.10	.202	.04	.667	.04	.660	-.01	.871
SCX condition	.09	.277	.03	.725	-.40	<.001***	.14	.139
SD condition	**.05**	**.485**	**.06**	**.505**	**-.11**	**.218**	**.13**	**.108**
RD condition	.05	.529	.08	.415	-.08	.376	.07	.427
PCX ratings	.25	<.001***	.16	.055*	-.12	.139	.19	.017*
SCX ratings	.05	.562	.21	.021*	.26	.005**	-.12	.183
RD ratings	.40	<.001***	.05	.580	-.14	.094	.38	<.001***

Note. The focal effects are bolded, representing the 'purified' effects of the experimentally instructed narrative condition while controlling for the ratings of the other three narrative types. PCX = past contextualisation, SCX = self-contextualisation, SD = self-distancing, RD = redemption. *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.

Table 17

Standardised Beta Coefficients and p Values for the 'Purified' Experimental Effect of the Redemption Condition on Self-Forgiveness Processes While Controlling for Measured Narrative Ratings of Past Contextualisation, Self-Contextualisation and Self-Distancing

	Genuine Self-Forgiveness		Self-Punitiveness		Pseudo Self-Forgiveness		Willingness to Reconcile	
	β	p	β	p	β	p	β	p
PCX condition	-.07	.390	.04	.650	.03	.742	.01	.891
SCX condition	.14	.117	.05	.613	-.41	<.001***	.18	.056†
SD condition	.07	.362	.09	.315	-.11	.206	.16	.065†
RD condition	**.16**	**.046***	**.11**	**.208**	**-.12**	**.183**	**.18**	**.039***
PCX ratings	.26	<.001***	.18	.030*	-.12	.144	.20	.016*
SCX ratings	.12	.163	.26	.005**	.24	.010**	-.03	.717
SD ratings	.20	.011**	-.09	.287	-.08	.363	.14	.081

Note. The focal effects are bolded, representing the 'purified' effects of the experimentally instructed narrative condition while controlling for the ratings of the other three narrative types. PCX = past contextualisation, SCX = self-contextualisation, SD = self-distancing, RD = redemption. †*p*<.07, **p*<.05, ***p*<.01, ****p*<.001.

Discussion

The present study examined (a) whether offenders could be instructed to narrate with techniques of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing or redemption, and (b) whether instructing offenders to narrate in certain ways would affect their self-forgiveness processes in predictable ways, replicating the relationships with naturalistic narration identified in Chapter 3. Results indicated that offenders could be instructed to narrate with characteristics of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption – but individuals tended to also incorporate additional narrative types in their writing, even when not instructed to do so. In terms of their effects on self-forgiveness, instructed redemptive narration led to the same effects as observed with offenders' naturalistic narration, which provides evidence for the causal effect of redemptive narration on offenders' self-forgiveness process. In contrast, instructed self-contextualisation had different effects on self-forgiveness when compared to offenders' naturalistic use, and prompting offenders to incorporate past contextualisation or self-distanced narration had no effect on their self-forgiveness processes nor their willingness to reconcile.

Redemptive Narration

Acknowledging the negative aspects of one's wrongdoing while also identifying new growth-oriented learnings (redemption) seems to be a key part of adaptive working through for genuine self-forgiveness. As predicted, redemptive narration led to greater genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile when offenders were instructed to employ this narrative technique. Moreover, these effects were mirrored by the positive associations of redemptive narration with genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile across all conditions, and when controlling for the other narrative types. These findings align with prior research that indicates instructing offenders to write about their wrongdoing with characteristics akin to redemption (i.e., restitution, behaviour change, identity change) can increase offenders' willingness to reconcile (vanOyen-Witvilet et al., 2011) and admit wrong (Helgason & Berman, 2022). Here, identifying specific ways one can act differently next time may provide a path for offenders to accept accountability for their actions and simultaneously restore their sense of moral integrity and agency (Maruna, 2001;

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Maruna & Ramsden, 2004) – which, in turn, may renew their self-acceptance and willingness to reconcile by restoring self-trust that they can act differently next time.

Interestingly, the manipulation of redemption was not entirely clean. Instructing individuals to reflect on the negative aspects of their wrongdoing, alongside how their actions could lead to personal growth, also led offenders to incorporate more self-distancing and self-contextualisation than the control. It could be that when offenders engage in redemptive reflections of what they can learn from the incident or how they can improve themselves, this type of self-reflection also involves a degree of abstraction and self-distancing. In other words, self-distancing and redemptive narration may not be completely independent of one another (indeed, ratings of naturally occurring narrative types are correlated; see Chapter 5), and redemptive narration may also involve offenders' relating their learnings to their sense of self (self-contextualisation). Therefore, instructing participants to engage in one type may also lead them to engage more in other types. Furthermore, instructing offenders to narrate redemptively had no impact on self-punitiveness nor offenders' defensiveness – contrary to predictions. Some research indicates that offenders who narrate redemptively may also draw self-condemning learnings that they are bad people (Lilgendahl et al., 2013; Mansfield et al., 2015). In the present study, the narrative prompts did not create this effect – nor did they impact offenders' defensiveness.

Self-Contextualisation

Instructing offenders to use self-contextualisation had different effects on offenders' self-forgiveness processes when compared to offenders' unprompted (and prompted) use assessed through offenders' self-ratings. Prompting offenders to engage in self-contextualisation – to reflect on how their wrongdoing relates to their values, worldview or sense of self – reduced offenders' defensiveness. Here, specifically guiding offenders to reflect on how their behaviour relates to their values may tap into the mechanism underlying value affirmation tasks, whereby thinking about the values one has violated, and why they are personally important, can reduce offenders' defensiveness by highlighting the importance of shared values between victims and offenders (Wenzel et al., 2020; Woodyatt et al., 2017b). Indeed, reflecting on how the wrongdoing relates to

one's worldview may prompt offenders to reflect on what type of behaviour is important to them, and their relational partner, and why.

In contrast, self-contextualisation measured via offenders' own ratings (across conditions, with or without explicit instruction) showed the opposite relationship, as it was positively associated with offenders' defensiveness as well as with self-punishment (as predicted). Unlike instructed self-contextualisation that may directly prompt value affirmation, when offenders identify how the wrongdoing relates to their sense of self or worldview in response to a combination of question types, this may reflect attempts to reconcile the cognitive dissonance between their actions and ideal sense of self (Festinger, 1957). Given that wrongdoings threaten offenders' moral integrity and belonging (Shabel & Nadler, 2008), offenders' concerns regarding how they may be viewed by others *because* of their behaviour may lead them to either deflect responsibility and double-down on their actions as congruent with the self (King, 2023), or engage in excessive self-punishment when acknowledging that (and potentially ruminating on how) their actions were incongruent with their values or worldview (vanOyen-Witvliet et al., 2011). These findings align with predictions and replicate what was observed for offenders' naturalistic and unguided narration in Chapter 3.

Past Contextualisation

Contrary to predictions, instructing participants to engage in past contextualisation – to reflect on the backstory, events leading up to what happened and the relational/emotional dynamics surrounding what happened – had no effect on offenders' self-forgiveness processes nor their willingness to reconcile. However, when offenders incorporated these aspects into their narratives as measured by their self-ratings (with or without explicit instruction to do so), this was associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile (replicating findings of offenders' naturalistic narration in Chapter 3) and, unexpectedly, greater self-punitiveness. Why might this mismatch arise? It could be that the correlational relationships do not reflect a causal role of past contextualisation, but rather they may be outcomes of self-forgiveness processes, or their association may be due to third variables. For example, it could be that part of the moral learning in genuine self-forgiveness requires offenders to engage more with the context surrounding what

happened, without that type of narration being instrumental to their genuine self-forgiveness (Cornish, 2016). In relation to self-punitiveness, more past contextualisation may indicate offenders' ruminating on the contextual details of what happened, possibly struggling to let go (Treynor et al., 2003). Thus, offenders may use contextual explanations in different ways, and the context provided may highlight offenders' present thoughts and feelings rather than serve a causal role in offenders' "working through" of guilt.

Another explanation could be the measure of genuine self-forgiveness that was employed, whereby it has been argued that a restoration of self-acceptance is not accurately captured by Woodyatt and Wenzel's (2013a) measure of genuine self-forgiveness. Given that it is theorised that past contextualisation may increase offenders' self-compassionate thoughts and feelings, it may be useful for future research to examine the effects of instructed past contextualisation on self-forgiveness using alternative measures that capture this restoration of positive self-regard, such as Griffin and colleagues' (2018) dual-process scale.

Self-Distancing

Unexpectedly, asking participants to engage in self-distancing – thinking about the bigger picture perspective, including how they might view the wrongdoing 6 months from now – did not downregulate excessive feelings of self-punishment. Here, the specific prompt used, which incorporated temporal distancing, may not have helped offenders' perspective taking nor emotion regulation, despite prior research that indicates temporal distancing may benefit adaptive self-reflection following interpersonal conflict (Huynh et al., 2016). Perhaps the benefits of self-distancing for emotion regulation may only arise for individuals who are experiencing excessive shame or guilt. Indeed, some research highlights that self-distanced narration is particularly useful for individuals who may have a higher baseline level of distress (Kross & Ayduk, 2009; Kross et al., 2012; Penner et al., 2016). Another explanation could be that the prompt used was perceived as somewhat condescending – since it asked participants to reflect on an "unbiased" perspective or "bigger picture" view. This could imply that offenders' current perspective is flawed, or there is a more righteous perspective offenders are not engaging with, which might be invalidating or

unhelpful in the early stages of processing. Moreover, while the IONS may capture the self-distanced narration identified in offenders' naturalistic narration, perhaps self-distancing as a prompted tool requires more creative methods than questions alone, such as visualization techniques or using distanced pronouns to refer to the self (see Kross and Ayduk, 2017). It would be interesting for future research to examine whether asking offenders to use visualization or linguistic techniques, such as imagining themselves as a fly-on-the-wall or referring to themselves in second/third person (as per Kross and Ayduk's methods), may increase offenders' narrative self-distancing as measured by the IONS.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study found that it was difficult to cleanly manipulate offenders' narration, as all narrative conditions had higher levels of other narrative types when compared to the control; despite explicit instruction to focus solely on the questions of interest. One aspect of the study that may have contributed to a muddy manipulation, is that individuals in all conditions were asked to provide a short 1-2 sentence summary of 'what happened' before being provided with tailored narrative instructions. This prompt was provided to control for offenders' potential desire to narrate in certain ways or about certain aspects of their wrongdoing. However, asking narrators to provide a short summary may have had the opposite effect than was intended. It may have led offenders to narrate as they would have instinctively done without instruction, allowing them to 'get on a roll' with their thinking or narration. As a result, individuals may have continued to narrate their wrongdoing in whichever way they had commenced narration, which could have made it difficult to stop narrating in these ways, or suddenly narrate solely in response to the specific instructions. Indeed, some research has found that it is difficult to 'manipulate' narrators to narrate in certain ways, particularly when researchers are asking individuals to narrate about events that may have already been consolidated into memory (Mansfield et al., 2023). Here, perhaps the question of 'what happened' may have kickstarted some form of narrative consolidation.

Another explanation could simply be that narration is inherently messy – whereby narrators may naturally use multiple narrative types when narrating. It could be that some narrative types

implicitly prompt, or encourage, other categories of narration, even when there is no explicit instruction to engage in such narration. For example, redemptive narration, which involves drawing a learning from wrongdoing, may require self-contextualisation or bigger picture thinking to occur so that offenders have something to tie their learning to (Blackie & McLean, 2022; Lilgendahl et al., 2013; Mansfield et al., 2015). Similarly, when asking narrators to reflect on how their wrongdoing relates to their values, this may require some degree of distanced reflection and lead to new insights about the self (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Rather than thinking about narrative types as something that exist in isolation from one another, it may simply be that they co-exist and thus it may be unrealistic to expect offenders to narrate with only one narrative type.

Furthermore, it could be that different combinations, or sequences, of narrative types may have differential benefits to offenders' working through processes, and these benefits may change based on the specific needs of offenders. For example, different combinations of narrative types could function to help offenders work through or reconcile different psychological needs, such as perceived threats to their moral-social image or challenging self-conscious emotions such as guilt and shame. Specific techniques such as self-distancing may be spontaneously employed by offenders who are experiencing heightened psychological distress (Ayduk & Kross, 2010a) and have been found as particularly beneficial for individuals with higher levels of baseline anxiety (Penner et al., 2016). Thus, encouraging self-distanced narration (using prompts from Ayduk and Kross' methods) may be useful as a precursor to narrating other aspects of the wrongdoing in cases where offenders may be particularly heightened. Similarly, it may be useful to add redemption alongside other narrative types to transform the context generated by contextualisation or abstraction into growth-oriented learnings that promote genuine self-forgiveness and subsequent willingness to reconcile with the victim. Future research may benefit from exploring hypotheses, such as these, to examine the function of combined narrative types, or sequences of narration.

Finally, because the manipulation of narration was somewhat muddy, secondary analyses were run to isolate the effects of specific narrative types on offenders' processes of self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile. These analyses indicated that instructed redemption led to genuine

self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, and self-contextualisation reduced defensiveness in both the experimental test of narration and the secondary regression analyses that controlled for alternative narrative types. While this provides additional reliability to these results, caution should still be exercised when interpreting these findings as the analyses were post-hoc, and statistically controlling for confounds is an imperfect solution relative to clean experimentation.

Conclusion

In sum, the present study found that offenders could be instructed to narrate with characteristics of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption – though, it proved difficult to isolate the distinctive causal effects of each narrative type. For redemptive narration, however, a triangulation of analyses – experimental effects, experimental effects while controlling for confounds, and correlational relationships – indicates most clearly that drawing growth-oriented learnings from wrongdoing is of benefit for offenders' adaptive working through, as part of their genuine self-forgiveness and subsequent willingness to reconcile.

CHAPTER 5.

Narration as an Emotional Processing Tool

Chapter 4 demonstrated that offenders incorporated multiple narrative types in their narration even when asked questions designed to prompt techniques of only one narrative type (i.e., either past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing or redemption). One reason for this may be that offenders use narration to respond to a pressing or inherent psychological need (e.g., threats to their moral-social identity) that requires exploration, satisfaction or reconciliation, with different narrative types potentially having different emotional processing functions. In the present chapter, I seek to explore (a) how offenders may use narration and re-narration as a tool to cope with, or transform, challenging emotions such as shame, guilt, self-anger and resentment, and (b) whether perspective-taking, self-compassion or growth-oriented thinking may explain part of how narration helps offenders to achieve these proposed emotional processing functions.

Emotional Implications of Interpersonal Wrongdoings

For offenders, interpersonal wrongdoings pose a threat of being viewed as an immoral person who is an unacceptable and unworthy relational partner (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). These moral-social threats can elicit uncomfortable self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt (Tangney et al., 2007; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Guilt may signal to offenders that their actions were unacceptable, and they are at risk of losing their relationship with the other person (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, 2021), whereas shame may be associated with fears of social devaluation from others or concerns that one is inherently flawed or bad in some way[11] (Leary, 2021; Sznycer et al., 2016; Tangney, 1998). Both emotions can be experienced as emotionally and physically painful (Boden & Eatough, 2020; Dickerson et al., 2004; Eisenberger et al., 2003; Karlsson & Sjöberg, 2009), and can lead to intense feelings of uncertainty, overwhelm, fear or lack of control, with some individuals reporting that guilt following interpersonal wrongdoing makes them feel stuck and unable to perceive the future (Boden & Eatough, 2020).

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[11] There is an ongoing debate in the literature regarding whether shame and guilt are uniquely distinct emotions given that individuals can, at times, experience both shame and guilt concurrently (e.g., Silfver, 2007; Tangney, 1998). The present chapter will not address this debate and will focus on the differentiating aspects of these emotions, while also acknowledging the overlap between them.

If offenders can tolerate the distress elicited from these self-conscious emotions (and moral-social threats), the acknowledgement of shame and guilt can have prosocial functions that benefit both offenders and victims. When offenders acknowledge feeling guilty for their wrongdoing, they tend to report less defensiveness or deflections of blame (Griffin et al., 2016; Tangney et al., 2007) and more constructive and conciliatory behaviour such as responsibility-taking, confessions, apologies, repentance, forgiveness seeking, perspective-taking, empathic concern for the victim, drawing learnings and making an effort to change behaviour (Baumeister et al., 1995; Behrendt & Ben-Ari, 2012; Fisher & Exline, 2006; Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Riek, 2010). Similarly, when individuals acknowledge feelings of shame, this can lead to greater engagement in, and commitment to, prosocial behaviour (de Hooge et al., 2008), and greater genuine self-forgiveness; which in turn increases willingness to reconcile by restoring moral integrity and self-trust that one *is* a valued relational partner (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014). In this way, shame and guilt may have beneficial functions as, when acknowledged, they can highlight that offenders are at threat of social exclusion, which can motivate offenders to restore their relationship and moral-social identity by acting in alignment with their values and making a conscious effort to avoid making the same mistakes again (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Baumeister et al., 1994; de Hooge et al., 2010; de Hooge et al., 2018; Gilbert, 1997; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014).

Acknowledging and "Working Through" Feelings of Shame and Guilt is Hard Work

It has been argued that acknowledging and adaptively "working through" shame and guilt may be difficult or effortful (Fisher & Exline, 2006; Holmgren, 1998; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a), because offenders are required to (a) engage distress tolerance and (b) constructively make sense of what these feelings imply for their sense of moral-social self (Gilbert & Woodyatt, 2017). Certainly, this process may be challenging "work", and some have argued that adaptive working through may initially feel like taking a step backward due to the discomfort it creates (Fischer & Exline, 2010). Given this challenge, what strategies might offenders employ to cope with feelings of guilt and shame (and their psychologically threatening implications)?

Intolerable Shame/Guilt Can Lead to Maladaptive Coping

Some individuals may find feelings of guilt and shame particularly painful, and thus to cope with this discomfort they may (a) deflect their shame/guilt or (b) ruminate on feelings of distress. Deflecting shame/guilt by externalizing it onto others and expressing other-oriented anger or resentment may temporarily relieve discomfort. However, these defensive processes can lead to long-term problems such as reduced empathy (Cornish et al., 2018; Thai et al., 2024; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a) and shame/guilt avoidance, wherein the true root of shame/guilt is left suppressed, unaddressed and lingering (see Elison et al., 2014 for a review). Alternatively, individuals may acknowledge their shame/guilt but ruminate on their responsibility for harm and thus experience overwhelming emotional distress; in turn, heightening their concerns of being viewed as immoral and unworthy. Fears of social devaluation may lead some individuals to respond defensively and become hostile, or others may feel overwhelmed at their responsibility for harm and direct anger at the self via excessive self-criticism (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Griffin et al., 2016; Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Tangney, 2002).

In both cases, these strategies are maladaptive and prevent the adaptive working through of shame/guilt. If offenders deflect blame and externalize it onto others, *or* accept blame but internalize it in a way that is ego-centric, the prosocial messages of shame and guilt are bypassed (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Baumeister et al., 1994; de Hooge et al., 2008; de Hooge et al., 2018). Typically, these types of maladaptive coping arise when offenders are unable to engage distress tolerance, thus the psychological distress elicited by feelings of shame and guilt (and the moral-social threats they signal) can feel intolerable. Subsequently, this can act as a barrier to offenders' accessing feelings of empathy and engaging in the constructive self-reflection needed for the adaptive "working through" of guilt/shame (Behrendt & Ben-Ari, 2012; Davis & Oathout, 1992; Fischer & Exline, 2010; Rangganadhan & Todorov, 2010).

Tolerating Distress and Engaging in Constructive Self-Reflection

One technique that may help to regulate overwhelming feelings of shame, guilt and self-anger, and shift offenders' ego-centric focus, is self-distancing. Self-distancing is considered one of the most effective perspective-taking strategies for emotion regulation (see Webb et al., 2012 for a

meta-analysis). Reflecting on a negative or distressing event from a distance has consistently been found to reduce distress via providing a more objective perspective that allows individuals to consider alternative viewpoints (see Kross & Ayduk, 2017 for a review), such as the perspective of others involved (Grossmann et al., 2021; Huynh et al., 2016). In this way, taking a step back to consider the bigger picture perspective might help to downregulate excessive shame and shift offenders' self-immersed concerns for the self; re-directing their focus to consider the victim's perspective, which may increase prosocial feelings of guilt or empathy (Davis, 1983).

Another technique that may help offenders to cope with the discomfort of shame and guilt, and engage in constructive self-reflection, may be self-compassion (Hall & Fincham, 2005). Extending kindness and understanding to oneself, whilst recognizing that the human species are flawed and it is normal to, at times, make mistakes may provide a self-compassionate buffer that protects against excessive shame, reduces defensiveness and helps offenders acknowledge their weaknesses or areas for improvement (Fischer & Exline, 2010; Neff, 2003; Rowe & Halling, 1998; Woodyatt et al., 2017b). In this way, a self-compassionate stance may provide offenders with a less threatening and more distanced perspective from which to reflect on their wrongdoing, which may in turn regulate excessive feelings of shame and help offenders to honestly work through the moral-social implications of their actions (Mróz & Sornat, 2023).

Similarly, adopting a growth-oriented mindset, wherein offenders view themselves as malleable and capable of change (rather than fixed and unchangeable) may also help individuals acknowledge shame and guilt. Believing that one has the agency to act differently in the future may regulate excessive shame by instilling hope and self-trust that one can act with moral integrity next time, restoring the belief that one's shame is malleable (Cibich et al., 2016; Leach & Cidam, 2015; Pasupathi et al., 2015). Thus, techniques of self-distanced perspective-taking, self-compassion and growth-oriented thinking may provide a buffer, anchored in empathic concern and humility, that helps to make the acknowledgement of guilt and shame less threatening. But how can offenders do this? The present thesis argues that self-narration may be a tool in this process.

Narration as an Emotional Processing Tool

For over a century it has been argued that narration may be an innate emotional processing tool (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Breuer & Freud, 1895; Goldie, 2012; Habermas, 2019; Pasupathi et al., 2017). Creating a story of emotional events, such as wrongdoings, may function to contextualize and consolidate the emotion associated with the event by providing a clear and coherent understanding of what happened, who was involved, how they felt, what caused the event and what consequences may have ensued (Angus & McLeod, 2004; Habermas & Bongard, 2024). Through exploring the event as a holistic story, narrative is theorized to consolidate emotion by creating a temporal ordering of events and allowing narrators to provide explanations or justifications for actions, which can forge links between their emotions and behaviour, and facilitate meaning making (Bruner, 1990). In contrast, if events that have caused some degree of distress are left in memory, without a coherent narrative attached to them, it has been argued that this can lead to the disorganization of emotion and subsequent meaning, which can negatively impact one's psychological and physical health via the suppression of emotion (Dimaggio & Smerari, 2004; Penebaker & Seagal, 1999). Indeed, without a temporal ordering of one's experience, achieved by narrative, individuals can remain psychologically 'stuck' in a ruminative loop of reliving the emotion associated with the event each time it is brought to memory (Boden & Eatough, 2020).

Despite numerous scholars proposing that narration may be an important emotional processing tool that helps individuals make sense of distressing events, few empirical studies have explored the topic, with even fewer addressing the mechanism by which narration may do this. Some evidence suggests that narration may function as an emotional processing tool by promoting the expression of emotion (Smyth & Pennebaker, 2008), such as by allowing narrators to unpack the emotion associated with events with more complexity or nuance than mere remembering (Fioretti & Smorti, 2015). Other findings suggest that narrating about emotional events can downregulate anger and distress (Barclay & Skarlicki, 2009; Pasupathi et al., 2017) and promote self-distancing (Park et al., 2016) – yet increased arousal immediately following narration or compared to mere remembering has also been reported (Murray & Seagal, 1994; Pasupathi et al., 2023). Together, these findings imply that there is some relationship between narration and

emotion, however the mechanism underlying how narration functions as an emotional processing tool, such as when and why it may downregulate (versus upregulate) emotion, remains unclear.

Regarding working through feelings of shame and guilt to achieve genuine self-forgiveness, a unique emotional processing task is posed. Offenders must acknowledge feelings of shame and guilt, but if shame and guilt become excessive, this can increase distress to an intolerable level and prevent the adaptive working through of it (Fischer & Exline, 2010; Gilbert & Woodyatt, 2017). Here, offenders must engage in an effortful balancing act of engaging distress tolerance to facilitate the approach and exploration of shame, guilt and the associated threats to their moral-social needs (Ayseli & Yildirim, 2023; Gilbert & Woodyatt, 2017; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014). Thus far, it has been proposed that narration may be a beneficial emotional processing tool that can promote the expression (and subsequent adaptive reduction) of complex emotions via facilitating meaning making. But how exactly might narration achieve this task in the context of offenders' working through for genuine self-forgiveness?

Proposed Emotional Processing Functions of Offenders' Narration

Narrative types of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption may differentially function to help (or hinder) offenders' coping with feelings of shame and guilt (and their associated threats to moral-social identity). As argued previously in this thesis: (1) creating explanations for one's wrongdoing by describing the contextual factors leading up to what happened (e.g., the backstory or emotional/relational dynamics; past contextualisation), may act as a self-compassionate buffer that helps offenders acknowledge and transform feelings of shame. Specifically, offenders' behaviour may become more understandable in context, and this may make acknowledging shame/guilt (and responsibility for harm) less threatening (Maruna, 2001; White & Epston, 1990). (2) Redemptive narration, whereby offenders acknowledge wrong and draw learnings from their actions, may lead to genuine self-forgiveness by promoting guilt and shame acknowledgement. It may do this by increasing offenders' growth-oriented thinking, whereby new learnings help offenders to view themselves as malleable and capable of change (Cibich et al., 2016; Leach & Cidam, 2015). (3) Self-distancing may down-regulate feelings of

shame and guilt by providing a more distanced and objective perspective to reflect from (Kross & Ayduk, 2017) – which may afford offenders the capacity to engage in empathic perspective-taking. (4) Self-contextualisation, which has consistently been associated with defensiveness and self-punishment (see Chapters 3 and 4), may highlight an incongruence between one's actions and values (Festinger, 1957), and thus exacerbate feelings of shame and moral-social image threat via beliefs of the self as fixed or unchangeable (i.e., low growth-oriented thinking).

Empirical Approach of the Present Studies

To explore these propositions, and further refine the theoretical framework for offenders' narration following wrongdoing, secondary analyses were conducted on data from Chapters 3 and 4. Specifically, random-intercept cross-lagged panel modelling was employed to explore the prospective ordering of narration on emotion, or vice versa (Hamaker et al., 2015). Thereafter, a series of mediation models were tested to further explore the theorized mechanisms underlying the impact of narration on emotion.

<div align="center">

Study 5.1

</div>

The present study aimed to explore bidirectional, prospective relationships between offenders' narration and self-reported emotion, moral-social image threat and self-perceived victimhood across three time points. To do this, secondary analyses were conducted on data from Study 3.3, using random-intercept cross-lagged panel models (RI-CLPM; Hamaker et al., 2015). RI-CLPM allows for longitudinal modeling of both between-person and within-person effects; it controls for time-invariant individual differences while assessing the cross-lagged relationships between within-person change in the modelled variables. Taking this empirical approach will provide further nuance to these correlational data by indicating whether within-person changes in narration seem to influence (and occur before) within-person changes in emotion, threat or self-perceived victimhood over time or vice versa.

Method

In Study 3.3, participants were asked to narrate a recent interpersonal wrongdoing that they committed within the last 24-hours in as much detail as they deemed relevant. Participants then re-

narrated their story 24 and 48-hours after their initial narration. After writing, participants self-rated their own narratives using the IONS (see Study 3.3 for full method details).

Measures

All measures used 7-point scales (1 = strongly disagree – 7 = strongly agree). For multi-item measures, item responses were averaged to obtain scale scores.

The Interpersonal Offender Narrative Meaning Making Scale (IONS). Offenders used the 14 item IONS to rate their own narratives. The scale includes 4 subscales; past contextualisation (4 items; a = .80/.83/.87, for Time 1–3 respectively), self-contextualisation (3 items; a = .86/.87/.89), self-distancing (3 items; a = .74/.68/.68) and redemption (4 items; a = .90/.91/.93).

Guilt. Guilt was assessed with 2 items – *'I feel guilty'* and *'I feel bad about what I did'* (a = .91/.92/.91).

Shame. Shame was assessed with 2 items – *'I feel ashamed'* and *'I feel bad about who I am as a person'* (a = .82/.84/.86).

Self-Anger. Self-Anger was assessed with 2 items – '*I feel angry at myself'* and '*I feel frustrated with myself* (a = .87/.90/.91).

Empathy. Empathy was measured with 2 items – '*I feel empathetic toward the person I wronged'* and '*I feel warmth for the person I wronged'* (a = .79/.87/.84).

Resentment. Resentment was measured with 2 items – '*I feel resentful'* and '*I feel bitter'* (a = .79/.81/.82).

Moral-Social Image Threat (King, 2023). Moral-social image threat was assessed with 5 items adapted from King (2023) – e.g., *'I fear that my actions were morally questionable'* and *'I am worried about what others will think of me because of this incident'* (a = .92/.94/.95).

Self-Perceived Victimhood (Thai et al., 2024). Self-perceived victimhood was measured with 1 item adapted from Thai and colleagues (2024) – *'I feel like a victim'.*

Results

Descriptive Statistics

See Table 18 for all means and standard deviations, and Tables 19 – 21 for correlations between all variables for Time 1 – 3, respectively.

Table 18

Means (and Standard Deviations) of Exploratory Measures for the Entire Sample (Study 5.1).

Variable	*Time 1*	*Time 2*	*Time 3*
Guilt	5.16 (1.72)	4.71 (1.89)	4.32 (1.98)
Shame	4.29 (1.79)	3.88 (1.88)	3.52 (1.93)
Self-Anger	4.60 (1.80)	4.24 (1.88)	3.86 (1.99)
Empathy	5.14 (1.62)	5.08 (1.72)	5.14 (1.73)
Resentment	3.30 (1.87)	3.09 (1.82)	2.80 (1.81)
Moral-Social Image Threat	3.93 (1.69)	3.70 (1.75)	3.55 (1.83)
Self-Perceived Victimhood	1.99 (1.49)	1.97 (1.57)	1.96 (1.48)
Past Contextualisation	5.39 (1.08)	5.18 (1.18)	5.34 (1.20)
Self-contextualisation	4.29 (1.49)	4.43 (1.45)	4.52 (1.45)
Self-distancing	4.60 (1.28)	4.80 (1.19)	5.04 (1.15)
Redemption	4.18 (1.58)	4.52 (1.50)	4.80 (1.52)

Table 19

Correlations Between Key Variables – Time 1 (Study 5.1)

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Guilt	–										
2. Shame	.79***	–									
3. Self-Anger	.81***	.82***	–								
4. Empathy	.64***	.48***	.53***	–							
5. Resentment	.23***	.39***	.37***	.03	–						
6. Moral-Social Threat	.51***	.59***	.53***	.21***	.44***	–					
7. Past Contextualisation	.22***	.23***	.18***	.28***	.09	.17**	–				
8. Self-Contextualisation	.12*	.18***	.14**	.13*	.21***	.28***	.43***	–			
9. Self-Distancing	.21***	.17***	.18***	.28***	.07	.18***	.42***	.56***	–		
10. Redemption	.34***	.32***	.31***	.38***	.17**	.25***	.38***	.55***	.72***	–	
11. SP Victimhood	-.31***	-.16**	-.18***	-.34***	.31***	-.02	-.18***	-.00	-.16**	-.11*	–

Note. n=349 for all variables; *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Table 20

Correlations Between Key Variables – Time 2 (Study 5.1)

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Guilt	–										
2. Shame	.82***	–									
3. Self-Anger	.84***	.83***	–								
4. Empathy	.62***	.46***	.48***	–							
5. Resentment	.31***	.47***	.45***	.03	–						
6. Moral-Social Threat	.58***	.65***	.60***	.25***	.48***	–					
7. Past Contextualisation	.24***	.17**	.20***	.25***	.17***	.09	–				
8. Self-Contextualisation	.27***	.30***	.27***	.15**	.27***	.34***	.41***	–			
9. Self-Distancing	.22***	.19***	.19***	.35***	.07	.20***	.41***	.58***	–		
10. Redemption	.35***	.33***	.32***	.39***	.16**	.30***	.34***	.58***	.68***	–	
11. SP Victimhood	-.26***	-.16**	-.11*	-.44***	.30***	.03	-.13**	.03	-.28***	-.21***	–

*Note. n=349 for all variables; *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.*

Table 21

Correlations Between Key Variables – Time 3 (Study 5.1)

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Guilt	–										
2. Shame	.81***	–									
3. Self-Anger	.85***	.85***	–								
4. Empathy	.58***	.41***	.45***	–							
5. Resentment	.36***	.55***	.48***	.00	–						
6. Moral-Social Threat	.58***	.68***	.62***	.25***	.48***	–					
7. Past Contextualisation	.25***	.17**	.17**	.28***	.11*	.14**	–				
8. Self-Contextualisation	.22***	.24***	.18***	.22***	.18***	.27***	.47***	–			
9. Self-Distancing	.20***	.12*	.10	.37***	.03	.16**	.51***	.63***	–		
10. Redemption	.36***	.29***	.27***	.43***	.12*	.26***	.46***	.65***	.74***	–	
11. SP Victimhood	-.21***	-.07	-.09	-.41***	.26***	.02	-.09	-.08	-.28***	-.26***	–

Note. n=349 for all variables; *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

RI-CLPM

To examine bidirectional effects and explore prospective relationships between narration and emotion over multiple time points, random-intercept cross-lagged panel modelling (RI-CLPM; Hamaker et al., 2015) was conducted in SPSS using AMOS (v30). Each model included all four narrative types and one emotion type (i.e., guilt, shame, self-anger, resentment or empathy), threat or self-perceived victimhood variable. The between-person component of these variables was represented as latent "random intercepts" drawing on the observed variables measured at Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3. Cross-lagged paths were modelled between the residuals of the observed measures to explore the prospective relationship between within-person variations (from a trait tendency) in narration at Time 1 and emotion/threat/self-perceived victimhood at Time 2 as well as between narration at Time 2 and emotion threat/self-perceived victimhood at Time 3, and vice versa. Autoregressive paths were also included to control for stability in narration and emotion within individuals across time. To aim for model parsimony, different models were tested against the default model: a stability-only model estimated the coefficients of corresponding stabilities for the Time 1/Time 2 lag and the Time 2/Time 3 lag to be equal; a cross-lags only model estimated the coefficients of corresponding cross-lags to be equal, and a stability and cross-lags model estimated corresponding stabilities plus cross-lags to be equal.

For all models tested, the stability plus cross-lag model did not show any deterioration in model fit compared to the less constrained models, based on comparative model fit criteria of change in CFI ≤ -.01 and change in RMSEA ≤ .01 (see Appendix J for comparative fit statistics for each model; Rutkowski & Svetina, 2014). These criteria were used instead of a nonsignificant χ^2-test, which is sensitive to sample size and model complexity (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). The results thus indicated that the prospective relationships (auto-regressive effects and cross-lagged effects) were consistent across both time lags, and the reporting will be based on these models with a single coefficient representing both lags for these relationships. For all models, overall model fit was deemed acceptable with RMSEA ≤ .06 and CFI/TLI ≥ .95 (see Table 22; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Cross-lagged effects between narrative types appeared to differ between emotion, threat and self-

perceived victimhood models. Therefore, one model of all four narrative types alone will be reported for economy of reporting (see below).

Table 22

RI-CLPM Model Fit Statistics for the Stability and Cross Lag Model Across Models (Study 5.1)

Model	χ^2 (df)	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Narrative Alone	24.11 (22)	1.10	.99	.99	.02
Guilt	38.66 (35)	1.11	.99	.99	.02
Shame	30.02 (35)	.86	1.00	1.00	.00
Self-Anger	38.28 (35)	1.09	.99	.99	.02
Empathy	61.72 (35)*	1.76	.99	.98	.05
Resentment	39.45 (35)	1.13	.99	.99	.02
Moral-Social Image Threat	33.98 (35)	.97	1.00	1.00	.00
Self-Perceived Victimhood	37.47 (35)	1.07	.99	.99	.01

Note: $*p<.01$.

Narrative Types Alone. The RI-CLPM indicated significant auto-regressive effects for past-contextualisation (β=.28, SE=.08, $p<.001$) and self-distancing (β=.29, SE=.09, $p<.001$)[12]. There were no other auto-regressive effects, nor any cross-lagged effects between narrative types over time (see Figure 1 for RI-CLPM model).

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[12] Cross-lagged effects between narrative types and auto-regressive effects of narration will not be discussed in subsequent analyses for economy of reporting.

Figure 1

Random-Intercept Cross Lagged Panel Model for all Narrative Types Alone
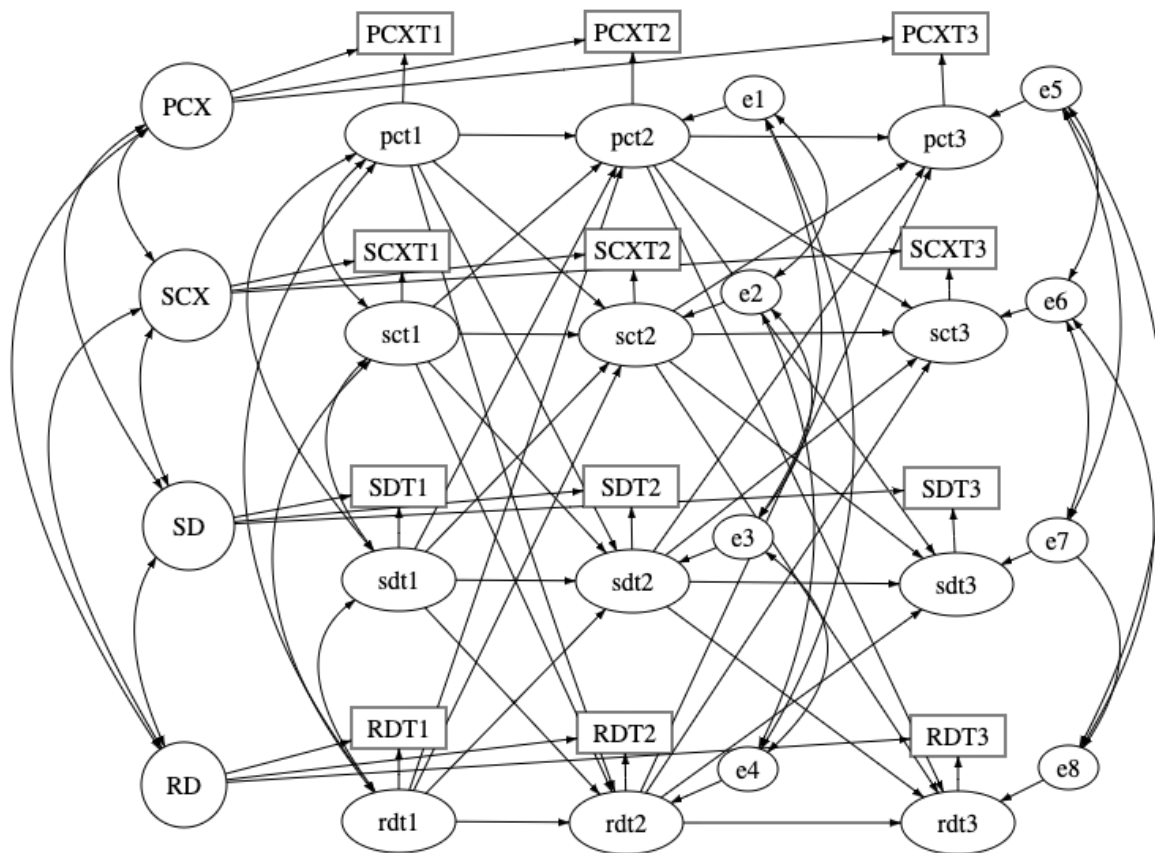
Guilt. A significant negative cross-lagged effect was found for self-distancing on guilt (β=-.18, SE=.08, *p*=.03), showing that a within-person increase in self-distanced narration was prospectively related to subsequent reductions in guilt. There was also a negative auto-regressive effect of guilt (β=-.23, SE=.09, *p*=.01). There were no other significant cross-lagged effects.

Shame. There was a significant negative cross-lagged effect of past contextualisation on shame (β=-.23, SE=.09, *p*=.01), indicating a within-person increase in past contextualisation was prospectively related to a subsequent reduction in shame. There were also two marginally significant cross-lagged effects between self-distancing and shame (β=-.15, SE=.08, *p*=.06), and between self-contextualisation and shame (β=-.12, SE=.06, *p*=.06); a temporary greater engagement in self-distancing or self-contextualisation was prospectively related to a reduction in shame. There

was a positive auto-regressive effect of shame (β=.43, SE=.09, *p*<.001). No other cross-lagged effects were observed.

Self-Anger. There was a significant negative cross-lagged effect of self-distancing on self-anger (β=-.18, SE=.08, *p*=.03), suggesting that a within-person increase in self-distancing was prospectively related to subsequent reductions in self-oriented anger. There was also a positive auto-regressive effect for anger (β=.55, SE=.07, *p*<.001). No other cross-lagged effects were found.

Empathy. There was a significant positive cross-lagged effect of redemption on empathy (β=.14, SE=.07, *p*=.04), showing that a within-person increase in redemption was prospectively related to a subsequent increase in empathy. There was also a cross-lagged trend of an increase in empathy being related to a subsequent increase in redemption (β=.11, SE=.07, *p*=.08), however this effect was not significant. The auto-regressive effect of empathy was significant and positive (β=.52, SE=.06, *p*<.001).

Resentment. There was a significant negative cross-lagged effect of resentment on redemption (β=-.17, SE=.07, *p*=.02), indicating that a within-person increase (decrease) in resentment was related to a subsequent decrease (increase) in redemptive narration. The auto-regressive effect of resentment was significant and positive (β=.27, SE=.11, *p*=.02).

Moral-Social Image Threat. There was a significant negative cross-lagged effect of moral-social image threat on self-distancing (β=-.16, SE=.08, *p*=.03), suggesting that a within-person reduction in perceived moral-social image threat was related to subsequent increases in narrative self-distancing. There was also a marginal positive cross-lagged effect of self-contextualisation on threat (β=.12, SE=.07, *p*=.07); this effect was not significant but suggested that a within-person increase in self-contextualisation was prospectively related to an increase in threat. The auto-regressive effect of threat was also significant and positive (β=.40, SE=.10, *p*<.001).

Self-Perceived Victimhood. There was a significant negative cross-lagged effect of self-distancing on self-perceived victimhood (β=-.17, SE=.07, *p*=.02), showing that a within-person increase in self-distancing was prospectively associated with a decrease in self-perceived victimhood. In contrast, a within-person increase in self-contextualisation was prospectively

associated with increased perceptions of victimhood (β=.15, SE=.07, *p*=.04). The auto-regressive effect of self-perceived victimhood was also significant and positive (β=.29, SE=.08, *p*<.001).

Discussion

The present study was exploratory and examined the bidirectional prospective relationships of within-person changes in offenders' naturalistic narration and their self-reported feelings of guilt, shame, self-anger, resentment, empathy, moral-social image threat and self-perceived victimhood across three time points. While, as with all correlational data, the findings need to be interpreted with caution as the confounding effects of time-varying covariates cannot be ruled out (Mund et al., 2021), the prospective cross-lagged associations that show temporary within-person variation in one variable being associated with subsequent within-person change indicates the direction of influence between variables.

The results suggest that identifying contextual factors in the past such as the backstory (past contextualisation) appeared to lead to the downregulation of shame, aligning with Narrative Therapy's idea that contextualisation may help offenders create some distance between themselves and their behaviour, subsequently reducing shame and the associated attribution that they are fundamentally bad people (Tangney, 1998; White & Epston, 1990). When offenders made links between their sense of self and the wrongdoing (self-contextualisation) this had no significant effects on emotion or threat variables, though there was a trend toward self-contextualisation reducing shame and increasing moral-social image threat and self-perceived victimhood. Here, drawing links between the wrongdoing and one's identity may increase concerns that one may be viewed as immoral and unacceptable. To cope with this moral-social image threat, offenders may avoid self-conscious emotions such as shame and perceive themselves as victims as a defensive mechanism that lets themselves off the hook (Thai et al., 2024; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a, 2013b).

Reflecting on one's wrongdoing from an unbiased or bigger picture vantage point (self-distancing) appeared to downregulate feelings of guilt and self-anger, and reduce offenders' self-perceptions of victimhood. There was also a trend towards the downregulation of shame, though

this effect did not reach significance. These findings align with Kross and Ayduk's (2017 for a review) research whereby considering a self-distanced and bigger picture perspective may be a useful emotion regulation tool. For offenders, self-distanced narration may do this in a way that also encourages moral engagement by reducing perceptions of victimhood.

Finally, drawing a new learning or insight (redemption) appeared to lead to more empathy. To learn from wrongdoing requires the acknowledgement of wrong; thus, this process may facilitate offenders' ability to empathize with the victim, which may explain why redemptive narration tends to be associated with greater willingness to make amends (Rotella et al., 2015). In addition, a decrease in resentment appeared to lead to greater engagement in redemptive narration, and there was a nonsignificant trend of empathy also leading to redemption. This may indicate that having more empathic concern and less hostile attitudes toward the victim may motivate offenders to try and learn from their wrongdoing in the first place, and this may have bidirectional effects.

Study 5.2

The present study aimed to explore the mechanism by which offenders' narration may lead to feelings of shame, guilt or moral-social image threat. Secondary mediation analyses were conducted on data from Study 4 to explore this question, whereby self-compassion, perspective-taking and growth-oriented thinking were explored as possible mediators of the relationship between narration and emotion/threat.

Method

In Study 4 participants were randomly assigned to one of five narrative conditions; they were asked to narrate a recent interpersonal wrongdoing they committed within the last 48-hours by following specific instructions (see Study 4 for full method details). Instructions were designed to prompt engagement in each of the four narrative types operationalized in the IONS or a control condition (i.e., narration absent from abstraction, focusing on concrete details). Secondary analyses reported here use offenders' self-ratings of their narrative outcomes (rather than the experimental condition) as the narrative predictor, since the experimental manipulation was not entirely 'clean' (i.e., experimental conditions led to the utilization of multiple narrative types).

Measures

As per Study 5.1, all measures used 7-point scales, and multi-item measures were averaged to obtain scale scores. The IONS was used to assess offenders' narration (see Chapter 4 for narrative measures).

Shame. Shame was measured with 2 items – *'I feel ashamed'* and *'I feel bad about who I am as a person'* (a = .81).

Guilt. Guilt was measured with 2 items – *'I feel guilty'* and *'I feel bad about what I did'* (a = .87).

Moral-Social Image Threat (King, 2023). Perceived threat to one's moral-social image was measured with 8-items adapted from King (2023) – e.g., *'I fear that my actions were morally questionable'* and *'I am worried about what others will think of me because of this incident'* (a = .95).

Perspective-Taking. Perspective-taking was measured with 3 items – e.g., *'I have tried to put myself in the other person's shoes', 'I have thought about how the other person might feel about what happened'* (a = .85).

Growth-Oriented Thinking. Offenders' growth-oriented thinking was measured using 4 items – e.g., *'I believe this experience is an opportunity for growth', 'I am how I am, and I can't really change that'* (reverse coded), *'If this incident were to happen again, I'd respond in the same way because that's how I am'* (reverse coded) (a = .72).

The State Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SSCS-S; Neff et al., 2021). Self-compassion was measured with 6 items adapted from Neff and colleagues (2021) – e.g., *'I'm giving myself the caring and tenderness I need', 'I'm remembering that there are lots of others in the world feeling like I am', 'I feel intolerant and impatient toward myself* (reverse coded)'; $a = .76$). Items were measured via a 5-point scale (*1 = not at all true for me – 5 = very true for me*).

Analytic Approach

To explore relationships between narration and emotion or threat-perception variables, correlations were run in SPSS (v30). Whether the relationship between narration and emotion was mediated by self-processing variables of perspective-taking, self-compassion or adopting a growth-oriented mindset was explored by conducting a series of simple parallel mediations using model 4 from Hayes' (2022) process macro (v4.3) in SPSS. Each model included one emotion or threat variable as the dependent variable (guilt, shame, threat), one narrative predictor and three self-processing mediators (perspective-taking, growth-mindset, self-compassion). Alternate narrative outcome types, wrongdoing severity and experimental condition (dummy coded) were entered as covariates to control for their effects on narration, self-processing, emotion and threat. All variables were centered.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

See Table 23 for all means and standard deviations and Table 24 for correlations between all variables.

Table 23

Means (and Standard Deviations) for Self-Narration, Emotion and Self-Processing Variables (Study 5.2)

Variable	Mean (SD)
Severity	4.59 (1.35)
Past Contextualisation	5.23 (1.15)
Self-contextualisation	4.79 (1.46)
Self-distancing	4.88 (1.16)
Redemption	4.80 (1.43)
Guilt	4.92 (1.71)
Shame	4.23 (1.82)
Threat	4.38 (1.59)
Self-compassion	3.51 (.79)
Perspective-taking	5.66 (1.20)
Growth-oriented thinking	5.26 (1.16)

Note. n=200 for all variables except self-compassion (*n*=151).

Table 24

Correlations for Self-Narration, Emotion and Self-Processing Variables (Study 5.2)

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Severity	–										
2. Past Contextualisation	.20**	–									
3. Self-contextualisation	.28***	.44***	–								
4. Self-distancing	.02	.34***	.48***	–							
5. Redemption	.10	.27***	.46***	.64***	–						
6. Guilt	.40***	.29***	.20**	.10	.25***	–					
7. Shame	.48***	.22***	.22**	.05	.19**	.79***	–				
8. Threat	.40***	.31***	.23***	.05	.16*	.62***	.70***	–			
9. Self-compassion	-.22**	.22**	.08	.25**	.05	-.32***	-.45***	-.38***	–		
10. Perspective-taking	-.01	.24***	.20**	.27***	.34***	.42***	.30***	.30***	.08	–	
11. Growth-oriented thinking	.02	.15*	.05	.22**	.26***	.44***	.26***	.25***	-.03	.48***	–

Note. n=200 for all variables except self-compassion (*n*=151); *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

The Effect of Self-Narration on Shame, Guilt and Threat via Perspective-Taking, Self-Compassion and Growth-Oriented Mindset

The second stage of the mediation models – the effects of the mediators on each of the three outcomes variables, while controlling for narrative types, wrongdoing severity and experimental condition – was identical, irrespective of which narrative type featured as predictor variable (and which ones were covariates). Hence, the effects of mediators (perspective-taking, self-compassion, growth-oriented thinking) on outcome variables (shame, guilt, threat) are reported first. Thereafter, predictor effects on mediators and their indirect effects on outcome variables are reported by narrative type.

Mediator Effects on Guilt, Shame and Threat. Perspective-taking was positively related to guilt ($b=.29$, $p=.02$) and shame ($b=.32$, $p=.01$), but had no significant relationship to threat ($b=.18$, $p=.11$); self-compassion was negatively related to guilt ($b=-.61$, $p<.001$), shame ($b=-.88$, $p<.001$), and threat ($b=-.74$, $p<.001$); and growth-oriented thinking was positively related to guilt ($b=.47$, $p<.001$) but had no significant relationship to shame ($b=-.21$, $p=.09$) or threat ($b=.17$, $p=.14$).

Past Contextualisation. Past contextualisation was not significantly related to engagement in perspective-taking ($b=.15$, $p=.11$), self-compassion ($b=.12$, $p=.08$) or growth-oriented thinking ($b=.15$, $p=.10$), and there was no direct or total effect of past contextualisation on guilt or shame. However, there was a direct effect of past contextualisation on moral-social image threat, whereby engagement in past contextualisation was significantly positively related to moral-social image threat (see Table 25 for path analyses for all direct, total and indirect effects). There were no indirect effects of past contextualisation on guilt, shame or threat.

Self-Contextualisation. Self-contextualisation was significantly negatively related to engagement in growth-oriented thinking ($b=-.24$, $p=.01$), but had no effect on perspective-taking ($b=-.03$, $p=.73$) or self-compassion ($b=.02$, $p=.75$). There were no direct or total effects of self-contextualisation on guilt, shame or moral-social image threat. However, there was an indirect effect of self-contextualisation on guilt via growth-oriented thinking, indicating that engagement in

self-contextualisation was related to reduced feelings of guilt via reducing growth-oriented thinking. There were no other indirect effects (see Table 26).

Self-Distancing. Self-distanced narration was positively related to self-compassion ($b=.20$, $p=.02$), but had no effect on perspective-taking ($b=.13$, $p=.25$) or growth-oriented thinking ($b=.18$, $p=.09$). There were no direct effects of self-distancing on guilt, shame or moral-social image threat. However, there was an indirect effect of self-distancing on guilt, shame and threat via self-compassion, whereby self-distanced narration was positively related to self-compassion, which was in turn negatively related to guilt, shame and moral-social image threat (see Table 27).

Redemption. Redemptive narration was significantly positively related to perspective-taking ($b=.24$, $p=.01$) and growth-oriented thinking ($b=.28$, $p<.01$), but had no effect on self-compassion ($b=-.07$, $p=.31$). There were no direct effects of redemption on guilt, shame or moral-social image threat, but the total effects of redemption on guilt, shame and threat were significant. There was an indirect effect of redemption on guilt via growth-oriented mindset, wherein redemptive narration was positively related to feelings of guilt via greater growth-oriented thinking. There was also an indirect effect of redemption on shame via perspective-taking, indicating that redemptive narration was positively related to feelings of shame via greater engagement in perspective-taking. There was no indirect effect of redemption on threat (see Table 28).

Table 25

Summary of Direct, Total and Indirect Effects of Past Contextualisation on Guilt, Shame and Moral-Social Image Threat via Perspective-Taking, Self-Compassion and Growth-Oriented Thinking (Study 5.2)

Effects of	Guilt			Shame			Moral-Social Image Threat		
Past contextualisation	*Effect*	*SE*	*95% CI*	*Effect*	*SE*	*95% CI*	*Effect*	*SE*	*95% CI*
Direct Effect	.19	.12	-.05; .43	.11	.13	-.14; .36	.39*	.11	.16; .62
Total Effect	.04	.09	-.14; .23	-.02	.09	-.20; .15	-.03	.07	-.17; .10
Indirect Effect (via PT)	.04	.04	-.01; .15	.05	.04	-.01; .15	.03	.03	-.01; .11
Indirect Effect (via SC)	-.07	.05	-.18; .01	-.10	.07	-.25; .02	-.09	.06	-.20; .02
Indirect Effect (via GOT)	.07	.05	-.02; .19	.03	.03	-.02; .11	.03	.03	-.02; .10

Note. PT=Perspective-Taking, SC=Self-Compassion, GOT=Growth-Oriented Thinking; *p<.05.

Table 26

Summary of Direct, Total and Indirect Effects of Self-Contextualisation on Guilt, Shame and Moral-Social Image Threat via Perspective-Taking, Self-Compassion and Growth-Oriented Thinking (Study 5.2)

Effects of Self-Contextualisation	Guilt			Shame			Moral-Social Image Threat		
	Effect	SE	95% CI	Effect	SE	95% CI	Effect	SE	95% CI
Direct Effect	.03	.11	-.19; .25	.06	.11	-.16; .29	-.00	.10	-.21; .21
Total Effect	-.13	.09	-.31; .03	-.08	.09	-.25; .09	-.06	.07	-.21; .08
Indirect Effect (via PT)	-.01	.03	-.07; .04	-.01	.03	-.08; .05	-.00	.02	-.05; .04
Indirect Effect (via SC)	-.01	.05	-.11; .08	-.02	.07	-.16; .10	-.01	.06	-.14; .09
Indirect Effect (via GOT)	-.11*	.06	-.24; -.02	-.05	.04	-.15; .02	-.04	.04	-.13; .02

Note. PT=Perspective-Taking, SC=Self-Compassion, GOT=Growth-Oriented Thinking; *p<.05.

Table 27

Summary of Direct, Total and Indirect Effects of Self-Distancing on Guilt, Shame and Moral-Social Image Threat via Perspective-Taking, Self-Compassion and Growth-Oriented Thinking (Study 5.2)

Effects of Self-Distancing	Guilt			Shame			Moral-Social Image Threat		
	Effect	SE	95% CI	Effect	SE	95% CI	Effect	SE	95% CI
Direct Effect	-.24	.15	-.53; .05	-.15	.15	-.44; .15	-.04	.14	-.31; .24
Total Effect	.01	.10	-.20; .18	-.09	.10	-.31; .09	-.09	.09	-.26; .08
Indirect Effect (via PT)	.04	.04	-.05; .12	.04	.04	-.04; .12	.02	.04	-.02; .12
Indirect Effect (via SC)	-.12*	.07	-.27; -.01	-.17*	.09	-.37; -.01	-.15*	.08	-.31; -.01
Indirect Effect (via GOT)	.09	.06	-.01; .22	.04	.04	-.02; .13	.03	.03	-.02; .11

Note. PT=Perspective-Taking, SC=Self-Compassion, GOT=Growth-Oriented Thinking; * $p<.05$.

Table 28

Summary of Direct, Total and Indirect Effects of Redemption on Guilt, Shame and Moral-Social Image Threat via Perspective-Taking, Self-Compassion and Growth-Oriented Thinking (Study 5.2)

Effects of Redemption	Guilt			Shame			Moral-Social Image Threat		
	Effect	SE	95% CI	Effect	SE	95% CI	Effect	SE	95% CI
Direct Effect	.17	.12	-.06; .41	.10	.12	-.13; .35	-.04	.11	-.27; .18
Total Effect	.24*	.09	.08; .42	.19*	.09	.02; .38	.14*	.07	.01; .30
Indirect Effect (via PT)	.07	.04	-.02; .15	.07*	.04	.00; .17	.04	.04	-.01; .16
Indirect Effect (via SC)	.04	.05	-.05; .15	.06	.07	-.07; .21	.05	.06	-.06; .18
Indirect Effect (via GOT)	.13*	.06	.04; .27	.06	.05	-.02; .16	.05	.04	-.03; .13

Note. PT=Perspective-Taking, SC=Self-Compassion, GOT=Growth-Oriented Thinking; * *p*<.05 level.

Discussion

The present research explored whether offenders' narrations were related to feelings of guilt, shame and moral-social image threat via self-processing variables of self-compassion, perspective-taking or growth-oriented thinking. The mediation analyses were based on cross-sectional data from Study 4 and, thus, do not permit any causal inferences. They provide a pattern of relationships whereby interpretation relies on the surplus of theorizing; however, they do not directly evidence directional influences, and interpretations need to be regarded with caution.

When offenders described contextual factors that contributed to the wrongdoing such as the events leading up to what happened (past contextualisation), this was positively associated with moral-social image threat, which was contrary to predictions (i.e., that exploring contextual factors may provide a less threatening, and more self-compassionate, avenue for offenders to discuss their wrongdoing; White & Epston, 1990). Instead, it seems that describing the contextual details of one's wrongdoing soon after the event may be associated with increased concerns of being viewed as an immoral or unacceptable relational partner. Given that context is needed to make sense of, or understand, wrongdoing events (Reese et al., 2011; Wilson & Gilbert, 2008), this finding could indicate offenders' thinking through their actions, including how the wrongdoing relates to their individual or relational history, and this may highlight that their actions were in fact morally questionable.

Offenders' reflections on how their wrongdoing relates to their sense of self (self-contextualisation) was related to them perceiving themselves as fixed and unchangeable, which was in turn negatively related to self-conscious feelings of guilt. If self-contextualisation highlights an incongruence between the self and one's values, the discomfort of acknowledging this may lead some offenders to engage in cognitive dissonance reduction; by doubling-down on their actions as congruent with their self-image, possibly leading them to state '*this is just the way I am*', which in turn may mean they feel less responsible for their actions and thus less guilty (Cancino-Montecinos et al., 2020; Festinger, 1957; King, 2023).

Taking an unbiased or bigger picture perspective (self-distancing) was positively related to self-compassion, which was in turn related to lower feelings of guilt, shame and moral-social image threat. This finding provides further support for self-distancing as an emotion regulation tool (Kross & Ayduk, 2017), and suggests self-distancing may also downregulate perceptions of threat. Interestingly, self-distancing seemed to down-regulate emotion/threat via positive associations with self-compassion (rather than other-oriented perspective-taking). Here, a self-compassionate stance may still provide offenders a new perspective from which to reflect on, but rather than broadening this outlook to the victim's experience (as was theorized), self-distanced narration may reflect, or encourage, thinking about the wrongdoing while bearing in mind that it is human to make mistakes (Neff, 2003). In turn, this is associated with fewer concerns of being ostracized/viewed as an immoral person (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008).

Drawing a new learning or insight (redemption) was positively related to offenders' growth-oriented thinking, which was in turn associated with greater feelings of guilt. Identifying a learning of how one could act differently may lead offenders to believe that they are able to grow and change as people. In turn, this may increase feelings of guilt given that a decision to change is rooted in acknowledging one's responsibility for wrong. Redemptive narration was also positively related to offenders' perspective-taking, which was in turn related to greater shame. Perhaps with the desire to change and draw learning offenders may reflect on the victim's experience of their behaviour, which may initially increase feelings of shame. Here, increases in self-conscious emotions are not problematic per se, but may instead reflect that offenders are indeed acknowledging feelings of guilt and shame (Fischer & Exline, 2010) – which is a key part of genuine self-forgiveness processes (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a, 2014).

General Discussion

The present research (a) confirmed relationships between offenders' narration and self-reported feelings of guilt, shame, self-anger, empathy, resentment, moral-social threat and self-perceived victimhood, and (b) found that self-compassion, perspective-taking and growth-oriented thinking may play a role in some of these relationships. Findings suggest that different narrative types have differential effects on whether, and to what degree, offenders experience feelings of shame, guilt, self-anger, resentment and empathy over time, with resentment and empathy having bidirectional effects on offenders' narration. Together, these findings imply that narration may be implicated in, or reflective of, offenders' emotional processing following interpersonal wrongdoing. These findings will subsequently be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of the present thesis for how offenders may use narration (and re-narration) to "work through" wrongdoing and achieve genuine self-forgiveness.

Past Contextualisation

It was theorized that providing contextual information about how things were leading up to the wrongdoing (such as the backstory or emotional/relational dynamics between parties; past contextualisation), may provide a less threatening and more self-compassionate way for offenders to unpack the reasons underlying their wrongdoing behaviour (Cornish, 2016; Cornish & Wade, 2015a, 2015b; White & Epston, 1990; Wilson & Gilbert, 2008) – wherein this may reflect a part of offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes. The present research finds some support for this proposition. Describing the past context surrounding the wrongdoing seems to, at first, increase (rather than decrease) feelings of moral-social image threat (as found in Study 5.2), but downregulate offenders' feelings of shame over time (as found in Study 5.1). This could suggest that, initially, offenders who narrate in this way may be experiencing moral-social image concerns, whereby they might be thinking through the past context to develop an explanation for their behaviour, which they perceive to reflect badly upon them in some way. Here, offenders may try to develop an understanding of their actions, possibly by taking into account the events leading up to what happened, such as prior instances of harmony or conflict with their present relational partner

(Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Stein et al., 1997). However, when the past context is re-narrated over time, it may indicate a coming to terms with one's wrongdoing; as offenders may have developed explanations for their behaviour, and thus may feel that they can explain their wrongdoing in a way that reduces their feelings of shame and concerns of social devaluation from others (Pleasants, 2021; Sznycer et al., 2016; Wilson & Gilbert, 2008).

Of course, this discussion of findings is somewhat speculative (despite being guided by findings from Chapters 3 and 4), as the present research did not identify the mechanism by which past contextual narration may increase threat initially but reduce feelings of shame over time. It seems that past contextual narration did not reduce shame via self-compassion, which is what had been theorized. However, self-compassion was not assessed in Study 5.1 (which found that past contextualisation reduced shame over time), and in Study 5.2 there was a marginal positive relationship between past contextualisation and self-compassion (despite past contextualisation being positively associated with greater moral-social image threat). Thus, rather than there being no relationship between these variables, it could be that more time is needed for offenders to develop a contextualized understanding of their wrongdoing in a way that reduces shame via transforming it (and the associated moral-social image concerns) into self-compassionate explanations. Indeed, concrete details may need to be developed *before* further abstractions needed for genuine self-forgiveness, such as learnings, can be made (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a).

Alternatively, there may be other mechanisms at play. Perhaps, at first, before the context is clearly understood, offenders may feel a sense of incoherence, struggling to make meaning and thus experiencing greater threat (Baumeister, 1991; Dimaggio & Semerari, 2004) – but with time, and re-narration, offenders may develop their understanding, or sense of narrative coherence, by forming clear explanations for their behaviour (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Pleasants, 2021; Stein et al., 1997). In turn, this may lower feelings of shame and associated concerns of social devaluation (Sznycer et al., 2016), reflective of affective adaptation (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008). Future research

should explore these potential mechanisms to further understand how and why past contextualisation may initially increase threat, but reduce shame over time.

Self-Contextualisation

Reflecting on how the wrongdoing aligns (or misaligns) with one's values, worldview or sense of self (self-contextualisation) was associated with greater defensives and self-punitiveness in Chapters 3 and 4; and was theorized to increase feelings of shame and perceptions of moral-social image threat by highlighting an incongruence between one's self-concept and behaviour (Festinger, 1957). The present findings find partial support for these predictions. Self-contextualisation appeared to increase moral-social image threat (in Study 5.1, albeit marginal) but lower offenders' feelings of shame (Study 5.1, though marginal). Self-contextualisation also seemed to lower guilt by increasing the belief that personality is fixed and unchangeable (Study 5.2). This finding that self-contextualisation seemed to lower shame/guilt was contradictory to predictions, however it might still explain why self-contextualisation was associated with defensiveness in Chapters 3 and 4. That is, reduced shame/guilt may indicate offenders' engaging in a defensive process of shame/guilt avoidance, and this may have occurred in cases where offenders believe they are incapable of change and, hence, their shame and guilt are irreparable (Cibich et al., 2016; Fischer & Exline, 2010).

Furthermore, reflecting on how the wrongdoing relates to one's self concept while holding the belief that one is incapable of change seems to increase psychological threats to moral-social identity (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008) – as offenders may feel they are inherently bad or flawed people; 'doomed' forever (Lilgendahl et al., 2013; Maruna, 2001). This may also lead offenders to feel (as found in Study 5.1) that they are a victim to their circumstances in which they have no control (Maruna, 2001). Subsequently, offenders psychological need for agency and control over their actions may be threatened (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015), leading offenders to experience cycles of rumination (indicative of self-punitiveness) or attempts at self-exoneration (Wenzel et al., 2020). Here, offenders may state their actions *were* in alignment with their authentic self and values and they have nothing to apologize for. Thus, leading to a reduction in guilt and greater restoration of

self-acceptance via the deflection of responsibility and avoidance of shame/guilt (i.e., pseudo self-forgiveness; Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996; Cancino-Montecinos et al., 2020; Griffin et al., 2016; King, 2023; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a).

Self-Distancing

Narrating from a distanced, bigger picture perspective (self-distancing) appears to downregulate feelings of guilt, shame, self-anger and moral-social image threat. This aligns with a large body of work from Kross and Ayduk (2017, for a review) that shows considering a distanced and bigger picture perspective when reflecting on distressing or emotional events may be a useful emotion regulation tool, and extends these findings to the self-conscious emotions. To my knowledge, only two studies have examined self-distancing for self-conscious emotions, but have found no effects. In one study, participants simultaneously self-distanced and self-immersed themselves (i.e., imagined a fly-on-the-wall perspective and analyzed the reasons underlying feelings), which may have counteracted the effects of self-distancing (Katzir & Eyal, 2013). In the other study, participants reflected on a recent time they experienced shame-related anger as a victim, rather than offender (e.g., insulted by others; Ding & Qian, 2020). The present research provides initial evidence that, in the case of offenders' narrating an interpersonal wrongdoing, self-distanced narration might benefit offenders who struggle with chronic or excessive guilt/shame (Fischer & Exline, 2010), or have higher baseline distress (Kross & Ayduk, 2009; Kross et al., 2012; Penner et al., 2016), since self-distancing was associated with less defensiveness and self-condemnation in Chapters 3 and 4. Given these relationships were correlational, this finding could alternatively indicate that individuals who are already low in self-punitiveness/defensiveness tend to narrate in a self-distanced way, and this, in turn, helps to downregulate self-conscious emotions further.

In Chapter 2, I inquired whether self-distancing from functional emotions of guilt and shame may become problematic for offenders and lead to moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999). Interestingly, the present chapter found that self-distancing also seemed to reduce self-perceived victimhood in offenders – which may explain why it was negatively associated with defensiveness

and self-condemnation in Chapters 3 and 4 (Thai et al., 2024; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014). This suggests that while this type of narration may down-regulate functional emotions such as guilt and shame (and the associated moral-social image threats), it may do so in a way that does not let offenders off the hook. This aligns with prior research that finds narrative self-distancing can lead to constructive self-reflection in situations of relational conflict (Ayduk & Kross, 2010a, 2010b; Grossmann et al., 2021; Huynh et al., 2016). However, it is important to note that the present sample reflects individuals who self-selected as offenders and were interested in reflecting and writing about their wrongdoing in the first place. Thus, it would be interesting for future research to explore how self-distancing as a narrative technique may function for individuals who may be less willing to accept responsibility, or who may start off with more defensiveness to begin with (Thai et al., 2024).

Regarding the mechanism by which self-distancing may achieve the downregulation of self-conscious emotions, it seems that self-distancing did not reduce these emotions via perspective-taking, as it was theorized. Instead, Study 5.2 indicated that adopting a bigger picture viewpoint (self-distancing) may provide a more self-compassionate perspective (Neff, 2011), rather than affording offenders to take the perspective of the victim (as I had conceptualized perspective-taking). Thus, reflecting on the bigger picture may lower self-conscious emotions in a way that also lowers offenders' self-condemnation (Woodyatt et al., 2017b); possibly by helping offenders adopt a kinder, more constructive viewpoint (Fischer & Exline, 2006, 2010) that considers it is natural to, at times, make mistakes (Neff, 2003, 2011), in turn reducing excessive self-criticism associated with high levels of shame (Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Mróz & Sornat, 2023; Neff & Germer, 2013).

Redemption

It was theorized that creating a narrative of personal growth via drawing learnings or new insights (redemptive narration) would promote acknowledgement of guilt and shame via increasing offenders' growth-oriented thinking. The present findings found that redemption did seem to increase feelings of shame and guilt in Study 5.2 (but not in Study 5.1), and it did so differentially via different mechanisms. It appears that redemptive narration led to greater feelings of guilt by increasing beliefs that one is malleable and can change. Learnings are rooted in an acknowledgement of wrong, but they can also detail pragmatic ways to act differently in the future. Thus, redemption may facilitate responsibility taking and guilt acknowledgement by promoting beliefs that one *can* change. Some research suggests that individuals who have growth-oriented mindsets are more likely to narrate with redemptive characteristics (Lilgendahl et al., 2013; Mansfield et al., 2015). Thus, this poses the question of whether redemption may afford offenders' growth-oriented thinking (which can, in turn, promote guilt-acknowledgement), or whether individuals who tend to adopt this mindset may naturally identify growth-oriented learnings when narrating their hardships (McAdams, 2006).

In addition, redemption seemed to lead to greater shame by increasing narrators' engagement with the victim's perspective (rather than via greater growth-oriented thinking). Here, offenders may think about how their actions have impacted victims to draw relevant learnings that will prevent them from repeating the same mistakes (Okimoto & Wenzel, 2014), and this process may increase shame. As previously stated, increased shame may not be problematic at first but may instead signify shame-acknowledgement, which is an essential component of genuine self-forgiveness and healthy shame management (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Fischer & Exliner, 2010; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014).

Furthermore, redemptive narration seemed to lead to greater empathic concern towards the victim (in Study 5.1), which may explain why redemptive narration has been found to lead to greater willingness to reconcile (see Chapter 4; Rotella et al., 2015). Here, learnings may restore offenders' self-trust that they *can* act in alignment with their values next time, which may facilitate

genuine self-forgiveness and make them more willing to apologize and make amends (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). In the context of romantic relationships, prior research has failed to find a link between offenders repeated redemptive narration and changes in their self-reported trait-level empathy (Blackie & McLean, 2022). These mixed findings could indicate that redemptive re-narration might increase state, but not trait, empathy over time.

Finally, lower levels of resentment towards the victim seemed to lead to greater engagement in redemptive narration, and there was a trend of empathy also leading to more redemption (though this effect did not reach significance; Study 5.1). This suggest that having less resentment towards, and more empathy for, the victim could explain part of what motivates individuals to take responsibility (Riek, 2010) and engage in the moral learning required for genuine self-forgiveness and interpersonal reconciliation (Graham et al., 2017; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). This provides further evidence that distress tolerance (i.e., emotion regulation skills) may be an important part of offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes (Gilbert & Woodyatt, 2017). Developing emotion regulation skills (e.g., emotional literacy, radical acceptance, cognitive reappraisal) can help to (a) reduce emotional avoidance, (b) regulate feelings of shame and other-oriented anger and (c) are argued as a necessary precursor to developing the virtuous skill of learning from failure (Elison et al., 2014; Pop et al., 2025; Roberton et al., 2012; Stichter, 2020). Thus, being able to regulate emotions and tolerate distress might be a vital skill that allows offenders to lower feelings of resentment, sit with feelings of shame and guilt, and subsequently draw learnings from their wrongdoing.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the present chapter facilitated an initial exploration of the direction of effects between narration and emotion (i.e., Study 5.1), caution must ensue when interpreting these findings; these analyses were secondary and on correlational data, thus limit our ability to make causal inferences. Even theoretically, questions of causality regarding the emotional processing function of narration are complex, thus it is unclear what ordering of variables make the most sense for tests of mediation (Wiedermann & Von Eye, 2015). That is, does narration lead to emotion via self-compassion,

perspective-taking or growth-oriented thinking? Or, does emotion lead to narration (and so on)? Perhaps this ordering may even vary between different narrative and emotion types, combinations or sequences. Determining the exact causal ordering of the emotional processing aspects of narration is thus difficult, and this conceptual challenge may explain why there is a gap in the empirical literature (Habermas, 2019). Indeed, while narration may lead to the processing of emotions, narration may also simply highlight offenders' current thoughts and feelings.

In a similar vein, while the present study found relationships between narration and emotion types, it is unclear whether increases (or decreases) in emotion/threat reflects a healthy acknowledgement and working through of them, or an overwhelming excess (or avoidance). Of course, the present chapter reflects secondary analyses on data from Chapters 3 and 4, which found associations between narration and self-forgiveness processes. Thus, I have been guided by these findings in interpreting the present results. Nonetheless, it seems it would be fruitful for future research to use experimental paradigms to examine whether narration functions as an emotional processing tool in the context of offenders' "working through" guilt for self-forgiveness, with this question as the primary research goal.

Furthermore, the present research finds evidence for relationships between narration and emotion, however emotions were examined in isolation from (and without controlling for the effects of) one another. This means these findings may reflect combinations of emotion types that have been unaccounted for. Thus, future research may benefit from examining combinations of emotion to explore more nuanced or complex experiences of emotion (Berrios et al., 2015), including their interaction with narration (and re-narration) following wrongdoing – particularly since some evidence suggests (a) offenders may feel a multitude of emotions concurrently (Boden & Eatough, 2020), (b) combinations of emotion may have differential effects on offenders' self-forgiveness processes (e.g., shame-free guilt versus guilt-free shame; Silfver, 2007) and (c) offenders may vacillate between different emotions in response to failed attempts at coping with shame and guilt (Elison et al., 2014; Woodyatt et al., 2025).

Finally, the present studies examined relationships between self-narration and emotion where narration occurred as a solitary task. However, social contexts will likely change whether, and to what degree, offenders experience beneficial effects of narration on emotion. Indeed, narrating to others is a common way that individuals regulate their emotions (Fischer & Manstead, 2016; Rimé, 2009), and responses from others can (a) promote (or hinder) shame-acknowledge (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013b) and (b) alter how effective strategies such as venting may be (Parlamis, 2012).

Conclusion

The present chapter advances our theoretical understanding of how distinct narrative types are associated with different emotional states in self-selected offenders following a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. These findings provide support for Habermas' (2019) proposal that narration and re-narration may be implicated in the emotional processing of emotional events. In some cases, narration seems to downregulate offenders' feelings of shame, guilt, self-anger and moral-social image threat, but in other instances it seems to lead to greater acknowledgement of shame and guilt, and increased empathy for the victim. In this way, narration and re-narration may have differential effects on offenders' "working through" of guilt and shame, which is an important part of their genuine self-forgiveness processes (Fischer & Exline, 2010; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a, 2014).

CHAPTER 6.

General Discussion

In this thesis, I investigated how self-selected offenders naturally use narration (and re-narration) to story a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. Specifically, I explored (a) what narrative types offenders naturally employ when storying a recent interpersonal wrongdoing, (b) how identified narrative types may lead to, or be implicated in, offenders' self-forgiveness processes and (c) what emotional processing function(s) narration may serve, including the mechanisms that may underpin these processes. To answer these questions, I first took an inductive, and critically deductive, qualitative approach to identify the different narrative types present in offenders' stories of a recent interpersonal wrongdoing. I then employed quantitative and longitudinal methods to further corroborate the conceptual distinction of identified narrative types, which went hand in hand with (a) the development of a quantitative scale to assess offenders' narration (the Interpersonal Offender Narrative Meaning Making Scale; IONS), and (b) an exploration of how offenders' narration develops over time in relation to their differentiated self-forgiveness processes (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). These findings were then extended to an experimental paradigm to establish whether narration has a causal effect on offenders' self-forgiveness processes, before, finally, secondary analyses were conducted to explore the emotional processing functions of narration. Together, findings from this bottom-up, mixed methods approach have advanced our theoretical and conceptual understanding of the role of narration in offenders' self-forgiveness processes.

In this final chapter, I will bring together the findings from each chapter to discuss the conceptual and theoretical framework for how identified narrative types of past contextualisation, self-contextualisation, self-distancing and redemption may be implicated in offenders' self-forgiveness processes soon after an interpersonal wrongdoing, including how narration may reflect part of the "work" required for offenders' *genuine* self-forgiveness (i.e., the restoration of moral integrity without downplaying guilt). I will also discuss the limitations of these findings together with directions for future research and implications for researchers studying self-forgiveness and

narrative processes, and therapists working with clients who may be struggling with self-forgiveness or interpersonal reconciliation.

What Narrative Types Do Offenders Naturally Use to Story a Recent Interpersonal Wrongdoing?

The present thesis identified four differentiated types of narration present in offenders' stories of a recent interpersonal wrongdoing, each of which could be self-identified by offenders (Study 3.3) and observed by third-party raters (Study 3.1 and 3.2). First, offenders tended to highlight the context surrounding their wrongdoing act, such as their larger personal history, the events leading up to what happened or the emotional/relational dynamics between themselves and the other person. This information was typically used to provide contextual explanations that link past events or experiences to one's present behaviour (e.g., *I have a bad habit of drinking quite heavily until I blackout and get mean. I said some really mean things that I don't remember;* past contextualisation). Second, offenders used context to make links between how their present behaviour reflects who they are (or who they want to be), including how the wrongdoing aligns (or misaligns) with their values (e.g., *I don't want to treat him like that. My drinking problem is not healthy;* self-contextualisation). Third, some offenders reflected on the bigger picture perspective, abstracting further than the event itself to consider the broader implications of their actions (e.g., *I thought I was not hurting anyone else with my drinking, but I hurt the person I love most in the world;* self-distancing). Finally, some offenders transformed the wrongdoing from a bad event into a positive learning; acknowledging responsibility for harm and identifying new insights such as ways to act differently next time (e.g., *I am not going to drink ever again*[13]; redemption).

Prominence and Stability of Contextual Explanations

Of these narrative types, the provision of contextual explanations seems to be the most predominant part of offenders' wrongdoing stories. In Chapter 2, most stories included some degree of past contextualisation, and for some offenders, this backstory made up a large portion of their narrative (Schütz & Baumeister, 1999). Unlike other identified narrative types, which typically

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[13] *Note.* These quotes were taken verbatim from a participant's narrative in Study 3.3

increased over time, offenders' self-reported use of past contextualisation remained stable over time (Study 3.3), and this was also observed by third-parties (Study 3.2). This suggests that descriptions of the backstory or emotional/relational dynamics between parties may be the "base" of offenders' stories. Indeed, according to theories of narrative meaning making (Bruner, 1990) and autobiographical memory (Nelson & Fivush, 2020), explanations that make links between contextual factors and present experiences are considered foundational to the formation of narrative and autobiographical memory alike. In this way, past contextualisation may provide the context surrounding what happened, which may serve as the foundational building blocks from which offenders frame their stories.

In addition to providing the foundation for one's narrative, contextual explanations may innately arise in response to feelings of psychological threat. In Chapter 5, secondary analyses indicated a positive relationship between past contextualisation and threats to offenders' moral-social identity (Study 5.2). As previously stated throughout this thesis, following interpersonal wrongdoing, offenders experience threats to their psychological need for moral integrity and social belonging (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). This may increase offenders' psychological distress and create the need for causal coherence, whereby context is used to explain how preceding experiences have caused one's present behaviour (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Stein et al., 1997). In this way, providing contextual explanations may simply reflect an innate and automatic reaction in offenders, whereby perceptions of threat may trigger the provision of contextual explanations. In turn, these explanations may serve to develop causal coherence that makes one's story understandable (Bruner, 1990; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Stein et al., 1997), and re-positions offenders as individuals with moral integrity (Maruna, 2001; Maruna & Copes, 2005). Thus, past contextualisation may be a natural and common type of narration used by offenders to create their story and provide causal explanations for their behaviour in the face of psychological threats.

However, providing causal explanations, in order to develop coherence and understanding, can look like (and perhaps have similar effects of) justifying and excusing one's behaviour. In Chapter 2, it seemed that many offenders used the past context to explore the reasons behind their

actions – at times, vacillating between responsibility taking and defensiveness, or between feelings of remorse and empathy and those of anger and resentment. From an observer's perspective, this type of narration tends to be appraised as offenders' justifying and excusing their behaviour (Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002) – particularly if offenders re-narrate their explanations with greater detail over time (Study 3.2). However, the present research found no link between offenders' self-ratings of past contextualisation and their defensive processes; suggesting that offenders may not intend to excuse or justify their behaviour when providing explanations, or they may not realize this type of narration is perceived as (and may serve the function of) excusing their actions (Pleasants, 2021). Thus, rather than necessarily implying defensiveness, contextual explanations may serve different functions; to excuse one's behaviour (as noted in prior research), or to understand, and make sense of, how or why one transgressed.

Abstracted Narration That Develops Over Time

In addition to providing contextual explanations, offenders also make links between their wrongdoing and their sense of self (self-contextualisation), take a bigger picture view that considers the implications of their behaviour (self-distancing) and identify new insights or learning from their behaviour (redemption). These types of narration reflect more abstracted types of thinking, and were found to increase over time in offenders' self-ratings (Study 3.3) and observers' appraisals of narration (Study 3.2). This suggests that abstraction requires time. According to construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), the passing of time affords greater psychological distance from an event because the emotions (and the event itself) typically begin to decline in importance or salience. In turn, abstract thinking becomes easier as individuals tend to naturally shift from describing concrete details to thinking about *why* certain events occurred or their broader meaning (i.e., abstraction). Indeed, a study by Habermas and Berger (2011) found that when events are narrated three months after they occur, narrators tend to incorporate more distancing, closure and abstractions (such as bigger picture learnings) compared to when they are narrated within the week they occur. The present research finds further support for this notion in the specific context of

interpersonal wrongdoings, suggesting that, with time, offenders tend to engage in more abstracted thinking about their wrongdoing.

Narrative Processes That May Benefit Offenders' "Working Through" of Guilt

In this thesis, I have argued that self-narration may be part of the cognitive effort, or "work", required for offenders to "work through" their responsibility and feelings of guilt to achieve *genuine* self-forgiveness (Fischer & Exline, 2006; Holmgren, 1998; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). I have employed the differentiated self-forgiveness processes scale (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a) to differentiate between narration that may benefit processes of genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, and narration implicated in less adaptive processes such as pseudo self-forgiveness (i.e., restoring self-acceptance via responding defensively and rejecting responsibility) or self-punitiveness (i.e., excessive self-blame and self-condemnation). With this in mind, what narrative processes may benefit offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes?

Drawing Learnings May Promote Shame/Guilt Acknowledgement

Redemptive narration, which involves drawing learnings that transform the wrongdoing from a negative event into a story of personal growth, may be a key part of what it means for offenders to "work through" feelings of guilt (and shame) following wrongdoing. At all three timepoints in Study 3.3, redemption was positively associated with offenders' genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile. These effects were then replicated in an experimental paradigm in Study 4; instructing offenders to narrate with redemptive techniques led to more genuine self-forgiveness/willingness to reconcile than narrating concrete details alone, and when controlling for the effects of other narrative types in post-hoc analyses. The robust associations of redemption with offenders' genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile processes suggest that drawing learnings may help offenders acknowledge their guilt, accept accountability, think through the reasons for their actions and subsequently transform these feelings of guilt and shame into a greater desire to make amends (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Holmgren, 1998; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). But *how* does redemption achieve this? The present research finds initial support for two mechanisms.

First, the reflective processes inherent in redemptive narration may involve offenders taking the perspective of the victim, and this may initially increase feelings of shame (Study 5.2). For offenders to identify relevant ways to act differently next time, they may first need to take the victim's perspective (also referred to as *cognitive empathy*; Davis, 1983) and reflect on how their actions have hurt the other person. Indeed, within-person increases in redemption were prospectively associated with increases in offenders' self-reported empathy in Study 5.1. Reflecting on the wrongdoing from the victim's perspective, or partaking in the process of cognitive empathy, may increase feelings of shame, as the hurt offenders have caused is brought to the surface. However, this may indicate a healthy engagement in shame-acknowledgement; whereby offenders are acknowledging their responsibility for harm and the associated impact of their behaviour on the victim (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014) and using this thinking to identify ways to act differently in the future. Thus, redemptive narration may promote shame-acknowledgement via perspective-taking, which increases offenders' motivation to restore their moral self by facing their shame and doing right (genuine self-forgiveness) to make amends with the victim (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Baumeister et al., 1994; de Hooge et al., 2010, 2018; Gilbert, 1997; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a).

Second, redemptive narration and the implicated learning and pathways to change may promote growth-oriented thinking, which may initially increase feelings of guilt (Study 5.2). If offenders identify pragmatic ways to act differently next time, this may increase the belief that they are capable of personal growth (Pasupathi et al., 2015). In turn, offenders may feel guilty, but rather than avoid or suppress these feelings, they may acknowledge their guilt and take accountability for their actions. That is, through learnings, the associated feelings of shame and guilt may feel reparable (Cibich et al., 2016), and this could potentially restore offenders' feelings of self-efficacy and control (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Shnabel & Nadler, 2015) and thus increase their self-trust that they *can* act differently in the future (Pasupathi et al., 2015; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). In this way, feelings of guilt are acknowledged, and offenders' self-trust is restored, which can motivate offenders' desire to make amends (Baumeister et al., 1995; Riek, 2010). Thus, redemptive

narration may promote the acknowledgement of guilt and acceptance of responsibility because identifying clear ways to act differently in the future may restore self-trust and agency, which in turn may promote offenders' willingness to reconcile.

But What About the "Integration" of Guilt and Shame?

It has been theorized that offenders who effectively "work through" their wrongdoing may, at first, experience elevated feelings of shame and guilt that then reduce over time (Hall & Fincham, 2008). One can think of this as a dialectical process of "integration" into a moral self-concept, where an acknowledgement of, facing and acting upon, shame and guilt means those feelings become less intense. In the present studies, redemptive narration led to an initial acknowledgement of guilt and shame (Study 5.2), but there was no evidence of redemption leading to a prospective decrease in shame/guilt over time (Study 5.1). Thus, the present research has not captured a process of shame/guilt "integration", and indeed it has been argued that this process may be difficult to capture (Hall & Fincham, 2008). Given the causal effect (and consistent associations) of redemptive narration on offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes, why then did the present study fail to capture an affective adaptation of guilt and shame?

According to Hall and Fincham (2005) genuine self-forgiveness involves the transformation from self-condemning thoughts and feelings into self-compassionate ones that restore self-acceptance while holding onto the acceptance of responsibility. It seems that redemptive narration allows offenders to take responsibility and acknowledge feelings of guilt and shame, but does it promote the restoration of positive self-regard? Some prior research has found a prospective link between increases in offenders' redemptive narration and greater feelings of self-compassion over time (Mansfield et al., 2015), but other research has not (Blackie & McLean, 2022). In the present studies, the relationship between redemption and genuine self-forgiveness implies that redemption may transform self-condemning thoughts and feelings into self-compassionate ones, however there was no relationship between redemption and self-compassion in Study 5.2. Furthermore, the genuine self-forgiveness subscale used in this research has been critiqued for failing to capture offenders' restoration of positive self-regard – instead, focusing largely on offenders' responsibility-

taking alongside their re-affirmation of values (Griffin et al., 2018). Thus, from the present research it is unclear whether redemption may transform self-condemning thoughts and feelings into self-compassionate ones, and likewise whether redemption may facilitate the integration of shame and guilt into positive self-regard.

Could Contextual Explanations Reduce Shame via Affective Adaptation?

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that providing contextual explanations for one's wrongdoing (past contextualisation) may benefit offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes by transforming feelings of shame into a self-compassionate understanding of *why* one transgressed. Indeed, some scholars have proposed that contextualisation could be an adaptive coping strategy in the context of moral injury by helping to reduce excessive feelings of shame, guilt, anger or fear (Griffin et al., 2021). This aligns with Narrative Therapy's proposition that exploring how contextual factors contribute to one's present problems (i.e., via the externalization technique) may reduce excessive feelings of shame and make discussing, and taking responsibility for, problem behaviour less threatening (Augusta-Scott & Brown, 2007; Duvall & Berés, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, contextual explanations may promote the development of causal coherence (Bruner, 1990; Habermas & Bluck, 2000), whereby offenders may use explanations to develop a clear understanding for what caused their behaviour. In turn, greater understanding can lead to *affective adaptation*, whereby emotional reactivity upon recalling the event is reduced (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008). In this way, could past contextualisation be responsible for the "integration" or healthy decline of shame that is theorized to reflect a coming to terms with one's wrongdoing (Hall & Fincham, 2005)?

The present thesis finds some initial support for this proposition. Increases in past contextualisation over time prospectively reduced feelings of self-reported shame (Study 5.1); and in the same dataset from which these secondary analyses were conducted, offenders' initial and within-person increases in past contextualisation were associated with their genuine self-forgiveness processes (Study 3.3). Together, these findings suggest that offenders' who re-narrated explanations for their wrongdoing prospectively experienced less shame over time. This may indicate an adaptive

lessening of shame (rather than shame avoidance) since past contextualisation was also positively associated with offenders' genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile (and less defensiveness at time 1). In this way, could past contextualisation lead to a healthy "integration" or "working through" of shame by helping offenders develop a clear explanation (and understanding) of their wrongdoing, in turn, reducing shame and guilt via affective adaptation (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008)?

It seems that developing explanations *alone* may not lead to genuine self-forgiveness and a healthy coming to terms with one's shame. In Study 4, there was no causal link between instructing offenders to develop contextual explanations and their genuine self-forgiveness. However, there was a positive association between offenders' self-ratings of past contextualisation and their genuine self-forgiveness/willingness to reconcile processes. These findings suggest that simply explaining one's actions is not enough to achieve genuine self-forgiveness nor a reduction in shame (Study 5.2), but rather contextual explanations may be *implicated* in these processes. That is, if contextual explanations are the building blocks from which offenders can abstract (Baumeister & Newman, 1994), offenders may do this in different ways, whereby some offenders may use this context to draw the learnings *required* for genuine self-forgiveness (e.g., "*I felt resentment because [...] and this led me to lash out. I need to get better at regulating my anger. Next time I will communicate my feelings before they bubble up*"). Of course, this is a largely speculative proposition based on correlational data, and more research is needed to test this proposition (and likewise explore if and when contextual explanations might maladaptively reduce shame and let offenders 'off the hook' as per moral disengagement theory; Bandura, 1999).

Narration That is Implicated in Offenders' Defensive Processes

While there was no evidence that narration led to offenders' defensive or self-punitiveness processes, offenders' natural use of self-contextualisation was associated with *both* self-punitiveness and defensiveness (Study 3.3 and Study 4); and with increased moral image threat and self-perceived victimhood (Study 5.1), as well as reduced shame and guilt (Study 5.1 and 5.2). To respond with self-punitiveness *and* defensiveness seems contradictory given that self-punitiveness

implies excessive responsibility-taking and defensiveness implies responsibility-avoidance (Cornish et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2018; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a, 2013b). With this in mind, what is it about naturally self-contextualizing one's wrongdoing (i.e., linking it to one's identity or values) that might explain this contradiction?

One explanation could be that offenders who readily think about how the wrongdoing relates to their sense of self reflect on their wrongdoing from a point of self-immersion. Taking a self-focus soon after committing interpersonal wrongdoing – when psychological threats to moral identity and social belonging are likely at their peak (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; Tangney et al., 2007) – may exacerbate feelings of threat by calling attention to an incongruence between one's actions and values (reflecting a process of cognitive dissonance; Festinger, 1957). From a self-immersed viewpoint, offenders may struggle to see the bigger picture and thus may get "caught up" in recounting the concrete details of what happened (Kross & Ayduk, 2017); possibly ruminating on their actions and perceived lack of control, or reliving the emotional aspects of the wrongdoing (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; vanOyen-Witvliet et al., 2011) – all of which may lead to overwhelming feelings of emotional distress.

In turn, these overwhelming feelings may lead offenders to respond defensively, in an attempt to protect themselves from the discomfort of these moral-social threats. In this way, offenders may engage in cognitive dissonance reduction by doubling down on their behaviour as congruent with the self (Cancino-Montecinos et al., 2020; King, 2023). For example, offenders may state that they *did* act in alignment with their values because the other person *deserved* it, or they may state that this is just the way they *are* and thus they cannot be responsible for actions outside of their control – in both cases, offenders may feel like victims (Study 5.2). Here, if offenders affirm their actions as congruent with their self-concept and values, this can restore feelings of integrity and self-acceptance (Cohen & Sherman, 2014) and thus absolve offenders of their guilt via self-exoneration or *pseudo* self-forgiveness (Cornish et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2018; Wenzel et al., 2020; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Interestingly, some scholars have suggested that offenders who respond to their transgressions with *both* self-punitiveness and defensiveness may,

deep down, know they have done wrong, but respond defensively to deflect feelings of shame and guilt (Griffin et al., 2016). Thus, offenders who narrate from a place of self-immersion and emotional overwhelm may naturally make links between their wrongdoing and identity to affirm the self, deflect feelings of shame and guilt, and in turn defend against moral-social threats by rejecting responsibility; this process may indicate a 'pseudo' value affirmation.

The Differential Effects of Self-Contextualising: Value Affirmation VS 'Pseudo' Value Affirmation

Interestingly, it seems that self-contextualisation may function differently when instructed compared to when it arises naturally. Being *instructed* to make links between one's wrongdoing and sense of self or values (self-contextualisation) led to reductions in offenders' defensiveness (Study 4). Perhaps being asked by an external source to self-contextualise may trigger a different type of thinking than that which arises naturally in offenders soon after wrongdoing. Some research suggests that instructed value affirmation tasks can restore moral integrity (or self-worth) by prompting individuals to purposefully think about how their behaviour reflects their values. Here, these questions may lead offenders to identify, on their own accord, that they *do* have parts of themselves that uphold integrity and moral goodness (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). In turn, this can restore offenders' psychological need for moral integrity, lowering perceptions of threat and thus reducing their defensiveness – aligning with findings from value affirmation tasks (Wenzel et al., 2020; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014; Woodyatt et al., 2017b).

But why might instructing offenders to affirm their self and values lead to a different outcome when compared to offenders' who naturally engage in this process without prompting? It seems that instructed value affirmation can promote greater psychological distance to the event one is reflecting on (indeed, Study 4 found that when offenders were instructed to self-contextualise, they also incorporated greater self-distanced narration than the control; Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Harber et al., 2011). From a self-distanced perspective, offenders may have the cognitive resources (afforded by reduced distress) to reflect on how their wrongdoing relates to their values and sense of self in a constructive (rather than defensive) way (Kross & Ayduk, 2017). Offenders may realize

that they are *not* their behaviour – but rather, their behaviour did not align with who they are and what they stand for, thus leading to value affirmation and a genuine restoration of moral needs (Woodyatt et al., 2017b). In comparison (as previously discussed), natural self-affirmations may reflect offenders narrating from a place of self-immersion and overwhelming feelings of psychological distress. Thus, their primary motivation may be to reduce distress and defend against discomfort; assimilating their wrongdoing to their values but bypassing engagement in constructive self-reflection, thus engaging in 'pseudo' value-affirmation to deflect feelings of shame and guilt and let oneself 'off the hook' (Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996; Cancino-Montecinos et al., 2020; King, 2023; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a).

Self-Distanced Narration as a Tool for Distress Tolerance and Constructive Self-Reflection

One tool that might help offenders to manage excessive feelings of psychological distress is self-distancing. Self-distanced narration, as conceptualized in this thesis, involves taking a step back to reflect on the unbiased or bigger picture perspective. The present thesis found that high levels of self-distanced narration were associated with reductions in moral-social image threat, guilt, shame, self-anger and self-perceptions of victimhood (Study 5.1 and 5.2) – and in the same dataset self-distancing was associated with reductions in self-punitiveness and defensiveness (Study 3.3, T1, T2, T3; Study 4). While self-distanced narration was not associated with offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes per se, these findings indicate that this type of abstracted narration might help to downregulate distressing or intolerable feelings of shame and guilt in a way that reduces (rather than increases) moral disengagement (Grossmann et al., 2021; Kross & Ayduk, 2017). Thus, suggesting the possibility of an alternative positive type of self-distancing in the moral repair context that differs from Bandura's (1999) idea of self-distancing as moral disengagement.

Interestingly, it seems that taking a step back to reflect on the bigger picture perspective may downregulate feelings of shame, guilt and psychological threats to moral-social identity by increasing offenders' self-compassion (Study 5.2). To explain the self-reflective benefits of self-distancing, Kross and colleagues (2015) use the analogy of giving advice to a friend (i.e., it feels easy to comment from a balanced perspective because you have distance from the event, and hence

are not caught up in the emotional details). This explanation for self-distancing aligns with the instructions used to teach self-compassion in clinical contexts (see Saulsman et al., 2017), thus suggests that self-distancing may prompt some degree of self-compassion. Some research has found that self-compassion can reduce feelings of self-punitiveness (but not defensiveness) following a transgression, however this pathway to restored self-acceptance does not increase genuine self-forgiveness nor willingness to reconcile (Woodyatt et al., 2017a), which partly aligns with the present findings.

While these findings suggest self-distancing may help downregulate intolerable feelings of shame and guilt, which are associated with self-punitive or defensive processes, *instructing* individuals to narrate with self-distancing did not reduce self-punitiveness nor defensiveness (Study 4). This aligns with prior findings that indicate instructed self-distancing may not reduce self-conscious emotions in particular (Katzir & Eyal, 2013). Why might this be? The self-distancing instructions in Study 4 asked offenders to adopt temporal distance and think about the "bigger picture" or "unbiased" view. However, these prompts may have been perceived as condescending or threatening by some (possibly by implying the offenders' current perspective was flawed or biased), and thus have failed to promote distanced reflections. Interestingly, in the study by Katzir and Eyal, their methods may have also failed to prompt self-distancing; participants were asked to focus on the reasons underlying their feelings whilst reflecting on their interpersonal wrongdoing by "watching the experience unfold as if it were happening again to the 'distant you'" (p., 1090). Here, self-distancing may not have been effective as participants were instructed to self-distance and self-immerse themselves concurrently.

Together, these findings raise an interesting question about what methods may prompt offenders' self-distanced reflections following interpersonal wrongdoings. There is some evidence to suggest that self-distanced reflections, even following relational conflict, can be prompted using Kross and Ayduk's methods. Grossmann and colleagues (2021) found that training individuals to recall relational conflict from a fly-on-the-wall perspective, and then write about the incident using third-person pronouns, led to greater wisdom and constructive thinking around relational conflict

(i.e., humility, perspective-taking and desire for conflict resolution). In this research, individuals were asked to use these paired-techniques to reflect on conflict for multiple different events over the space of one week and one month. These findings suggest that instructed self-distancing may not necessarily be beneficial in the first instance, but rather participants may need practice in adopting this viewpoint.

Based on these findings, it would be interesting for future research to explore whether this type of self-distancing training could benefit offenders' "working through" processes. Specifically, could these techniques lead to greater self-distanced narration, as measured by the IONS? And may training individuals in self-distanced reflections help to downregulate self-conscious emotions in an adaptive way? Furthermore, it would be interesting for future research to explore whether self-distanced reflections (and narration) could also downregulate feelings of hostility and other-oriented anger (resentment) in offenders – particularly since it seemed that low levels of resentment prospectively led to greater redemptive narration over time (Study 5.1), and prior studies have found self-distancing beneficial in reducing feelings of anger in other contexts (Ding & Qian, 2020; Kross & Ayduk, 2017; Pasupathi et al., 2017). If self-distancing functions as a tool for distress tolerance and constructive self-reflection, this may provide a less intensive way for offenders to engage emotion regulation skills, which can take time to develop but are needed to cope with feelings of resentment (Roberton et al., 2012; Pop et al., 2025) and shame (Elison et al., 2014; Leith & Baumeister, 1998), and are proposed as imperative to learning from failure (Stichter, 2020). Thus, while self-distancing did not lead to genuine self-forgiveness in the present study, it seems it could be a useful tool in helping offenders to get there.

Summary of the Theoretical Framework for Offenders' Narration

In sum, when offenders construct their story of wrongdoing by identifying redemptive learnings that (a) consider the victim's perspective and (b) are rooted in the belief that one is capable of change, this can promote the acknowledgement of shame and guilt. In turn, this may prospectively increase offenders' feelings of empathy, and lead to greater genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile with the victim – suggesting that this process of redemptive narration

may reflect part of the "work" required when "working through" wrongdoing for self-forgiveness (Holmgren, 1998; Fischer & Exline, 2006; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Furthermore, it seems that providing contextual explanations for behaviour may allow self-understanding that reduces feelings of shame over time, and these causal explanations may form part of the moral learning required for genuine self-forgiveness. In contrast, if offenders describe how their actions align (or misalign) with their values from a self-immersed perspective, the resultant shame/guilt and moral image threat, together with the mindset that one is incapable of change, may lead to defensiveness processes. It seems that directly instructing offenders to reflect on how their wrongdoing relates to their values or worldview may have the opposite effects – promoting a self-distanced viewpoint and reducing defensiveness, possibly by restoring one's need for moral-integrity; akin to value affirmation (e.g., Woodyatt et al., 2017b). Finally, taking a bigger picture or self-distanced view when narrating is associated with the downregulation of guilt, shame and moral-social identity threats, and it may do this by increasing feelings of self-compassion. While the limitations of this research will be discussed in more detail below, it should be cautioned here already that these conclusions from the present findings are mainly based on correlational relationships (albeit in part prospective) and more research is needed to establish the causal effects of these processes.

Implications

Based on these findings, it seems that it may be useful for friends, family, therapists and AI chatbots to encourage those who have harmed others to transform their wrongdoing narrative from a negative event into a positive learning (redemptive narration). This may help to increase offenders' feelings of empathy towards the victim and promote a greater willingness to reconcile and make amends. Similarly, it seems that helping offenders to empathize and take the perspective of the victim may equally encourage redemptive narration, and the subsequent acknowledgement of guilt and shame. The present research suggests this type of redemptive narration can be prompted with the simple question stems used in Chapter 4. While this process of narration can be done in private without input from others, it may also be done in interaction with others, for example with a therapist. Or, it may even be useful for therapists to ask their clients to first write about their shame

and guilt as a precursor to therapeutic intervention (Pennebaker, 2010). This could be particularly useful when clients are uncomfortable with sharing their feelings of shame and guilt openly (Pennebaker, 2010; Tangney & Salovey, 2010), or for individuals who are experiencing higher levels of psychological distress surrounding the wrongdoing (Kross & Ayduk, 2009; Kross et al., 2012; Mordechay et al., 2019).

To facilitate learning and complement the process of redemption, it may also be helpful to gain clarity about the event by contextualizing the wrongdoing and developing an understanding of what led to it, or what prior or underpinning issues it reflects. Such understanding may also help to reduce the intensity of emotions of guilt and shame. This suggests that, while prior research tends to categorize explanations as excuses, justifications or attempts at downplaying wrong (Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002), this may not always be the case; contextual explanations may be *needed* for offenders to draw relevant learnings that are rooted in past experiences. Furthermore, in cases where offenders may be experiencing excessive feelings of shame, guilt, self-anger, moral-social image concerns or self-perceived victimhood, promoting a self-distanced viewpoint that considers the bigger picture may help to downregulate these feelings, and similarly it could reduce feelings of excessive self-punishment or psychological defensiveness (though further research is needed to confirm the causal effects of this finding). Two techniques that may help offenders to achieve this distance are imagining oneself as a fly-on-the wall when reflecting on the experience, and/or using second-person pronouns (e.g., *you*) when speaking about one's thoughts and feelings (Kross & Ayduk, 2017). These techniques may be particularly useful if offenders are trained to develop them (see Grossmann et al., 2021).

Another implication from these findings (Study 5.1), is that reducing feelings of resentment may be needed before encouraging engagement in redemptive narration. Narrating one's wrongdoing story from a place of other-oriented anger, such as resentment, can exacerbate these feelings – akin to brooding or ruminative thoughts that are associated with a "hot" reliving of emotion (vanOyen-Witvliet et al., 2011) – thus may act as a barrier to offenders' accessing

cognitive empathy and drawing growth-oriented learnings. There may also be cases in which there are mental health or wellbeing barriers that clinicians need to consider before attempting to work with a client's narrative. For example, it seems that depression and enduring feelings of resentment toward others are highly positively correlated, which may suggest that during episodes of depression, individuals may struggle more to release feelings of resentment (Mullet et al., 2005).

Finally, while there is good evidence that value affirmation can help a process of genuine self-forgiveness (e.g., Woodyatt et al., 2017b), the present findings caution that some attempts to link wrongdoing with values may reflect a defensive process of 'pseudo' value affirmation – particularly if offenders are reflecting in an unprompted way and from a place of self-immersion and emotional overwhelm, or are experiencing guilt avoidance, self-perceived victimhood or beliefs that they are fixed and cannot change (Study 5.1 and 5.2). It is unclear whether beliefs of being 'fixed' or 'unchangeable' may drive a pseudo value affirmation, or whether they arise due to self-immersion and heightened psychological distress. In either case, fighting misinformation surrounding the pervasiveness and impermanence of moral character may be important to offenders' ability to manage heightened distress, take responsibility and accept their behaviour violated their own values and the values of their relationship. Interestingly, instructing offenders to make links between their values and wrongdoing may have the opposite effect (i.e., reducing defensiveness), possibly by increasing self-distanced reflection and making this process of self-reflection less threatening. These findings point to the value of writing tasks such as value affirmation (Woodyatt et al., 2017a).

Limitations and Future Directions

While the present research has advanced our theoretical and conceptual understanding of how narration (and re-narration) may play a role in offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes, there are, of course, several limitations to the present findings; these limitations provide fruitful directions for future research.

First, most of the present findings are correlational and thus need to be considered with caution. Any suggested causal ordering of variables when discussing the results of this thesis are

theoretical propositions based upon the present correlational data and the existing literature. They are, at times, speculative and require further examination. Furthermore, while the present research aimed to capture whether narration may have different causal functions based on offenders' *re-narrations*, the present research did not capture an adaptive "integration" of guilt/shame that is theoretically expected following adaptive "working through" for genuine self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a). Capturing processes that reflect transformative changes in thoughts and feelings may be a particularly challenging task for the field (Hall & Fincham, 2008). It could be useful for research to employ prospective studies with longer timeframes and conduct more experimental studies that would help to clarify causal mechanisms of this change.

Second, narrative types were examined in isolation from one another to gain conceptual clarity. However, narrative variables were positively correlated with one another (see Chapter 5) and attempts to manipulate use of specific narrative types led offenders to employ multiple types (see Chapter 4). Future research could examine combinations (or sequences) of narration, as these combinations may have differential effects on self-forgiveness processes. For example, if offenders are rehashing the backstory (past contextualisation) or fixating on how their wrongdoing misaligns (or aligns) with their values (self-contextualisation) without engaging in other types of thinking (self-distancing and redemption), could this lead to self-punitive or defensive responses? Indeed, in Chapter 2, some stories were created using only contextualisation. In these cases, it seemed individuals were stuck on some aspect of the past context such as their feelings of self-anger, resentment or a past instance of victimization. In contrast, narrators who appeared to use contextualisation alongside responsibility taking and learning, seemed to use the context to work through their guilt and understand their actions. Thus, examining combinations or sequences of narration may provide further nuance to the study of offenders' narration.

Third, the present sample were self-selected offenders who chose to participate in a study that involved writing (and re-writing) about a wrongdoing they committed. These individuals may have thus taken the first step towards genuine self-forgiveness by acknowledging their role as

offender, and hence may have had lower defensiveness and higher guilt/empathy to begin with (Thai et al., 2024). Indeed, the average self-ratings of defensiveness across studies indicated participants tended to 'somewhat disagree' with items reflecting defensive processes. Thus, it is possible the narrative functions outlined in the present thesis may change in samples who are more defensive to begin with. For example, self-distanced narration did not lead to moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999), but rather downregulated defensiveness and self-perceptions of victimhood. However, could bigger picture abstraction hinder genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile if it occurs too soon (c.f., Wenzel & Coughlin, 2020 for victims' thinking), particularly if offenders are high in defensiveness or the wrongdoing is severe?

Fourth, the present sample were largely white participants from the United States, which limits the generalizability of these findings. In the context of narrative research, personal narratives are psychosocial entities (McAdams, 1996), wherein different cultures (and sub-cultures) have different norms (i.e., master narratives; Hammack, 2008; McLean et al., 2018) for how different types of stories are narrated (e.g., Blackie et al., 2023; Najibzadeh et al., 2019; Synnes & Malterud, 2019). In the case of the present research, the culture of the United States is individualistic and tends to prefer story arcs that are redemptive (McAdams, 2006). In contrast, Chinese culture, which is collectivist, values Confucian teachings such as social harmony, attention to others and moral correctness, so it is likely that redemptive narration following wrongdoing would function (and perhaps look) differently within a Chinese culture (Zhao et al., 2024) – or within other diverse cultures (e.g., Hughes, 2013). Given that redemptive narration appears to be a key part of offenders' genuine self-forgiveness processes (at least for individuals from the United States), future research could examine (a) whether these effects are replicable in cultures sharing the master narrative of redemption, and (b) how different master narratives may influence offenders' narration, including what narrative types may reflect "working through" for genuine self-forgiveness.

Fifth, the present research examined offenders' independent narrative/self-forgiveness trajectory, but individuals exist in social worlds. Certainly, a primary function of narration is to narrate to, or with, others (Rimé, 2009), and listeners can play a role in the emotion regulation of

narration (Fioretti et al., 2017; Parlamis, 2012). For example, when the stories we tell are actively listened to, and validated by others, they become more detailed and coherent and can become more salient in memory (Pasupathi, 2001, 2003). Similarly, when we feel accepted by others, we tend to explicitly acknowledge feelings of guilt (Wenzel et al., 2020); and respectful responses from others can encourage shame-acknowledgement (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013b). On the other hand, responses from others can have negative effects. For example, victims may not 'buy' offenders' newfound story, particularly if the wrongdoing is on the back of cumulative instances of conflict (Thai et al., 2024), or they may challenge its redemptive meaning. Thus, a large part of what it means to "work through" wrongdoing may also involve others, rather than this "work" existing as solely an independent or individualistic task (Woodyatt et al., 2022). Future research could investigate the role of narrative types and content within processes of co-reflection between offenders and victims (Wenzel et al., 2023).

Finally, the present research did not measure trait-based characteristics. However, baseline levels of humility, or shame/guilt-proneness, could change the ease by which offenders may "work through" their guilt. Indeed, humility may be *needed* for offenders to make honest and non-defensive assessments of their actions (Fischer & Exline, 2006, 2010; Holmgren, 1998; Onody et al., 2020; Wenzel et al., 2012) – which may be a precursor to drawing redemptive learnings. Furthermore, individuals who have experienced chronic or pervasive relational trauma (particularly in childhood) may be more prone to experiencing feelings of shame and guilt (Flach & Cariola, 2025; Tangney et al., 2007). For this reason, this population may particularly struggle with the "work" required to transform feelings of shame and guilt into self-compassion and positive self-regard (Gilbert et al., 2011; Long et al., 2010; Tangney et al., 2005). Thus, future research could investigate the moderating effects of individual traits or chronic conditions on the function of narration on self-forgiveness processes.

Further Outlook

Expanding the Methodological Toolbox

This chapter has highlighted a multitude of third variables that may alter the function of offenders' narration in "working through" their wrongdoing, including how these processes may change over time. Indeed, narration provides a reflexive tool for self-reflection, with different combinations or sequences of narration likely having differential effects on the emotional processing of offenders. Furthermore, offenders may vacillate between different emotions, thoughts and coping strategies when engaging in "working through" or narrating their wrongdoing (Study 2.1; Griffin et al., 2016; Woodyatt et al., 2025). Thus, these interrelationships between variables are likely bidirectional and nuanced, which calls for more sophisticated quantitative methods. For example, latent trajectory analyses or latent profile analyses (Muthén & Muthén, 2000) may allow researchers to examine dynamic interactions between multiple variables (including prospective changes in variables), or capture nuanced clusters of responding on a multitude of relevant variables such as narrative combinations, narrative sequences, listeners responses and trait-based characteristics.

Moreover, it may be particularly fruitful for future research to consider employing *prospective* paradigms that recruit participants before a wrongdoing has occurred to capture offenders' immediately once wrongdoing does occur (e.g., Wenzel et al., 2010). This may help researchers to capture offenders' very first narration and re-narration attempts, which could provide a better assessment of genuine *re*-narration. It may additionally be useful to employ experience sampling methods (Conner et al., 2009) to determine how often offenders narrate, to whom they narrate, when and if they receive input from others, and subsequently how their narratives, and corresponding emotional processing, may either change and evolve over time, or stagnate and remain constant.

Furthermore, although offenders were observed to use self-distanced language via spontaneous shifts between first-person and third-person language in Chapter 2 (i.e., referring to the self as *you* rather than *I* – which has also been identified by prior research; Ayduk & Kross, 2010a), a self-report measure of such language did not contribute reliably to a measure of self-distanced narration. For this reason, it may be useful for future research to employ automated tools, such as

Linguistic Word Enquiry Count (LIWC; Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010), to more accurately capture spontaneous shifts in self-distanced (versus self-immersed) language that seem to arise in offenders' naturalistic narration – and may function as an effortless way to downregulate the distress of psychological threats (Orvell et al., 2019; Orvell et al., 2021).

Expanding the Theoretical Focus: Can Narration Lead to Character Growth?

The present thesis was built upon theory and evidence from self-forgiveness, narrative meaning making and narrative identity. In narrative identity research, it is argued that the story one tells can influence the person that one becomes (e.g., McAdams, 1985, 2001; McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Pals, 2006; Mansfield et al., 2010). While the present research did not examine whether narration led to greater development of personality or character, it did explore how narration may lead to the development of self-forgiveness. It would be interesting to see whether instructing offenders to use redemptive narration as a tool in "working through" interpersonal conflict in future instances may have flow on effects to the development of character traits that are associated (or likely associated) with genuine self-forgiveness processes, such as humility (Onody et al., 2021), wisdom (Mansfield et al., 2010), self-compassion (Mansfield et al., 2015) and emotional maturity (Pals, 2006). While some prior research has found no causal effects of repeated redemptive narration following interpersonal wrongdoing on traits of empathy, humility and compassion (Blackie & McLean, 2022), it may be that, rather than leading to trait-level change, narration and re-narration may lead to state-level change, and perhaps consistent changes in state-level variables, such as self-forgiveness, may eventually have flow on effects to character development. An area for future research may be to join the literature on self-forgiveness with that of narrative identity, to explore how single-event wrongdoing narratives that lead to differential self-forgiveness states (i.e., defensiveness, self-punitiveness, genuine self-forgiveness; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013a) may contribute to narrative identity and personality development over time. Combining these areas of research may provide more rigorous exploration of self-narration in the context of transgressions and indicate how offenders' self-narration of wrongdoing narratives may be consolidated into memory and contribute to the development of narrative identity, adversarial growth and potential personality change over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present thesis has contributed to the body of knowledge on offenders' self-forgiveness and narrative processes following interpersonal wrongdoing. Specifically, it has extended research on offenders' narration from significant wrongdoings in the distant past to offenders' narration soon after a recent, interpersonal wrongdoing; identified four conceptually distinct ways offenders' naturally narrate; developed a quantitative tool that can be used by third-parties, or narrators themselves, to assess offenders' naturalistic narration and change in narration; explored prospective correlational relationships between narration and emotion, including the mechanisms that may underpin these processes; evidenced a causal relationship between redemptive narration and offenders' genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile processes; and thereby furthered our understanding of (1) the implications of the identified narrative types for offenders' differentiated self-forgiveness processes and (2) part of the "work" required for offenders' to "work through" wrongdoing and move towards *genuine* self-forgiveness.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Narrative Stimuli (Study 3.1)

Appendix B: Initial Exploratory Factor Analysis Results (Study 3.1)

Appendix C: Pilot Study Methods and Results (Used to Collect Narrative Stimuli for Study 3.2)

Appendix D: Narrative Stimuli (Study 3.2)

Appendix E: Results of Interactions Between Time x Within-Person Fluctuation in Narration on Observers' Appraisals of Offenders' Self-Forgiveness Processes (Study 3.2)

Appendix F: Monte Carlo Simulation in R: Code and Output for Power Analysis (Study 3.3)

Appendix G: Pre-Registered Hypotheses and Results of Interactions Between Time x Within-Person Fluctuation in Narration on Offenders' Self-Forgiveness Processes (Study 3.3)

Appendix H: Writing Instructions for All Narrative Conditions (Study 4)

Appendix I: Tailored Writing Instructions for Each Experimental Narrative Condition (Study 4)

Appendix J: RI-CLPM Comparative Model Fit Statistics (Study 5.1)

Appendix A:

Narrative Stimuli (Study 3.1)

Condition 1

A job position had opened up at work for a senior manager and I wanted the job. There was one other person that was qualified for the position – my friend Lisa – and she was also being considered. I really want this job not only for the recognition but also for the large pay increase that would come along with it. Nothing would make me happier than getting this promotion. So, Lisa and I were both individually interviewed on Thursday. The interview was long and intense. After the interviews, Lisa did not speak to me for the rest of the day. We were told we would have to wait until Sunday for the results and the weekend was difficult because of that wait. We both worked on Sunday and we were each called into the boss's office. I was told that I did not have the job and I was completely and totally devastated. Lisa came into my office shortly after, and gave me a look of pity. I got so angry and before I could even think about it, I grabbed a nearby glass of water and threw it in her face. She wiped her face and looked at me, totally shocked, as she left my office. It was infuriating.

Condition 2

Yesterday, I didn't mean to give my partner the cold shoulder after waking up and working in the living room when she came in there to sit in the kitchen with me. I was all worked up because I had a nightmare and I had a cold and I also still felt hurt about the talk that her and I had last night about how I said that she doesn't believe in me when it comes to being successful in my career even though I've had some success in the past but at another business. Her and I ended up getting into a heated argument that day too while sitting on the couch and it was over something so stupid but she was more mad at me because she felt like I was giving her the cold shoulder because of what she said last night. She explained to me that she does believe in me but says I don't work enough or take enough action so she can't believe in me. I explained that we've been going through a lot taking care of our baby daughter and she's been sick most of this year and so I've had to stay up all

the time to take care of our daughter and our dog and my partner and work at the same time on my career. She couldn't seem to understand that for some reason and it was really annoying and frustrating and she ended up having an anxiety attack followed by throwing a glass at the wall and yelling. I cried and pleaded for her to stop. I begged and begged and she stopped at some point but it felt it was so wrong for her to do that. I even cleaned the bloody mess up. I can't stop thinking about it and the talk on the couch too plus all those times I walked the dog. It's so messed up.

Condition 3

It was yesterday, I was over at my parent's house having coffee in the morning. Then my dad's friend Greg came over to join us. I wasn't aware he would be coming and I wasn't happy about it. I had done some work for Greg in the past and he didn't pay me for it (he had an issue with the irrigation in his garden and I had gone to his house and fixed the problem). Anyway, Greg arrived and I got him a coffee and as I was setting the coffee down in front of him I said "that will be $50", which is the exact amount he owed me for the work I had done. Well, Greg didn't like that one bit, he didn't think he owed me anything, and got up and left. Well, dad was angry at me, because Greg was a close friend of his and I offended him, so now dad is mad at me, along with Greg, even though I feel I have done nothing wrong. You'd expect to be paid for the work you have done.

Condition 4

I was picking up my stepsister from the airport and her flight was really early. I didn't get there on time so she ended up being late for a meeting since she couldn't leave the airport. She was super annoyed that I wasn't there when she landed, even though I didn't feel like it was my fault and I would have been there on time if the flight had been on time and not early. I think she's still mad at me about it since her boyfriend wasn't very happy about it. Her boss wasn't very happy about her being late to the work meeting and missing some things either. You could tell that she was obviously angry about this too. You could feel her anger when she eventually got in the car. During

the car trip to her work, she would not stop talking about the fact I was late. I kept explaining that it was not my fault the flight was early but she would not listen so I ended up yelling at her. I need to make sure I'm more careful next time. Even though it wasn't my fault the flight was early, I don't want to be THAT person who ends up yelling. It's not who I want to be.

Condition 5

I ended up yelling at my partner because I was frustrated by how much we always see his family. In particular, they always make last minute plans and then expect us to just follow them. The latest was for my partner's birthday, when they decided, THAT DAY, that we should go to their house and celebrate over dinner. At the time, I was angry because I had just gotten back from the farmer's markets with a bunch of supplies and food that we were going to cook at our house. We both love the fresh produce from the farmer's markets but hate going there to shop because we get stressed and overwhelmed being in large crowds. With this in mind, I went while my partner was sleeping as a nice gesture (and surprise) for his birthday. By the time I got back, he'd woken up and already accepted his parents' invitation to dinner (without my consent). As he told me, I felt a rush of anger and said some awful things. I couldn't help myself – I felt so resentful that we always do what he decides. I know it's hard because he really values time with family, whereas I can't understand how anyone could enjoy so much family time! I guess it makes sense, since I lost contact with my family years ago now. Anyway, although I was angry at first, I have now realized that it wasn't fair for me to explode like that – especially since it was his birthday. I need to find a way to express my feelings without getting so angry…it isn't easy, but I'd like to find a way to control my anger so I don't hurt him like that again.

Table 29

Initial Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for the IONS (Study 3.1)

IONS item	Factor Loading						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Factor 1: Redemption							
it feels like a story of personal growth	**.95**	.09	.00	-.05	-.03	.11	-.17
there was a shift from the bad event to a positive learning	**.91**	-.02	-.03	.06	-.00	.01	-.10
it seems that the narrator wants to change for the better	**.85**	-.12	-.04	-.01	.02	-.12	.34
the narrator acknowledged that what they did was wrong	.85	-.04	.01	-.10	.12	-.07	.32
the narrator identified a lesson or insight	**.80**	-.05	-.07	.11	-.02	-.09	.14
it feels like a story of redemption (e.g., the narrator made amends for their wrongdoing and showed they are a good person	.79	.02	.09	-.07	.02	.25	-.22
the story only focused on what went wrong in the past (R)	-.47	-.01	.16	-.01	.21	.18	.40
the story was focused on the abstract, larger scheme of things	.30	-.06	.08	.22	.10	-.03	-.09
the narrator discusses the event as a problem to be solved	.30	.11	-.08	.21	-.12	.21	.07
Factor 2: Past Contextualisation							
the events leading up to what happened have been described	-.08	**.90**	.02	-.08	.05	-.09	.03
the narrator has provided a backstory to what happened	-.06	**.87**	.04	-.03	-.00	-.13	-.11
the narrator has described the relationship dynamics between themselves and the person they've wronged	.08	**.75**	.01	.09	.21	-.01	.01
I understand the context around what happened	-.06	.74	-.04	.03	-.07	-.19	-.07

the narrator has described the emotional dynamics around what happened	.09	**.72**	-.02	.01	.25	-.06	.16

Factor 3: Self-Distancing

the narrator has gained distance from the event	-.01	-.02	**1.05**	-.06	.13	.12	.07
the narrator has stepped back from the event	.05	.01	.88	-.03	.03	.05	.09
the narrator reflects on the bigger picture	.31	.02	**.38**	.21	-.11	-.02	.05

Factor 4: Self-Contextualisation

the narrator has thought about how what happened relates to their values	.01	-.10	-.05	**.93**	-.08	.07	-.09
the narrator has linked what happened to their sense of self (e.g., who they are as a person)	.11	.02	-.05	**.62**	.18	.06	.04
the narrator has provided an explanation for their actions	-.08	.32	-.02	.58	-.05	.06	-.07
the narrator has considered what the event means for the future	.22	.11	.05	.47	.15	.02	.00

Factor 5: Self-Distancing #2

the narrator has a self-centred perspective of what happened (e.g., egocentric) (R)	.01	.05	.03	-.05	.65	.16	.04
the narrator discusses the event with a lot of emotion (R)	.21	.21	-.01	.06	.52	.01	.19
the narrator speaks rationally about what happened	-.06	.28	.08	.15	-.49	.07	.02
the narrator takes an unbiased perspective	.17	.01	.15	-.07	**-.45**	.07	.02
the narrator uses a lot of "I" statements (R)	-.09	.09	.16	.09	.40	-.04	.19

Factor 6: Self-Distancing #3

the narrator seems stuck in what happened (R)	-.26	-.13	-.23	.10	.29	.46	.22
the narrator sometimes speaks of themselves in the second/third person (you/he/she)	.02	-.27	.16	.14	.06	.44	.06
the story was focused on the specific concrete details of what happened (R)	-.03	.37	-.11	-.14	-.13	.41	.25

Factor 7: Self-Distancing #4

the narrator speaks in a negative way about: themselves --- their behaviour	.18	.01	.03	-.05	.12	.07	.22

Note. The extraction method was maximum-likelihood factoring with an oblique (Promax with Kaiser Normalization) rotation. The final retained 13-items[14] are in bold. Reverse-scored items are denoted with an (R). Before each item, participants saw the following question stem: 'When reading the story, I see that…'.

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[14] The final scale was 14-items – however, one additional item is not reported here because it was added after the initial exploratory factor analysis (Study 2a) following concerns about the face validity of the self-contextualisation subscale

Appendix C:

Pilot Study Methods and Results

(***Used to Collect Narrative Stimuli for Study 3.2***)

Objective

The aim of the pilot study was to collect genuine narratives from self-selected offenders across three time points, and use these narratives as stimuli for Study 3.2. Collecting genuine stories from self-selected offenders meant the IONS could be tested on stimuli with high ecological validity (i.e., narratives written by self-selected offenders themselves). Similar to Chapter 1, crowd-sourced offenders were required to have committed an interpersonal wrongdoing within the last 24-hours to capture narration in the early stages of processing the event.

Method

Procedure

Participants wrote about a non-trivial interpersonal wrongdoing (i.e., an event that caused some degree of hurt, harm or conflict) that they, or someone else, felt they had committed within the last 24-hours. Before writing, eligibility was confirmed: (a) had they experienced an interpersonal wrongdoing within the last 24-hours, (b) were they the offender (or both offender and victim), and (c) did they pass 4 out of 5 English proficiency questions (since participants had to write narratives in English). If deemed eligible, participants were instructed to: *Please take a moment to think about the transgression. Now describe the story back to yourself, as if you were thinking to yourself, writing in a journal or speaking with a friend, in as much detail as you think is relevant.* The survey's next button was hidden for 2-minutes to prevent participants moving forward and encourage narratives of longer length. Participants then reported the wrongdoing characteristics (i.e., type of transgression, relationship between victim and offender, appraised transgression severity), and wrote about their wrongdoing two more times (24-hours after one another). Upon re-writing, instructions were slightly modified: *Please take a moment to think about the transgression, and whether your thinking about what happened has changed in any way. Now describe the story*

back to yourself, as if you were thinking to yourself, writing in a journal or speaking with a friend, in as much detail as you think is relevant. The study was not pre-registered.

Participants

Participants were invited to participate via an advertisement on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Fourty participants self-selected to participate in the study. Of these 40 participants, two exited on their own accord and 26 were excluded for failing eligibility criteria (16 failed to select they had experienced an interpersonal wrongdoing; seven selected they were the victim (not the offender); three failed the English proficiency test). This left 12 participants who completed Time 1. One participant was then excluded from follow-up surveys for reporting a transgression that was too minor (wearing headphones and not hearing a stranger hand them the wallet they had dropped) and four participants failed to complete Time 2 and/or 3. This left a final sample of 7 participants aged 34 – 62 (M_{age} = 46.43, SD_{age} = 10.98; 2 females, 5 males). Ethical approval was granted from the University ethics committee (6443) and participants received a small honorarium for their time.

Results

Wrongdoing Characteristics

On average, participants reported wrongdoings of moderate severity (M = 4.43, SD = 1.51; where a rating of 1 indicated 'not very severe' and a rating of 7 indicated 'very severe'), reflecting three insults, one betrayal of trust, one act of neglect, one verbal fight or argument and one act of disrespect. These incidents were reported to be between offenders and significant others (two cases), strangers (two cases), family members (one case), close friends (one case) or work colleagues (one case), and six of seven participants reported they identified as sole offenders (one reported feeling they were both victim and offender).

Appendix D:

Narrative Stimuli (Study 3.2)

Note. These stimuli were collected in the pilot study reported in Appendix C

Condition 1

Time 1

When my friend drove me home yesterday night, she made a bad sharp left turn. I laughed at her and said Stupid Asian Old Woman never know how to drive. My friend was very upset about my racism and cut me off afterwards.

Time 2

I realized the way what I said to my colleague (Asian woman) was very disrespecful and hurt her feeling. It was kind of racism and sexism from her interpretation. I hope she will accept my apology later.

Time 3

I feel bad about my attitude toward my colleague and should realize my underlying bias toward other races. Today, I was ashamed of working with her in the office but she accepted my apology. She told me many American misunderstand Asian and dislike Chinese after pandemic. Probably, I need to change my perception to them.

Condition 2

Time 1

Yesterday I got rid of something that was important to my wife but something that she hasn't used in a very long time and may or may not notice it's even gone. I had asked her to go through her things on a repeated basis and she didn't and we were running out of space in our storage. Because she wouldn't do it, I got rid of some things even though I know they were important to her because I just got so frustrated and wanted things cleared out. She does not yet know this but it will make her very mad that I hurt her by getting rid of these things.

Time 2

My thinking about it really hasn't changed in any way. I still understand why I did it because I was frustrated, but I still also feel slightly guilty about it because I know it was the wrong approach to take in the heat of the moment and she is going to be upset that I threw out things that were important to her, particularly behind her back. I think it's going to lead to a huge fight if she ever discovers that they're gone. In my head I just try not to think about it and let it bother me but I know it's probably going to come to a point where I have to address it head on in the future.

Time 3

Nothing has changed about how I am thinking about it. I'm still in the same place I was yesterday. I haven't discussed it with her and she hasn't found out, but I know it'll be a big issue when it is realized. In the meantime, I'm just continuing on trying not to think about things and keep it out of my mind while I'm busy with other things.

Condition 3

Time 1

My good friend thinks that I should show my husband more respect . She even got me a book called Love and Respect to read. I showed my husband disrespect by rolling my eyes at him. I talked back at him in a disrespectful way. I was told not to go to store and spend more than $25 and I spent $48.32 . I didn't care that I was going to get in big trouble and he would be angry at me. I deliberately spent more just to be like you don't tell me what to do .

Time 2

My husband Tom isn't happy with his job and likes to complain and tell me all about it since I am a housewife. He has been working home remotely for two years. Usually if he doesn't have work to do he than will try to get me to listen him rant and rave about politics groceries boys Covid school and so forth for a very long time. I started getting pissed off and didn't want to listen . I wanted to go run errands and go grocery shopping. I stood there all pissy and rolled my eyes which I don't think he saw. He knew I was pissed and told me to just go and not to spend more than $25 because it wasn't grocery main shopping and we had a lot of bills. I didn't care or listen and spent over $42 on purpose . I didn't care about him or the bills or what he was trying to do for our family. He is the breadwinner and main provider of all the house. I didn't care that he was going to lecture me when I got home and that he would be upset. I wanted to show him a complete show of disrespect as if I was giving him the finger. I always tell my one friend almost everything that happens and a few others most things . They all agree that was very disrespectful and we need to work on our relationship.

Time 3

I am thinking of how I showed my husband tom disrespect by eye rolling and showing non verbal cues that I was angry and pissed off. If he doesn't have work to do which is more and more the case, Anyways, he will go on and on and talk about politics and school and Covid and just keep talking. I

have no interest in most of what he says. We were talking about groceries and he told me only to spend $25 because it wasn't the normal time to go grocery shopping. I was pissed off at him and tom knew it and told me to stop acting pissy and go away. I went to the store and purposely spent more than I was supposed to over $40. Now that I am looking back over last and realized how disrespectful I was to him. At the time he really made me angry and I felt he deserved it. I wrote to my good friends. One of them says I should read a book called love and respect.

Condition 4

Time 1

Today, I had to go to the grocery store for a couple of things, and as usual, I was wearing a mask. Not very many people here are still wearing one, so I kind of stick out. I have had several people over the last few months make comments to me, and I have let them go. Today, a man with son about 10 years old walked by and as they passed, the man started telling his son how stupid older people are to be scared of the virus. Today was not the day, and I reacted. I backed him down, made him apologize, and I did it in front of his kid. I have felt horrible all day. I haven't done anything like that in 30 years or more, and it was wrong.

Time 2

A younger guy was walking on the same aisle in Kroger that I was on. His son, who was 10 or 12, was with him. I was wearing a mask, as usual, and as they walked past me the man started telling the kid how stupid I was for wearing a mask against the flu. He said it in a way that made sure I could hear him. I have had enough of this nonsense, and I confronted him and backed him down. The bad part is that I did it in front of his kid. Not really like me.

Time 3

I was in Kroger, wearing a mask as usual. A man in his 30s was shopping with his son, about 10 or 12. When they went by me, the man started telling his son how stupid people were for wearing a mask when the virus was just like the flu. He said it in a way so as to make sure that I could hear him. I have had enough of this foolishness, and I got in his face about it, and backed him down. The bad part is that I did it in front of his kid. No one should see his father in that situation. I'm more than a little ashamed of myself.

Condition 5

Time 1

It was something that I thought was so simple, and turned out to be so stressing. I had placed an order for lunch and was buying food for a few of the guys. I thought ordering way in advance would help that the guaranteed pick up time was guaranteed. Low and behold it wasn't, the order wasn't even getting prepared. I sat and watched as the young employees wandered around panicking because the place was full during lunch time. I then noticed the line employees not realizing the order needed to be skipped. I had to be very rude and condescending to the manager so that the order could actually be placed because as much as I didn't want the food, I had hungry employees waiting for food at the company. I felt like I was excessive with my words and I was hurtful when I should not have. I was vulgar, rude, and obscene when speaking to the manager. I tried to justify it because he was justifying the place being busy, and all I could think about was placing an order hours ago.

Time 2

What I most recall was the things I said to the manager. In my eyes, ordering a few hours ahead of time should be enough for a store that offers a guaranteed pick up to get it right. I think what pushed me over the top was the manager trying to justify why the order wasn't ready. Meanwhile I was thinking about my people waiting on food. I feel I was wrong for what I said, and how I said. Being condescending and rude was not the best manner to go about it. Hind sight allows for these thoughts but in the spur of the moment instead of someone apologizing for a mistake, justifying it can also push someone into frustration like I was.

Time 3

On the day I needed to get lunch, I decided to order for some of the guys too. Ordered well in advance just to find out that the word guarantee means nothing. Manager gave me excuses and I lost my cool. If it was just my food I probably wouldn't of minded, but I had multiple mouths to feed

that day. I feel like everyone can do a little bit better, but that scenario I did not. I can't really

change other peoples actions but I can change mine, the manager didn't deserve to be insulted just

because I wanted to stand my ground on principles.

Appendix E:

Results of Interactions Between Time x Within-Person Fluctuation in Narration on Observers' Appraisals of Offenders' Self-Forgiveness

Processes (Study 3.2)

Table 30

Linear Mixed Effects Model for Third-Party Perceptions of the Moderating Effects of Changes in Offenders' Narration Over Time on Third-Party

Perceptions of Offenders' Self-Forgiveness Processes (Study 3.2)

Predictor	GSF			SP			PSF		
	B	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*
[...]ᵃ									
Time x past context dev	.03	.05	.69	-.07	.05	-1.33	.03	.06	.51
Time x self-context dev	.02	.05	.29	.05	.06	.79	.10	.07	1.60
Time x self-distance dev	.01	.06	.13	-.00	.06	-.04	-.12	.07	-1.77
Time x redemption dev	-.00	.05	-.04	-.08	.05	-1.65	-.05	.05	-1.01

ᵃ Main effects omitted. *p <.05, ** p <.01, ***p <.001.

Monte Carlo Simulation using 'simr' and 'lme4' in R:

Power Analysis Code and Output (Study 3.3)

Code

```
id <- 1:320 # create 320 cases with id as identifier variable
pc <- 1 + rbinom(320, 6, 0.5) # create an individual-level variable,
        normal-ish distributed on scale from 1 to 7 (on Peter Green's advice)
sc <- 1 + rbinom(320, 6, 0.5)
sd <- 1 + rbinom(320, 6, 0.5)
rd <- 1 + rbinom(320, 6, 0.5)
X1 <- data.frame(id=1:320, t=1, pc=pc, sc=sc, sd=sd, rd=rd) # create
        a data matrix for Time 1
X <- extend(X1, along="t", n=3) # create three time points, duplicating
        id and m
str(X) # show data strings
b <- c(4.8, -0.18, 0.17, 0.2, 0.37, 0.01, -0.03, -0.04, 0.08) # set
        intercept and fixed effects (pc, sc, sd, rd, t*pc, t*sc, t*sd, t*rd) for
        simulated model (informed guesses)
V <- list(1.2, 0.18) # set variances for random effects (intercept, t)
        and their covariance
s <- 0.3 # set residual variance (another informed guess)
model.1 <- makeLmer(y ~ pc + sc + sd + rd + pc:t + sc:t + sd:t + rd:t
+ (1|id) + (1|t), fixef=b, VarCorr=V, sigma=s, data=X) # create
        simulated model
> power_analysis.1 <- powerSim(model.1, test=fixed("pc", method =
"t"), nsim=1000) # Perform the power analysis
b <- c(4.8, -0.18, 0.17, 0.2, 0.37, 0.01, -0.03, -0.04, 0.08) # set
intercept and fixed effects (pc, sc, sd, rd, t*pc, t*sc, t*sd, t*rd) for
simulated model (informed guesses)
V <- list(1.2, 0.18) # set variances for random effects (intercept, t)
and their covariance
s <- 0.3 # set residual variance (another informed guess)
model.1 <- makeLmer(y ~ pc + sc + sd + rd + pc:t + sc:t + sd:t + rd:t
+ (1|id) + (1|t), fixef=b, VarCorr=V, sigma=s, data=X) # create
simulated model
```

Output

```
> # Perform the power analysis w 10000 simulations
>
> power_analysis.1 <- powerSim(model.1, test=fixed("pc", method =
"t"), nsim=1000)
print(power_analysis.1)
Power for predictor 'pc', (95% confidence interval):
91.40% (89.49, 93.06)
Test: t-test with Satterthwaite degrees of freedom (package lmerTest)
Effect size for pc is -0.18
Based on 1000 simulations, (9 warnings, 0 errors)
alpha = 0.05, nrow = 960
Time elapsed: 0 h 4 m 17 s
>
> power_analysis.2 <- powerSim(model.1, test=fixed("sc", method =
"t"), nsim=1000)
print(power_analysis.2)
Power for predictor 'sc', (95% confidence interval):
89.70% (87.65, 91.51)
Test: t-test with Satterthwaite degrees of freedom (package lmerTest)
Effect size for sc is 0.17
Based on 1000 simulations, (13 warnings, 0 errors)
alpha = 0.05, nrow = 960
Time elapsed: 0 h 4 m 11 s
>
> power_analysis.3 <- powerSim(model.1, fixed("sd", method = "t"),
nsim=1000)
print(power_analysis.3)
Power for predictor 'sd', (95% confidence interval):
96.60% (95.28, 97.63)
Test: t-test with Satterthwaite degrees of freedom (package lmerTest)
Effect size for sd is 0.20
Based on 1000 simulations, (9 warnings, 0 errors)
alpha = 0.05, nrow = 960
Time elapsed: 0 h 4 m 41 s
>
```

```
> power_analysis.4 <- powerSim(model.1, fixed("rd", method = "t"),
nsim=1000)
print(power_analysis.4)
Power for predictor 'rd', (95% confidence interval):
100.0% (99.63, 100.0)
Test: t-test with Satterthwaite degrees of freedom (package lmerTest)
Effect size for rd is 0.37
Based on 1000 simulations, (11 warnings, 0 errors)
alpha = 0.05, nrow = 960
Time elapsed: 0 h 3 m 34 s
>
> power_analysis.5 <- powerSim(model.1, fixed("pc:t", method = "t"),
nsim=1000)
print(power_analysis.5)
Power for predictor 'pc:t', (95% confidence interval):
18.80% (16.42, 21.36)
Test: t-test with Satterthwaite degrees of freedom (package lmerTest)
Effect size for pc:t is 0.010
Based on 1000 simulations, (14 warnings, 0 errors)
alpha = 0.05, nrow = 960
Time elapsed: 0 h 5 m 32 s
>
> power_analysis.6 <- powerSim(model.1, fixed("sc:t", method = "t"),
nsim=1000)
print(power_analysis.6)
Power for predictor 'sc:t', (95% confidence interval):
88.30% (86.14, 90.23)
Test: t-test with Satterthwaite degrees of freedom (package lmerTest)
Effect size for sc:t is -0.030
Based on 1000 simulations, (11 warnings, 0 errors)
alpha = 0.05, nrow = 960
Time elapsed: 0 h 4 m 34 s
>
> power_analysis.7 <- powerSim(model.1, fixed("sd:t", method = "t"),
nsim=1000)
print(power_analysis.7)
```

Power for predictor 'sd:t', (95% confidence interval):

99.50% (98.84, 99.84)

Test: t-test with Satterthwaite degrees of freedom (package lmerTest)

Effect size for sd:t is -0.040

Based on 1000 simulations, (5 warnings, 0 errors)

alpha = 0.05, nrow = 960

Time elapsed: 0 h 4 m 0 s

>

> power_analysis.8 <- powerSim(model.1, fixed("rd:t", method = "t"), nsim=1000)

print(power_analysis.8)

Power for predictor 'rd:t', (95% confidence interval):

100.0% (99.63, 100.0)

Test: t-test with Satterthwaite degrees of freedom (package lmerTest)

Effect size for rd:t is 0.080

Based on 1000 simulations, (12 warnings, 0 errors)

alpha = 0.05, nrow = 960

Time elapsed: 0 h 3 m 44 s

Appendix G:

Pre-Registered Hypotheses and Results of Interactions Between Time x Offenders' Within-Person Fluctuation in Narration on Offenders' Self-Forgiveness Processes (Study 3.3)

Hypotheses

1. *Past Contextualisation*

   Systematic increases in past contextualisation over time would be associated with increases in pseudo self-forgiveness and reductions in genuine self-forgiveness and self-punitiveness over time;

2. *Self-Contextualisation*

   Systematic increases in self-contextualisation over time would be associated with greater genuine self-forgiveness and self-punitiveness;

3. *Self-Distancing*

   Systematic increases in self-distancing over time would be associated with greater increases in genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, and greater reductions in self-punitiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness;

4. *Redemption*

   Systematic increases in redemption over time would be again associated with greater increases in genuine self-forgiveness and willingness to reconcile, and greater reductions in self-punitiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness.

Results

Table 31

Linear Mixed Effects Model for the Moderating Effects of Changes in Offenders' Narration Over Time on Offenders' Self-Forgiveness

Processes (Study 3.3)

Predictor	GSF			SP			PSF			WTR		
	B	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*B*	*SE*	*t*
[…][a]												
Time x past context dev	.05	.05	.97	-.05	.05	-.92	-.03	.05	-.57	.02	.05	.46
Time x self-context dev	.03	.04	.88	.01	.05	.12	.00	.04	.04	.02	.04	.52
Time x self-distance dev	-.06	.05	-1.28	-.09	.05	-1.72	-.02	.05	-.35	-.06	.05	-1.20
Time x redemption dev	.03	.04	.83	-.02	.05	-.35	-.06	.04	-1.41	-.01	.04	-.23

[a] Main effects omitted. *p <.05, ** *p* <.01, ****p* <.001.

Appendix H:

Writing Instructions for All Narrative Conditions (Study 4)

***

You reported that you committed an interpersonal wrongdoing **in the last 48 hours.**

This may be any wrong either you, or someone else, feels you have committed against another

person **whom you know.**

The wrongdoing should be non-trivial (i.e., have caused some hurt, harm or conflict).

It could be anything whereby you, or someone else, thinks you should not have behaved in that way,

such as an act of disrespect, a betrayal of trust, infidelity, an argument, neglect, physical harm, and

so on.

Please take a moment to think about the wrongdoing

*

Below are some specific questions about your wrongdoing

Note: **it is important that you answer <u>every question</u> - and <u>do not</u> include any information**

outside of what the question asks.

Do not include any full names in the description. This will ensure that you and the information you

provide will not be identifiable at all.

In one to two sentences, describe what happened…

Appendix I:

Tailored Writing Instructions for Each Experimental Narrative Condition (Study 4)

Control Condition

When did the incident happen?

Where were you?

Who was there?

What did you do?

How did it end?

Past Contextualisation Condition

What is the backstory to what happened?

What were the events leading up to the event?

What were the relationship dynamics around what happened?

What were the emotional dynamics around what happened?

Self-Contextualisation Condition

How does what happened relate to your sense of self (e.g., who you are as a person)?

How does what happened relate to your values?

How does what happened fit with your worldview?

Self-Distancing Condition

Imagine yourself 6 months from now, how might you look back at what happened?

What is the 'bigger picture' view around what happened?

What would be the unbiased perspective of what happened?

Redemption Condition

What are the bad aspects of what happened?

Considering what happened, how could you change for the better?

What is a lesson or insight that you have gained from the incident?

How might this incident lead to personal growth for you?

Appendix J:

RI-CLPM Comparative Model Fit Statistics (Study 5.1)

Comparative model fit criteria of change in CFI ≤ -.01 and change in RMSEA ≤ .01 were used to determine which model best fit the data when compared to the default model. The stability and cross-lagged model met these criteria of change, whereas the stability model and cross-lagged models did not. Only relevant comparisons are shown here for sake of economy.

Table 32

RI-CLPM Model Fit Statistics and Comparison Between Models for Narrative Types Only (Study 5.1)

Model	χ^2 (df)	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Default	4.32 (6)	.72	1.00	.00
Stability and cross-lagged	24.11 (22)	1.10	1.00	.01
Difference	–	–	.00	.01

Table 33

RI-CLPM Model Fit Statistics and Comparison Between Models for Guilt and All Narrative Types (Study 5.1)

Model	χ^2 (df)	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Default	7.70 (10)	.77	1.00	.00
Stability and cross-lagged	38.66 (35)	1.11	1.00	.02
Difference	–	–	.00	.02[z]

[z] *Note* = all other models met criteria of change in CFI ≤ -.01 and change in RMSEA ≤ .01, thus the stability and cross-lagged models were chosen for consistency across analyses.

Table 34

RI-CLPM Model Fit Statistics and Comparison Between Models for Shame and All Narrative Types

(Study 5.1)

Model	χ^2 (df)	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Default	7.81 (10)	.78	1.00	.00
Stability and cross-lagged	30.02 (35)	.86	1.00	.00
Difference	–	–	.00	.00

Table 35

RI-CLPM Model Fit Statistics and Comparison Between Models for Self-Anger and All Narrative

Types (Study 5.1)

Model	χ^2 (df)	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Default	6.51 (10)	.65	1.00	.00
Stability and cross-lagged	38.28 (35)	1.09	.99	.01
Difference	–	–	.01	.01

Table 36

RI-CLPM Model Fit Statistics and Comparison Between Models for Empathy and All Narrative

Types (Study 5.1)

Model	χ^2 (df)	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Default	14.78 (10)	1.48	1.00	.03
Stability and cross-lagged	61.72 (35)	1.76	.99	.04
Difference	–	–	.01	.01

Table 37

RI-CLPM Model Fit Statistics and Comparison Between Models for Resentment and All Narrative

Types (Study 5.1)

Model	χ2 (df)	χ2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Default	10.25 (10)	1.02	1.00	.01
Stability and cross-lagged	39.45 (35)	1.13	.99	.02
Difference	–	–	.01	.01

Table 38

RI-CLPM Model Fit Statistics and Comparison Between Models for Moral-Social Image Threat

and All Narrative Types (Study 5.1)

Model	χ2 (df)	χ2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Default	5.73 (10)	.57	1.00	.00
Stability and cross-lagged	33.98 (35)	.97	1.00	.00
Difference	–	–	.00	.00

Table 39

RI-CLPM Model Fit Statistics and Comparison Between Models for Self-Perceived Victimhood and

All Narrative Types (Study 5.1)

Model	χ2 (df)	χ2/df	CFI	RMSEA
Default	7.46 (10)	.75	1.00	.00
Stability and cross-lagged	37.47 (35)	1.07	1.00	.01
Difference	–	–	.00	.01