

## PART I

# Situating Narrative Inquiry

In Part I there are two chapters. The first, by Stefinee Pinnegar and Gary Daynes, gives us a particular historical read of the movement to narrative inquiry, showing how, through a series of narrative turns, there are key moves toward narrative inquiry. The four turns are a change in the relationship between the researcher and the researched; a move from the use of number toward the use of words as data; a change from a focus on the general and universal toward the local and specific; and a widening in acceptance of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing. The four turns offer readers a set of terms with which to read the field historically, to read current work being published, and to consider their own genealogy and development as a narrative inquirer. Pinnegar and Daynes highlight the tensions that ensue from the significant epistemological and ontological differences between the ways in which narrative researchers continue to undertake their work. The terms Pinnegar and Daynes offer will both help narrative researchers locate themselves in relation to the four turns and help readers of narrative research understand the different ways researchers position their work within the overall field. In their chapter, they outline a challenge to narrative inquirers that is echoed throughout the handbook: “To enter conversations with the rest of our communities to develop a method—a way of talking and asking and answering and making sense—that will allow narrative to flourish in this congenial moment for stories.”

In Chapter 2, Jerry Rosiek and I offer a particular map of the field of narrative inquiry. While we realize that “any attempt to organize these divergent views into a summary representation inevitably risks short-changing one view in favor of the priorities of another,” we highlight “real differences of opinion on the epistemological, ideological, and ontological commitments of narrative inquirers as well as real differences with those who do not identify as narrative inquirers.” We argue that

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these differences “require careful attention and discussion if the field of narrative inquiry is to realize its potential for making a contribution to the study of human experience and lives.” Our chapter offers one

representation of the field of narrative inquiry that holds one aspect of narrative inquiry constant, and uses this as a point of reference from which to examine the internal and external boundaries of this area of scholarship. The map we construct, with its borders and borderlands, allows researchers to locate themselves on the landscape of narrative inquiry methodologies.

We take as the point of constancy “the observation that narrative inquirers study experience” but note

there are many philosophical treatments of the word “experience,” from Aristotle’s dualistic metaphysics in which knowledge of particulars and universals were considered separately, to early empiricist atomistic conceptions of experience, Marxist conceptions of experience distorted by ideology, behaviorist notions of stimulus and response, and post-structuralist assertions that state our experience is the product of discursive practices.

However, the view of experience that serves as “the cornerstone” of our analysis has its roots in John Dewey’s (1938) pragmatic philosophy. By doing this we “work toward clarifying differences and affinities narrative inquiry has with other areas of scholarship” with an intent

to sharpen distinctions both between narrative inquiry and other scholarly traditions as well as to sharpen distinctions within the field of narrative inquiry. Through highlighting the tensions at the boundaries with other areas of scholarship, we bring into sharper relief the differences with other areas of scholarship.

—*D. Jean Clandinin*

## CHAPTER 1

# Locating Narrative Inquiry Historically

### *Thematics in the Turn to Narrative*

Stefinee Pinnegar and J. Gary Daynes

In attempting to locate narrative inquiry historically, we begin by marking off the territory of this methodology. Ultimately this chapter is not a history of the emergence of narrative. Instead, we provide a description of how the academy opened up in a way that made space for narrative inquiry. Put another way, we are describing the creation of an environment in which narrative inquiry can flourish. Most of these changes did not come about because of pressure from narrative practitioners. Nor are they the result of competition between narrative and nonnarrative ways of inquiry, with narrative gaining the upper hand. To this day, most academic work is nonnarrative, and in many disciplines the most prominent theories, methods, and practitioners continue to do work that is based on quantitative data and positivist assumptions about cause, effect, and proof.

In this chapter, we begin by defining qualitative research and narrative inquiry. These definitions provide the reader with markers from which they can identify where they stand in relationship to narrative inquiry. Next we describe the ways in which situating oneself within a particular history of the move to narrative has been part of the structure of the presentation of narrative inquiry reports. From an analysis of examples of this phenomenon, we consider four turns researchers complete as they turn to narrative inquiry. Finally, we explicate the four turns: the attention to relationships among participants, the move to words as data, the focus on the particular, and the recognition of blurred genres of knowing.

## Marking the Territory

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In providing these definitions, we are marking the territory of narrative inquiry not at its boundaries (which was done by Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) but at its intersections. Narrative inquiry is not simply another in a cadre of qualitative research strategies. In this section, we provide not complex definitions of any of these traditions but instead highlight the relationships and distinctions that mark the territory of narrative inquiry. We do this by considering qualitative research and narrative inquiry.

### Qualitative Research

The first marking is the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) begin their first *Handbook of Qualitative Research* with the following definition:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter . . . qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use of and collection of a variety of empirical materials . . . that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives. (p. 2)

As this definition reveals, the distinction between the two research paradigms rests not on the decision to use numbers or not, since researchers from either of these paradigms might employ numbers. Instead, the assumptions underlying the research distinguish one from the other (although in terms of practice the boundary is porous, particularly in terms of specific methods). Quantitative research rests exclusively in positivistic and post-positivistic assumptions. In contrast, qualitative research forms around assumptions about interpretation and human action. Another difference is the purpose of the research. Qualitative researchers are interested not in prediction and control but in understanding.

### Narrative Inquiry

Qualitative researchers often use words in their analysis, and they often collect or construct stories about those they are studying. But there are territorial markings that distinguish narrative researchers. These boundaries do not, necessarily, match up with a distinction between the two research paradigms.

What narrative researchers hold in common is the study of stories or narratives or descriptions of a series of events. These researchers usually embrace the assumption that the story is one if not the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience. But what counts as stories, the kinds of stories they choose to study, or the

methods they use for study vary. Within the framework of narrative research, researchers use a number of research approaches, strategies, and methods (Lieblich, Mashiach-Tuval, & Zilber, 1998).

Some researchers use the metaphor of story to articulate learning from research generally. From this perspective, metanarrative, historiography, and critical analysis can be seen as potential methods. Some narrative researchers employ sociolinguistic analytic tools to analyze qualitative data collected as field notes or interviews and either piece together or develop a generic narrative of experience that generalizes as a “typical” narrative such as learning or everyday experience within a culture (Josselson, 1996; Polanyi, 1989). Others use conceptions from narrative such as *plotline*, *characterization*, *theme*, *role*, and other literary terms to analyze and make general sense of experience. Other researchers explore narrative as fundamental to cognition (Schank, 1990). Narrative researchers might also study the impact of particular narratives on experience. Again, these researchers may use surveys or measurement strategies to calculate and represent the impact of narratives (Green, Strange, & Brock, 2002). Other narrative researchers may code narratives, translate the codes to numbers, and use statistical analysis, or they may analyze the factors involved during a storytelling event as a predictor of some phenomenon of interest (Pasupathi, 2003).

Narrative researchers use narrative in some way in their research. Narrative inquiry embraces narrative as both the method and phenomena of study. Through the attention to methods for analyzing and understanding stories lived and told, it can be connected and placed under the label of qualitative research methodology. Narrative inquiry begins in experience as expressed in lived and told stories. The method and the inquiry always have experiential starting points that are informed by and intertwined with theoretical literature that informs either the methodology or an understanding of the experiences with which the inquirer began (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In essence, narrative inquiry involves the reconstruction of a person’s experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

## Conceptions of the Historical Emergence of Narrative Inquiry

Through an exploration of the emergence of narrative inquiry, we found comprehensive outlines of this development existing already. However, within these histories we identified four themes that are clear indicators of movement toward narrative inquiry both in the research lives of individuals and in the disciplines. Thus, in this section we outline our exploration of the history, the identification of the four themes, and finally a careful consideration of each theme.

The original direction of this chapter was a historical charting of the emergence of narrative inquiry within and across the various disciplines of the human sciences. As we read this literature (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Martin, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986), it became apparent that there

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already existed several historic accounts. Polkinghorne (1988) provides a careful, scholarly, detailed analysis and theoretical defense of narrative knowing. Bruner (1986), using a broad-brush stroke, argues for two ways of knowing in the human sciences—narrative and traditional positivistic social science research (paradigmatic knowing)—and in doing so articulates the historical basis for the credibility of narrative knowing. Geertz (1983) provides a more metaphoric account of this same process. *Narrative Psychology* (Sarbin, 1986) provides a series of chapters that define the field, but in defining the field they outline the history behind narrative in psychology and a defense of the method's emergence and viability. Martin (1986), from the perspective of the literary critic, articulates how Barthes and others used social science strategies for understanding narrative in literature.

In the process of tracing the history of narrative theories in literary criticism, Martin brings the reader to see how the approaches of the literary critics, such as Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, Wayne Booth, Roland Barthes, and Mikhail Bakhtin, came to be tools for narrative research. He also articulates the historical contribution of these literary critics to the development of the use of narrative in human science research.

In contrast with these other historical plotlines, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) tracing of their development as narrative inquirers is more intimate and personal. Yet it is also a stronger theoretical account of how, in the moment of their own development as researchers, narrative inquiry emerged as the most compelling and appropriate way to study human interaction.

### Emergence of Themes in Historical Accounts

When we then turned to examinations of research studies or projects (Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, & Kennard, 1993; Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003; Witherell & Noddings, 1991), we began to notice that providing a historically based defense of narrative as the method or phenomenon for study was almost a convention for accounts of narrative research. Narrative researchers routinely and consistently situated themselves and their methods historically in the accounts they provided of their work.

What intrigued us, and gave direction for this chapter, were thematic commonalities in these accounts. The themes highlighted changes in the thinking and action of individual researchers and research movements within disciplines. They provided a way of tracing the process by which one becomes a narrative researcher and ultimately a narrative inquirer or just four definitional points in the stance that narrative inquirers embrace in their research. We realized these themes could be conceptualized as the individual and collective historical bases for the turn toward narrative inquiry, the bases on which a space for this kind of inquiry opened. These themes involved changes in the relationships of researchers and research participants, kinds of data collected for a study, the focus of the study, and kinds of knowing embraced by the researcher.

## Four Themes in the Turn Toward Narrative Inquiry

As we read the literature that has emerged from various narrative research projects (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988) and the critiques of positivism (Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Geertz, 1983; Thayer-Bacon, 2003), post-modernism and post-structuralism (Sarup, 1993), the accounts of research groups in various disciplines that have embraced narrative or asserted narrative as a way of knowing the world, we identified some common themes in the movement toward narrative inquiry. From our study, we came to realize that as an individual, discipline, or group of researchers moves toward a narrative inquiry approach to research, there are four turns in their thinking and action that occur. By *turn*, we mean a change in direction from one way of thinking or being toward another. We do not argue that these turns occur in a particular order; they evolve based on the experiences of a particular researcher in the process of designing, studying, and engaging in inquiries. We also do not assert that researchers either ought to or must make these turns if they are to be considered “researchers.” We recognize that there are indeed multiple ways of knowing and studying the world and the interactions of people. However, we become narrative inquirers only when we recognize and embrace the interactive quality of the researcher-researched relationship, primarily use stories as data and analysis, and understand the way in which what we know is embedded in a particular context, and finally that narrative knowing is essential to our inquiry.

We use the term *turn* strategically because we want to emphasize the movement from one way of thinking to another and highlight the fact that such changes can occur rapidly or slowly, depending on the experience of the researchers and their experiences when doing research.

How fully the researcher embraces narrative inquiry is indicated by how far he or she turns in her or his thinking and action across what we call here the four turns toward narrative. The four include the following: (1) a change in the relationship between the person conducting the research and the person participating as the subject (the relationship between the researcher and the researched), (2) a move from the use of number toward the use of words as data, (3) a change from a focus on the general and universal toward the local and specific, and finally (4) a widening in acceptance of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing. Those who most fully embrace narrative inquiry are those who, like Clandinin and Connelly (2000), simultaneously embrace narrative as a method for research and narrative as the phenomenon of study. For narrative inquirers both the stories and the humans are continuously visible in the study.

In the movement toward narrative inquiry, researchers, research communities, and research disciplines in particular forge their own idiosyncratic journey. In other words, while we have chosen to list these four turns in a particular order, we do not suggest that every researcher who becomes a narrative inquirer negotiates the turns in any particular order. Instead, we recognize that researchers, research groups, or disciplines of inquiry begin at different points. For example, narrative or story has long played a central role in anthropology and word data, and

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its analysis was always part of this discipline. However, part of anthropology's growth as a discipline involved marking a distinction between anthropological studies and travelogs, personal narratives, and memoirs. Thus, what can prompt a move toward narrative inquiry on the part of an anthropologist is not so much a turn from numbers as data but a turn toward a new understanding of the authority of the anthropologist and the relationship of the anthropologist and those they are studying (Pratt, 1986). A recognition that capturing the particular and local rather than insisting on the development and validity of a "grand narrative" of a culture is a worthy goal (Geertz, 1983). Thus, anthropologists who become narrative inquirers, like historians, may have begun from a position of embracing words rather than numbers as data.

Indeed, the turn to narrative occurs in ways that suggest the image of water that Foucault (1976) uses to discuss negotiations of power. Water flows move differently across different landscapes with different seasons, feeder streams, or impediments. In turning toward narrative inquiry, different researchers begin at different places. Some researchers take the turns slowly and more gently, just as some flows meander slowly, with deep turns that become almost switchbacks. The switchbacks may periodically erode through a loop. This straightens the water's path, and former meanders are abandoned, and new streambeds are cut. The path for others may be more constrained, and because of their socialization into research and the kinds of publications available, they may be less able to freely turn toward one or another research methodology. Indeed, some water flows are cemented in place, such as the Rio Grande at the U.S. border with Mexico. The path of the water is restricted and held in place, with others maintaining authority, power, and control. In such settings, the turns may appear in the currents and eddies or in pools created by barriers.

Having grown up in the dry desert Southwest, we have experienced flash floods where the roaring water coalesces and separate streams flow together forcefully, being stalled by dams that emerge from the flotsam their action creates. The stream may suddenly divide into new flows because of impediments in the path, abandoning old streambeds and destroying homes and buildings that no one thought were even in the way. For many, this is the path toward narrative inquiry. Concern with humans, experience, recognizing the power in understanding the particular, and broader conceptions of knowing coalesce in flashes of insight, and old ways of researching and strategies for research seem inadequate to the task of understanding humans and human interaction.

We know that water flows and creates the streambed we see at a particular moment in time based in a particular landscape because of the interaction of water, landscape, humans, animals, climate, and so on. In the same way, inquiry stance and identity as a researcher emerge in a particular place, with particular people, around particular questions, and based on desires to understand humans and human interaction in particular ways. What we present here are four of the common turns in the stream that direct the flow of inquiry into a narrative channel.

Because we are narrative inquirers, we have of course made these turns and embraced these ways of studying and understanding the phenomenon we care about. For us, of course, other ways of inquiry are less appealing and appropriate.



However, we do not assert that other ways are invalid or that those who employ them are less qualified as researchers.

In the rest of the chapter we begin by exploring the turns. We focus first on the change in the relationship between researcher and researched, and then we discuss the characteristics of the move from using numbers toward using words as data. Next, we consider the movement from a focus on the general and universal toward the local and particular. Finally, we explore the turn in acceptance of a wider range of ways of knowing and the blurring of epistemologies in research.

## **Narrative Turn 1: Relationship of Researcher and Researched**

In the turn toward narrative inquiry, no change in direction is more important than the change in an understanding of the relationship of the researcher to the researched. In the move toward narrative inquiry, the turn is characterized as a movement away from a position of objectivity defined from the positivistic, realist perspective toward a research perspective focused on interpretation and the understanding of meaning. In turning, narrative inquirers recognize that the researcher and the researched in a particular study are in relationship with each other and that both parties will learn and change in the encounter.

An important movement in the social sciences occurred in the late 19th century. At that time Comte, Mill, Durkheim (Smith, 1983), and others convinced social scientists that they could use the methodology of the physical sciences to study human learning and interaction. An essential feature of this stance is the sense that things being studied are real and that they exist independently and are not brought into existence by the act of studying. In taking this step, social scientists would then be able to identify “facts” and use them to develop social laws that, like physical laws, would articulate invariant relationships among social objects. On the basis of such laws, social scientists could control causation in social relations and thus assert control over and make accurate predictions about the social world (Smith, 1983). Martin (1986), in his exploration of narrative theories and literary criticism, charts the development of the current narrative theories in literary study. In his discussion, he reminds us that just as the social sciences sought to embrace a rationalist approach to the study of human sciences, scholarly work in the humanities flowed into a similar approach in the use of theories of literary criticism.

Asserting the realist perspective in the social sciences allowed researchers to treat social facts as things. In this way, the objects of study in the social sciences (human relationships, interactions, dispositions, and culture) could be treated as if they were physical things. This would allow social scientists to “stand apart from their subjects and think of [them] as having an independent, object-like existence with no intrinsic meaning” (Smith, 1983, p. 7). From this perspective, research into the social world could be constituted as a neutral activity. Researchers could proceed with their work as though the person and phenomenon that were being researched could be bounded, that they were atemporal and static, and that findings from such

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a study are not context bound but are generalizable under certain conditions. Researchers base this stance on an assumption that they can be objective in doing research. In other words, they can wholly distance themselves from the researched. As human scientists, they can consider themselves bounded, static, and atemporal particularly in regard to their relationship with the researched. As a result, the observations they make are considered systematic, reliable, and unbiased.

By labeling the researcher or researched as *bounded*, we mean that the knowledge of the researcher and the knowledge of the researched are separate and distinct from each other and even when they interact the distance between them can be maintained and guaranteed. Most importantly, under objective conditions, they are almost completely knowable, or at the very least, the things under study (culture, humans, human interaction, human traits or dispositions) can be explained. As a result, true beliefs about the social world can become valid and sure knowledge. In other words, social “things” are knowable in a foundational sense, and researchers have a secure base from which, with surety, they can assert knowledge about that thing. Through careful, systematic, and structured observations guided by uniform instrumentation that has high reliability and validity, coupled with skilled manipulation of potentially intervening variables, randomization, and controlled treatment settings, researchers can insert sufficient distance between themselves and their subjects to make formal knowledge claims on the basis of the scientific method.

Another condition of the researcher-researched relationship is atemporality. This is a state whereby the findings of research are considered outside time, and time itself is a neutral and controllable entity. Even when the research projects involve a longitudinal, developmental study, the process of change being studied is treated as if it exists independent of time. Piagetian research (Gruber & Vonèche, 1977) is an example of this, whereby child development researchers, even when they are dissatisfied with the age range labels or quibble with conceptions of the study, still work from the developmental stages outlined and the time sequence proposed either in opposing or developing further support. From a position of atemporality, the phenomenon studied or the process studied can be asserted to exist even generations since those original findings. Such a stance assumes that time is real and static rather than constructed or influenced by culture or individual human interaction (Slife, 1993).

The participants and interactions studied are considered static when the scientist acts as though the thing under study can be held still or that the action entailed in observation will not influence what is being studied. Furthermore, researchers who take this stance proceed as if they can hold themselves at a particular point in their thinking about a phenomenon as they engage in systematic observation of it. Even if the phenomenon is expected to evolve or progress or change during the observation, researchers assume that they can control this process or distance themselves from it enough so that they can objectively observe what is being studied in such a way that they themselves as researchers will remain unchanged. They act as though even if their thinking about the thing studied changes it will not be affected by changes in the phenomenon brought about because of their

observation or changes in their own feelings and emotions or fundamental understanding. During the research process, both the researcher and researched will be suspended in a static state, each uninfluenced by the other.

Within this perspective, researchers act on the premise that context can be controlled in ways that result in decontextualized research findings. As a result, others can then apply the findings to contexts and settings beyond the group being studied. In the case of anthropology, it allows researchers to treat findings about a culture as a monolithic capturing of the essence of the culture (Clifford, 1986; Geertz, 1983). Psychology provides another example. Research in learning sought basic learning principles that could be applied to any learning setting regardless of the age, the environment, or the dispositions of the learner. When such characteristics (age, environment, or disposition) might intervene, then the results of the research would provide clear directions about how to avoid or control for the potential interference from those variables. Indeed, one of the powers of this kind of research, and the controlled relationship between researcher and researched, is the ability to assert valid and reliable and, therefore, generalizable findings.

The move away from an acceptance of the researcher-researched relationship as an objective one toward a more relational view involves a reconceptualization of the status of the researched in the relationship. Researchers acknowledge that their subjects are not bound, static, atemporal, and decontextualized. However, researchers may continue to view themselves as capable of preserving the distance between themselves as researchers and the subjects they are researching. They continue to assume that in their interaction with the researched they can maintain a distance (particularly during the processes of analysis and interpretation of data) between themselves and their subjects.

Ironically, when researchers make the turn from an objective stance in the researcher-researched relationship, it is their view of the other rather than the self that changes. Researchers admit that the humans and human interaction they study exist in a context and that the context will influence the interactions and the humans involved. They recognize the researched is not atemporal but exists in time and that time is itself a socially constructed concept (Slife, 1993). Furthermore, they recognize that humans and human interactions are seldom, if ever, static. Researchers acknowledge that since context matters, human interaction and humans are embedded in context, and people, cultures, and events have histories that affect the present, findings from one setting cannot be effectively decontextualized. Researchers need to provide accurate descriptions of these characteristics of the research experience for without them it becomes impossible to understand and use findings from the project.

So while researchers have new respect for the human in the subjects they study, they continue to perceive themselves as capable of being objective. Researchers outlining their movement from a positivistic discourse to a discourse of self-study describe and characterize their stance in the role of the researcher in ways that articulate and catalog the position of narrative inquirers as they move away from an objective conception of the researcher-researched relationship (Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, & Placier, 2004):

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In this discourse, as researchers we continued to act in our role as researchers as if we were capable of remaining in some way intellectually and objectively separate from what we were studying—we did not remove the boundaries we had drawn around ourselves as researchers. We felt that in our role as researchers the self was unchangeable. (p. 1136)

Thus in this turn toward narrative, objectivity becomes a property of the researcher, almost a role the researcher puts on as he or she engages in the research process. The researcher puts energy into maintaining an objective stance and distancing himself or herself from the relationship with the researched; he or she uses strategies such as member checks, triangulation, and audit trails to assure accuracy, consistency, and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984). What is important at this point in the turn toward narrative inquiry is that the researchers still maintain a belief that in the interpretive process they can relate to the research in such a way that they can provide “valid” and “generalizable” interpretations in their research projects.

In the late 1960s through the 1980s many changes occurred in research in the social sciences, resulting in researchers turning away from this objective conception of the relationship of the researcher and the researched. One of these changes grew out of the disenchantment of the social scientists with behaviorism. After the infusion of funding for social science research in the 1960s, researchers saw little of value in the results of the studies conducted. They lost faith that research in the human sciences, at least research based in current social science methodologies, would help solve human social problems even though increasing numbers of individual people looked to psychotherapists for help. Thus, the generalizable findings from social science research appeared unhelpful, while the local knowledge of particular social scientists investigating and responding to the individual problems of humans seemed increasingly more productive (Polkinghorne, 1988). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provide a personal example of this disenchantment in articulating Clandinin’s dissatisfaction with her thesis study and Connelly’s dissatisfaction with an international group of educational researchers regarding their conception of assessment and curriculum.

Researchers studying human learning and interaction began to look beyond “behavior” alone to account for what they observed. For example, through speech-act theory studies, researchers began to treat speech as action (Hymes, 1955). As researchers moved to include human thinking in research on learning, healing, and other human interaction, they also began to recognize the value of the particular, the role of culture, and the value of the case. In studying human thinking, researchers had to rely on language as a vehicle for expressing cognition. As a result, researchers required new tools for collecting data and making sense of it. For example, graduate students in nursing were often engaged in collecting interview data with terminally ill patients. In this process, the patients or their family would confide in the researchers, telling personal, often intimate, stories about their experiences in relationship to the question prompts on the questionnaires being filled out. These nursing graduate students, who were tape recording the questionnaire

process and taking notes of patient responses, were suddenly inundated with data that were not easily translatable into Likert scales. The word *data* raised questions about the constructs represented by the questionnaires and provided insights into human interactions and the healing process. The graduate students and their professors began seeking ways of making sense of the narratives they collected in addition to the quantitative instruments they were marking (Lauren Clark, personal communication, May 1986). Like Clandinin (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in her thesis work, researchers became interested in what their subjects were saying. Relationships developed.

Rychlak (1994) critiqued studies based in behaviorism. When he conducted new studies, they revealed that in behavioristic experiments much of the noise or variance of response emerged because subjects' behavior was not so much "shaped" by the process, but the subjects learned what response the researchers desired and willfully chose to act oppositionally. Those subjects who, according to the data, were not "shaped" by the treatment actually intentionally responded in the direction opposite to that shaped by the researcher. In other words, attention to the meaning of subjects' responses led to an understanding different from the one the researchers claimed. Bateson's (1984) response to the debate about the criticism of her mother's (Margaret Mead) fieldwork in Samoa was not a defense of Mead's work but an assertion of the ways in which different researchers, because of their personality, interaction skills, and access to particular community members, have a different experience in their fieldwork.

These kinds of experiences led and lead researchers to reconsider their relationship with the research subject. As researchers begin to collect verbal data, they seek to make sense of it (Josselson, 1996). If the words of participants represent the thinking, and in some cases stand as a proxy for behavior, then researchers need to engage in more responsive and interactive ways with the research participants. They also become more concerned with a different sets of issues—things such as the articulateness of subjects, the integrity or honesty of the accounts, and the role of tacit knowledge in a research subject's ability to reveal his or her thought or belief. Of course, this raises new issues about and discussion of validity in social science research. But just as importantly, in a turn toward narrative inquiry, new ways of collecting and analyzing data also raised issues about the appropriate relationship between the researcher and the researched. Pratt (1986) articulates the problematics in such relationships in her discussion of Shostak's study of the !Kung. In *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*, Shostak, as a neophyte researcher, comes to explore and understand the !Kung through her interaction with Nisa, a native !Kung woman. Nisa meets Shostak the evening of her arrival to do work among the !Kung. Nisa seeks Shostak out because Nisa has been a participant in an earlier study of the !Kung and she is not only personally but economically curious about this new set of anthropologists. As a result, not only does Shostak name her study for Nisa, but she also acknowledges Nisa's growth and change in the study and the role Nisa plays in helping Shostak come to understand the life of !Kung women.

Part of this movement in the relationship of the researcher and the researched is represented by Bruner's (1986) assertion of two paradigms of knowing, one

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narrative and the other paradigmatic, and Geertz's (1983) insistence that research increasingly involved blurred genres. The emergence of post-modernism, post-structuralism, neopositivism, and cultural studies called into question the authority of the researcher for knowing or asserting knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This is captured well in *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), where the various authors explore the impact of writing on the authority, interpretations, and findings of anthropologists. Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) discussion of Stoller's struggle with his work in representing his findings from his research among the Songhay of Niger is an example. In this instance, Stoller finally creates a memoir as his research account. In this memoir, Stoller, rather than the Songhay, becomes the central character as he presents an analysis of his own struggle to reconcile his worldview with the sorcery of the Songhay. As researchers begin to embrace those they research as humans rather than as objects of study and as they struggle to make sense of the narratives that such interactions produce, they begin to embrace other ideas about how to make data interpretable and how to provide interpretations of data that are coherent, that resonate with the data, and that are true to them.

Coles's (1989) *The Call of Stories* captures a researcher enmeshed in the process of moving away from a conception of the objective researcher toward a relational view of researcher-researched interaction. Not that *Call* is a research study, but contrast it with *Women of Crisis* (Coles, 1978), in which Coles continues to use a more objective research stance. We see the difference in stance as Coles begins to articulate the ways in which engagement with narratives, whether fiction, anecdotal evidence, or nonfiction reports, causes learning and growth. Bateson's (1990) *Composing a Life* presents a similar view in focusing on the lives of five women researchers. She raises conceptions such as "unfolding stories," "improvisations," and "rethinking achievement" and articulates how looking back across those lives and their research and professional activities, one sees the ways in which the women composed their lives. This is a stance considerably different from the one in which the researcher constructs theories and then designs studies that measure subjects, manipulate data, and validate constructs, thus instantiating the accuracy of the researcher's theoretical construction. This movement is further articulated and captured even more clearly in Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) descriptions of their work in research conducted at Bay School. They tell us that building relationships allowed them to support the development of the school, deepen their understanding of educating children in diverse settings, and carry out their research.

Thus, in this turn toward narrative inquiry, the researcher not only understands that there is a relationship between the humans involved in the inquiry but also who the researcher is and what is researched emerge in the interaction. In this view, the researched and the researcher are seen to exist in time and in a particular context. They bring with them a history and worldview. They are not static but dynamic, and growth and learning are part of the research process. Both researcher and researched will learn.

Many researchers who engage in narrative research move in this direction and may even recognize the accuracy of this account of the relationship of the researcher and the researched, but they may still covet being able to assert that they

have a basis for turning their “true belief” into knowledge. While they value meaning and understanding as goals of research, they may still want to assert knowing and stand in a position of objectivity whereby what they come to “understand” is generalizable. This is the final aspect of this turn, when researchers recognize the implausibility of being able to truly distance themselves from what they come to know and understand and yet continue to act in integrity and demonstrate trustworthiness, virtuosity, and rigor (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) in their scholarship. For those who, no matter how much they value and embrace narrative knowing, continue to harbor remnants of the positivistic dream of control, prediction, objectivity, and generalizability, letting these glittering stars go is not easy. Some researchers may draw back from this turn. While they continue to work with narratives and interpret narratives, they simply value their own sense of objectivity whereby their interpretations can be termed objective and valid—they hold tight to the image of themselves as having foundational criteria that allow true beliefs to become formal knowledge (Fenstermacher, 1994).

What this section attempts to capture is the first turn that researchers make in becoming narrative inquirers. To use narrative as methodology and explore narrative as the phenomenon of interest, they must come to embrace a relational understanding of the roles and interactions of the researcher and the researched.

## **Narrative Turn 2: From Numbers to Words as Data**

The next turn toward narrative inquiry is the turn from number to word data. In the historical development of narrative inquiry and the personal development of narrative inquirers, what is labeled here as the second turn toward narrative flows from and is intertwined with the other turns. The turns are discussed in the order presented because of the relationship of the turns to each other and to the philosophical development of narrative inquiry and inquirers—but in actual experience any of these turns can proceed to any other, and indeed we may pause in one turn as we begin another or we may take two or three or even four turns simultaneously.

The turn from numbers to words as data is not a general rejection of numbers but a recognition that in translating experience to numeric codes researchers lose the nuances of experience and relationship in a particular setting that are of interest to those examining human experience. An important positivistic assumption underlying the use of numbers relates to reliability. Quantitative researchers, who base their research in modernist and post-positivist views of the appropriate way of conducting studies of the social sciences, have concerns about reliability. They want to be able to assert that anyone experiencing a phenomenon would label it with a similar, hopefully identical, number or in the same way. Numbering a phenomenon and then correlating the consistency of ratings allows researchers to assert a level of reliability upon which validity can then be asserted.

The movement of research in the human sciences from number to word data is clearly articulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Polkinghorne (1988), and Reason (1988) and more recently by Denzin and Lincoln (1994). These accounts articulate

the problems of using numbers to capture experience. In this section of the chapter we begin by articulating two general paths that lead toward the landscape of narrative inquiry. We then discuss qualities of number data that contribute to that development. First we discuss the sterile and deadening quality of the linguistic aspects of the discourse of human inquiry when there is an insistence that data ultimately be represented as numbers. Next, we present an understanding of the linguistic qualities of numbers. Third, we explore a recognition that numbers provide limited ways of representing findings, and finally, we consider the trustworthiness of numbers.

### *Paths Toward the Landscape of Narrative Inquiry*

As researchers are confronted with verbal accounts and personal descriptions and explanations regarding the phenomenon under study, their response to the veracity, value, and vigor of word data in contrast to number data either nudges them toward a more relational stance with the researched (Turn 1), a greater concern with the particular (Turn 3), or a valuing of different ways of knowing (Turn 4). Researchers, who ultimately became (or become) narrative inquirers, found (or find) the use of numbers as the exclusive way of representing data increasingly dissatisfying.

If this is the first turn a researcher makes toward narrative, the path is a deceptively simple one. Researchers begin to question the ability of numbers, particularly numbers collected in standardized ways, to reveal deep understandings about human interaction. One pathway away from the exclusive insistence on numbers begins when researchers become intrigued with the nonnumeric responses of their research subjects and with what those responses begin to teach them or cause them to question about positivistic research in the social sciences. The apocryphal story of Piaget (Darrell Sabers, personal communication, September 1983) intrigues beginning social science researchers. In that story, Piaget was administering the Stanford-Binet intelligence test to norm it (provide a way of standardizing its administration and provide a framework for interpretation of test scores). In this process, he became interested in the wrong answers of his students. As Piaget turned away from interest in norming a test and toward understanding what the answers meant, he focused not on numbering the answers but on the children's explanations (words) about their understanding of particular events.

Piaget did not turn completely toward narrative inquiry in that he developed standardized tasks and ratings for students' answers to interpret their stories. Indeed, this is a common stopping point on the path toward narrative inquiry that modern researchers who begin to move toward narrative take when confronted with the problem of making sense of the stories they elicit from their research participants. Often, these researchers, in a sense, turn back from narrative inquiry because they desire to create "grand theories" in the human sciences, and they embrace the efficiency that numbers provide for convincing other social scientists of the fundamental accuracy and reliability of their findings. They recognize that without standardizing the process of data collection they open themselves to



charges of unreliability and lack of accuracy in their final representations of their findings (Franzosi, 2004).

A second way a researcher might move away from numbers and through the landscape that leads to narrative inquiry begins with researchers questioning whether or not the survey questions asked, the test scores recorded, and the relationships discovered through causal modeling or multiple regression are an adequate account of the experiences they represent. Researchers may begin to be interested in the noise, the other fit, the other model that gets submerged when significant findings emerge from a study. For example, they may begin to explore parenting and the impact on children's development. They wonder when authoritative parenting begins to feel like authoritarian parenting and what difference the child's experience of the parent-child relationship makes in that assessment. They wonder about the blurred areas on the demandingness-responsiveness table, wondering when authoritativeness begins to be more like indulgence and when it fades off into authoritarian or indifferent parenting (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). They may wonder what their own parenting reveals about what they know about parenting and what stories of parenting or parent-child interaction collected from the parent or the child reveal about the relationship of parenting to development and growth. They decide to ask parents or children to tell stories of that experience. Again, some researchers may stop on the path, simply using the stories to develop a new or different survey that attempts to capture the experience of parenting that can be administered to scores of parents and the numeric findings can be used to develop a new, numerically based empirical and scientifically accurate account of parenting.

Of course, there are other paths through the landscape of human science research that lead from positivistic research conceptions to narrative inquiry, and there are also many points for stopping on the path or turning back toward the reassuring use of numbers as anchors for the research and as strategies for making sense of linguistic data.

### *Numbers as Sterile Discourse*

A strong reason why narrative inquirers may turn from numbers to words as data is the sterility of numbers as discourse as well as the sterility of the discourse surrounding the presentations of number data. As Foucault (1976) explains, when attempts are made to restrict or reduce particular kinds of discourse or discourse about a particular topic, the inhibition results in an increase rather than decrease in discourse. In the same way, an insistence on number rather than word data in the human sciences results not in the disappearance of words or a substitution of numbers for words but an escalation in language. First of course is the defense of numbers, and the justification for the value of changing word to number data (Franzosi, 2004). Essential to this discussion is the explanation of how, when, and where numbers can reliably, consistently, and accurately replace words.

Kirk and Miller (1985), in discussing quality in qualitative research, argue that validity is the ability to count to one. They articulate this strategy as a way of proposing the potential validity of claims of qualitative researchers. However,

implicit in their assertion is the idea that if a researcher can establish that the phenomenon being labeled can be defined so that it can be identified with a one, then it can be counted. If a phenomenon can be counted, its occurrence or absence, its repetition, and its regularity can be chronicled. When numbers become involved, then further statistical analysis can be conducted.

In the process of counting to one, language plays an important role, for to count one of something, the thing to be counted must be defined and specified. The distinction between this one and that must be clearly articulated. Kuhn (1970) argues that language attached to numbers results in the limited, flat, and sterile language of science. When numbers replace the phenomenon under study, the exact nature of the phenomenon or construct must be specified. The definition must establish clear boundaries between more general uses of the label of the phenomenon and the specified scientific boundaries for the term. Furthermore, in establishing definitions for a term, there are often long discussions about the meaning, not only of the phenomenon but also of each term used in the definition. The consistency with which other scientists can agreeably use the definition to number the phenomenon must also be established numerically. Reaching agreement about the count, the degree of likeness, or amount of phenomenon visible results in lengthy and ongoing discourse and negotiation about the definition produced. As a result, researchers in the human sciences may spend exponentially more time trying to constrict and control the words used to describe when, how, and where to number than they do in numbering, and the tone of their discourse can be experienced as tedious, mundane, and tangential to understanding.

The rules that govern counting highlight the limits of numbers in accounting for the particular, local, and contextual in human relationships. When children learn to count a set of things, they learn that each item must be counted separately and counting must proceed in an invariant sequence. This rule points out the fragmentation and the sense of control that the use of numbers can impose. In addition, when counting, the child can begin with any object and continue until each item has been numbered once. The process of counting highlights the characteristics of number data that are so satisfying in positivistic research. Each occurrence is independent of any other, each occurrence is interchangeable, and each occurrence is equal to every other occurrence. Furthermore, these properties of counting highlight the static, atemporal, knowable, and controllable aspects of things so valued by positivistic researchers. Attending to these qualities, Bruner (1986) labels the findings of paradigmatic knowing *actual*, in contrast to the findings of narrative knowing, which he labels *possible*.

Bruner (1986), in fact, argues that positivistic research begins in wild metaphor. He asserts that it is through the wild metaphors and their interconnections that researchers arrive at a level of abstraction where meaning can be made of the phenomenon of interest. According to Bruner, at that point in time, researchers working from a base of paradigmatic knowing then define the phenomenon and develop instruments that provide numbers for accounting for the relationships that emerged metaphorically. They continue to use a restricted and confined language, as free of metaphor as possible to account for the facts they observe and the laws

they develop. As a result, since metaphor is a tool for opening and deepening understanding, the opportunity for insight and meaning making is flattened. As researchers became less content with labeling numerically the level of kindness or the degree of hope, they may become more interested in understanding the stories of kindness and hopefulness. They begin to wonder about the stories, words, and other linguistic accounts their research masks. In taking this step, they may begin to turn toward narrative inquiry. When researchers become interested in the nuances of meaning, then reducing what was originally word data to numbers is viewed as restricting opportunities for meaning making and understanding.

### *Numbers as Language*

One reason for a turn from the insistence on the use of numbers rather than words in quantitative social science research emerges from certain kinds of understandings about the characteristics of numbers and formulas. The insistence on numbers for use in positivistic human science research allows researchers to make justifiable claims about the reality they are studying. Numbers, scientists sometimes assert, are less ambiguous than language, and thus their interpretation is more straightforward. Such reasoning ignores certain properties of numbers.

While numbers, through probability and norm curves, provide the bedrock for turning true beliefs into knowledge and have the potential for allowing social scientists to believe they can predict and control human relationships and interactions in the same way scientists can assert control and prediction over the physical world, they remain a language. Numbers are often nouns and formulas, sentences that represent stories about the relationship of one essence to another. However, while a story invites participants into the research, formulas can intimidate and exclude them.

Indeed, numbers are linguistic entities and have certain linguistic properties that are often overlooked when numbers are asserted as valuable because of their concreteness, specificity, and consistency. Each number or letter in a formula is symbolic of quantities and relationships. Thus, letters in formulas are symbolic entities and have the properties of such entities. Meaning in a formula never resides exclusively in the number but is established through the ways in which the numbers and symbols are held in relationship to each other. In addition, a letter in a formula is merely a placeholder for a number, and since any number might replace each letter in the formula, the letter represents infinity. As a result, formulas are less sterile and controllable than might be imagined. Furthermore, infinity constantly emerges in any consideration of a number line or scale since it exists between one number and the next.

In any discussion, numbers are labeled with words, and as words, numbers introduce all the metaphoric qualities of language—possibly not as unfettered but still present. When a number is inserted into a discussion, it enters discourse, becomes embedded in sentences, and through the interconnection of the meaning of the number in relationship to the other entities in the sentence, has meaning beyond itself or even the immediate relationship specified in the formula.

### *Numbers as Limited, Untrustworthy Representations*

Social science researchers may turn from numbers to words as data because they provide limited representations of what is studied and rely more heavily on the researcher constructing a narrative to account for the numbers and their relationships with each other. Numbers, through formulas, charts, graphs, and tables, provide limited ways of representing the understandings that emerge in inquiry involving humans and human interaction. When the audience of research is presented with numeric findings, the reader must provide a narrative to explain and capture the relationships presented with statistical values. In addition, numbers also impose a limit on the ways in which participants in the research can present what they know or understand.

Plotlines, character, setting, and action (Bal, 1997) provide ways of holding meaning together in more complex, relational, and therefore more nuanced ways than flowcharts or number tables. For example, using the interpretive lens of the three-dimensional narrative space articulated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) allows researchers to both present and interrogate findings and allows the narrative inquirer to represent the contingent, nuanced, and symbolic aspects of the findings.

Sometimes narrative inquirers begin to turn away from numbers because they become suspicious of their trustworthiness in providing an authentic research account. Indeed, numbers are purported to hold out great promises of validity for human science researchers, but the sterility of their representation and the imposition of meaning on the participants leads to questions about the validity of the data when questions about their trustworthiness emerge. Since numbers alone represent findings from each subject, the researcher has no way of exploring the coherence of the reports or the consistency of expression or the nuances of language that suggest integrity. Participants in research that elicits only numeric responses are given little space to provide their own understanding of concepts being studied. Audiences of the research and the researcher themselves must rely on the adequacy and appropriateness of definitions and the ways in which those definitions have been operationalized. The limiting of the opportunity for participants to express meaning by circling a number or building a score provides participants with few ways of expanding the meaning. Numbers as findings, even with descriptions of the sample, the treatment, definitions, and significance levels, reduce the context for exploring or establishing the integrity of findings. While researchers who use numbers will, of course, follow the assumptions and guidance of the standards of statistical research, researchers may begin to feel that there is not sufficient data or explanation to determine the data's authenticity or integrity.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the fact that the researcher constructed or selected the instrument to explore her or his understanding of the concepts and their interrelationships raises problems regarding the trustworthiness of the research findings. Indeed, there is little textual evidence that allows the audience to determine whether the research was simply designed to impose the worldview of the researcher on what was researched.

Researchers who desire a deeper opportunity to establish the authenticity and trustworthiness of their findings may move toward formats of research that allow research findings to be presented in the words of the participants in ways that represent the experience of the researchers and the researched and allow evidence of the quality of the interaction and relationship to emerge in the research report (Kirk & Miller, 1985).

Narrative inquiry, in both the collection and presentation of the data, allows a clear arena for addressing questions of the trustworthiness of the data and their interpretations. The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) prompts researchers to both question explanations and meanings constructed and provide the audience with accounts that uncover and reveal such questions of meaning, value, and integrity.

There are common themes in researcher accounts of their move toward use of word data. These themes include the sterility of numbers in representing the complexity of human interaction, the arbitrary and impositional nature of the assignment of numbers to observations or accounts, the increasing desire of researchers to understand better the meaning of human interaction for the humans involved in the action, and, finally, a hesitancy about the integrity and trustworthiness of data where only a number is recoverable.

### **Narrative Turn 3: From the General to the Particular**

When researchers make the turn toward a focus on the particular, it signals their understanding of the value of a particular experience, in a particular setting, involving particular people. Coles (1978) captures the power of the particular in his book *Women of Crisis*. His earlier books focused on accounts and analysis of the experience of impoverished groups of Americans. In this retrospective, he revisits and explicates the story of one child from the earlier study. In capturing the life story of these children, he instantiates the difficulties emerging from poverty and the resiliency of the human spirit in such circumstances. The accounts resonate and provide readers a potentially deeper and more valuable understanding of the impact of poverty on children's lives. In a similar way, Bullough's (2001) *Uncertain Lives* provides educators with a deeper and more complex understanding of the lives of children enmeshed in poverty and the potential value of teachers and schools.

To understand this turn, we begin with a discussion of this turn as a move from generalizability. We then capture the strength and value of this turn through a consideration of particular evidence of this turn in the discipline of history.

#### *Generalizability and the Power of the Particular*

One of the powers that quantitative research holds out for researchers is the potential for generalizability. Indeed, it may be this tantalizing prospect that stalls researchers in a move to narrative inquiry. According to this paradigm for knowing,

if the researcher can remove the impact of the particular, then the findings of a research study can be generalized beyond that setting.

This concern with generalizability and the capturing of the universal is an ethos that occupied all branches of the human sciences. The anthropologist, historian, psychologist, medical practitioner, and educator (for example) were interested in constructing grand narratives: theories of the world that could be applied universally, regardless of particular circumstances. The basis for the grand narrative is the careful study and accumulation of facts from which laws are determined. Such laws, based as they are on irrefutable facts, allow social scientists to predict and control human life.

Geertz (1983), in his discussion of the relationship of law to fact in four different cultural settings, demonstrates clearly that law and fact do not necessarily interact in these ways. His analysis of the relationship of fact and law in four particular cultures raises doubts about the possibility of using facts as the basis for developing laws since, just as fact might be seen to determine law, law can actually bring facts into existence. For many researchers, it is this unease about the actual relationship of fact and law that turns them from a study of the general to a study of the particular. The other chapters in this handbook, through the authors' reporting of their own particular work to capture and explain the overarching themes, provide clear examples of the power that a focus on the particular brings narrative inquirers. The emergence of narrative therapy is an especially powerful example. White and Epston (1990) and their colleagues became interested in embracing the particular stories and experiences of particular clients and using the value of narrative rather than grand theories of psychology as a way of helping clients reimagine and reshape their lives.

Geertz (1983) turned social scientists in this direction. One step was his use of the narrative of the Balinese cockfight as a particular case for understanding the Balinese culture. Kitchen (2005) provides a recent example of the power of focusing on the particular for understanding teacher development. Through his careful narrative of the experience of his work with one teacher who transforms his teaching, we come to better understand the value of relationships in bringing about profound changes. His textured, layered focus on this narrative and his careful description of the particular setting and people involved provide a secure anchor for using what is learned in this narrative inquiry in our work in other settings.

### *History as an Example*

In exploring this turn from the general to the particular, we would be wrong to say that the social sciences focused solely on general issues by the close of World War II. Social scientists, after all, carried out case studies and gathered local data. But in the decades that followed the war, key social science texts attended to abstractions, using particular facts to make broad points about the society under examination. In the United States, works such as Gunnar Myrdal's (1944) *An American Dilemma* or David Potter's (1954) *People of Plenty* sought to describe an

American character, a set of traits or beliefs that could be used to understand contemporary American society as a whole. In both instances, a single topic—race relations for Myrdal and the middle class for Potter—served as a lens through which to understand the entire nation. In Europe, structuralists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and historians of the Annales School worked at the same level of abstraction. Lévi-Strauss's (1969) key ideas, that societies were hot or cold, raw or cooked, gave other social scientists a frame through which they could see things whole. Annales historians used a different tack—casting their eyes on a place over such an extended period (*la longue durée*) that the particularities of personalities and events fell away under the persistent forces of time (Braudel, 1949/1972).

These works were responding to trends in the social sciences, most particularly to the postwar embrace of positivist science and the availability of large amounts of data. Positivism made it possible for social scientists to think that their results would be generalizable across time and space if only their methods were replicated. And longitudinal, or panel, data made it possible for social scientists to generalize about the characteristics of a large number of people. Of course, positivism continues to frame the assumptions of most social scientists, and the stores of data are even richer and more complete. If positivism and data were all it took to turn social scientists to the general, there would be no room for narrative today. But in the postwar world, cultural forces were as important as academic ones, and preeminent among those cultural trends was the contest between the United States and the Soviet Union for global predominance.

In some cases, the Cold War was the explicit context in which social scientists worked. Some sought to find national traits that could be used to distinguish between one superpower and the other. This is the goal of George Kennan's (1947) "long telegram," which described the Soviet character for American policy makers and birthed a huge social science enterprise dedicated to laying out the grounds for containing the Soviet Union. In other instances, the Cold War was the implicit context, presenting issues in an either-or format—freedom or totalitarianism, individualism or conformity—which themselves became the terms of debate for social scientists (Arendt, 1951; Chambers, 1952). Finally, the ideologies of the superpowers themselves formed the basis for academic social science. Both Marxist academics and their modernization theory adversaries saw the world in general terms, a home for social systems best understood according to the assumptions of Marx or the assumptions of capitalism (Lerner, 1958; Williams, 1959).

In form, the Cold War continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. But the dualism behind it came under question much earlier. In global politics, the challenge came from the movement of nonaligned nations, which carved out some space between the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its supporters. But the more profound challenge came from liberation movements around the globe that sought to replace Cold War orthodoxy with a worldview that was at once more nuanced and narrower. While these movements were primarily focused on political and social change, they created their own social science, one that by giving attention to the experience of minorities created space in which narrative could flourish.

## 24 SITUATING NARRATIVE INQUIRY

In the United States, the women's movement and the movement for black civil rights both brought the nation's self-definition into question. By pointing out that the nation failed to live up to its promise of equality for all citizens, these movements created a space in which to question both Cold War orthodoxy and social science. Both movements used positivist evidence to point out American inequalities—quantitative studies of salary inequity by gender or of the absence of African Americans on voting roles—and certainly pointed out the gap between theory and reality in the United States. But perhaps more powerful than the quantitative evidence was a more particular, personal body of evidence, amassed and shared in both movements.

In women's consciousness-raising groups, and in black churches across the South, personal stories became the rhetorical basis for grassroots movements. These stories played at least four roles. They united members of the movements by making public the experiences that, when hidden, were reminders of their oppression. They made it possible for people without "expertise" to contribute to the intellectual work of the movement. They created a repository of stories upon which movement leaders could theorize and plan. And they provided powerful, authentic evidence of the need for political and social change, evidence that had more persuasive power than positivist social science.

The women's and civil rights movements, along with other, less well-known movements, influenced the social sciences in key ways. By the early years of the 1970s, each movement had an academic cognate—women's studies, black studies, Chicano studies, gay and lesbian studies—that did scholarly work on the questions raised by social movements. In many instances, the academic leaders of these disciplines were former (or current) movement activists who brought their own experiences to bear on their research. And those experiences influenced the methodologies of these disciplines, both explicitly in those works that drew social scientific conclusions from the scholar's autobiography and implicitly in those works that drew on storytelling and stories for some or all their evidence.

In many instances, personal stories added richness to social scientific works that otherwise fell comfortably into the positivist mainstream. But in others, narratives became the basis for innovation in theory and presentation of social science. Sara Evans's (1979) *Personal Politics* used her own experience as a civil rights activist and that of dozens of her colleagues to argue for a new understanding of politics. In it, issues that had once been considered private or personal—sexuality, child care, reproductive rights, mental health, abuse—became central public concerns, sources of political agitation, and the subject of legislation and litigation. Mary Belenky's (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) *Women's Ways of Knowing* went a step further, arguing that narrative and storytelling constituted part of a gendered epistemology with as much explanatory power as any other. And, more quietly, dozens of autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs made a simpler point—that the particular deserves as much attention as the general among social scientists. Thus, as researchers, narrative inquirers embrace the power of the particular for understanding experience and using findings from research to inform themselves in specific places at specific times.



## Narrative Turn 4: Blurring Knowing

The final turn we explore here is the turn from one way of knowing the world to an understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience. In many ways, this understanding of the variety of ways of knowing leads researchers away from a secure base. In explicating this turn, we begin with an exploration of validity and a renewed understanding of it as a basis for this turn. We then explore the reemergence of narrative knowing as a valid and important tool for knowing in the human sciences.

### *Blurred Knowing and Validity*

Social science has traditionally been anchored in numbers and focused on a concern with proving facts that lead to the development of law and theory to have a secure basis for asserting a specific view of the ways things are. Reliance on the assumptions of positivistic and post-positivistic science allows researchers to assert that their findings are valid. A turn toward acceptance of multiple ways of knowing the world is a turn toward establishing findings through authenticity, resonance, or trustworthiness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). For some researchers, an understanding of the limits of validity within a quantitative paradigm precipitated a move toward narrative inquiry. The acceptance of the relational and interactive nature of human science research, the use of the story, and a focus on a careful accounting of the particular are hallmarks of knowing in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers recognize that embracing and executing the methodology of narrative inquiry, rather than an exclusive reliance on the assumptions of a positivistic paradigm, provides authentic and resonant findings. In making this turn, narrative inquirers recognize the tentative and variable nature of knowledge. They accept and value the way in which narrative inquiry allows wondering, tentativeness, and alternative views to exist as part of the research account.

### *Knowing in the Human Sciences*

If this chapter were simply about the history of narrative, then this section, on the turn away from positivist ways of knowing in the academy, would be unnecessary. Outside the academic disciplines, there seems to be little question about the ability of narrative to convey information. Television and film, fiction and journalism, and video games all contain strong, complex narrative strands (Johnson, 2005). Readers and listeners are sophisticated consumers of narrative, actively determining which stories to trust and which to doubt, even in the face of “official” interpretations offered by government and the academy (McGlaughlin, 1996; Turner, 1994).

But inside the university, narrative ways of knowing fell from favor early in the 20th century and have only in the past 30 years begun to reemerge as a legitimate field of study, means of communication, and orientation toward truth. Their reemergence is due to several key trends—a mounting critique of the enlightenment

philosophies that underlie positivist epistemologies, close studies of scientific practice and its relationship to scientific rhetoric, growing attention to the histories of the social sciences, and a more robust debate about who owns the stories that have traditionally been the raw material of social science research. Together, these trends have opened space for narrative inquiry. The size and shape of that space depends, at least in part, on the narrative forms traditionally associated with particular disciplines—as in history, where biography flourishes while post-modern narratives have had a narrower appeal. (Compare, for example, the response to Simon Schama's, 1988, traditional narrative *The Embarrassment of Riches* and his experimental *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations*; Schama, 1992.)

Of the social sciences, only sociology was born as a positivist discipline. By the time that Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim gave the discipline its academic shape, sociologists had already embraced key components of positivism—that social structure, not individual behavior, was central to understanding human life, that social structure could be best understood through number data, that there were “laws” that governed human societies, and that those societies should be described in analytical, not narrative, terms (Stark, 2004).

Other disciplines that are now part of the social sciences had their birth in narrative. History, in its ancient or 19th-century guise, told stories, often relying on the record of individual actors to carry the narrative along (Higham, 1990). Anthropology grew in part out of travelogs, and psychology's first preferred genre was the case study (Freud, 1913; Pratt, 1986). But as these disciplines became professionalized, narrative practitioners fell to the side. Particularly instructive is the case of history, where “amateur” historians without a graduate education in history continued to practice narrative, while their “professional” credentialed colleagues wrote analytical, positivist history and slowly excluded amateurs from disciplinary organizations (Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, 1994; Higham, 1990; Novick, 1990). By the 1930s, these disciplines were as devoted to the rhetoric of objectivity and science as sociology.

The resurgence of narrative in the social sciences is due, in part, to the unraveling of the certainties that upheld positivistic social science. The “unravelers” are pulling from a number of different, and sometimes contradictory, directions. They should not be seen as united or as having a monolithic perspective on truth or knowledge. Nor are they all partisans of narrative. But their efforts have made room for narrative inquiry and writing in the social sciences.

The philosophical basis of positivistic knowing faces challenges from at least two directions. The first, growing out of the work of the moral philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre, casts doubt on key elements of the Enlightenment. MacIntyre is particularly skeptical of two Enlightenment commitments—the encyclopedia and the search for social scientific law. For MacIntyre (1990), the encyclopedia is the model of rational, radically decontextualized knowledge. The organizing structure of the encyclopedia means that things must appear to be rational on their own since they are not meaningfully connected to the things that surround them. (Thus, at [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com), the term *enlightenment* is preceded by *Enkoping*, an industrial center in Sweden, and followed by *Enlil*, the ancient Sumerian earth god.)

MacIntyre doubts that things are rational on their faces. Instead, he argues that people trust things that claim to be rational because they trust the institution or the person responsible for those particular things. Part of the enlightenment, then, must be to create a type of organization that can provide credence for decontextualized things. MacIntyre argues that that organization is the bureaucracy and that one of the key roles within the bureaucracy is the social scientist. The social scientist's task is to provide generalizations about the way things are and to assert that these generalizations are predictive. By doing so, they lend authority to bureaucracies—corporations and universities among them—who in turn buttress the moral claims of enlightenment rationality (MacIntyre, 1984, especially chap. 8).

The Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas has played out the implications of MacIntyre's work for narrative. If encyclopedic knowing lacks any rational basis, then there must be some other source for trusting information. Hauerwas and MacIntyre both identify embodied tradition as the way of knowing that provides the soundest basis for truth. Embodied traditions share important characteristics. First, knowledge is not decontextualized. Instead, it exists in the context of a narrative that gives it meaning, nuance, and application. Second, that narrative is shared by members of a community who provide support to those who wish to live in accordance with the narrative. Together, the narrative (or narratives) and community provide a rich context in which claims about the world can be evaluated (Hauerwas, 1995/2001a, 1980/2001b, 1981/2001c).

Hauerwas's attention to embodied narratives lived in community connects moral philosophy's critique of the enlightenment with the second major intellectual trend undermining the scientific certainty of positivism—neopragmatism. Neopragmatism is a sprawling philosophic movement, much of which is beyond the scope of this essay. But the work of Richard Rorty, and in particular his 1986 article "Science as Solidarity," is particularly apropos. In it he, like MacIntyre and Hauerwas, seeks to show that "rationality" need not be the sole domain of positivists. But while MacIntyre is predominantly concerned with social scientists, Rorty's attention focuses on natural scientists. He argues that in the West the scientist has replaced the priest at the top of the cultural hierarchy. As a result, humanists find themselves in the position of borrowing the rhetoric of the sciences, particularly claims to objectivity and rationality, to bolster their cultural position. For Rorty, this mimicry is troubling for two reasons. First, it turns the humanities away from their role of supporting the civilization of society. Second, it misunderstands the work of scientists by assuming that their work is always cold, rational, objective, and clear. Rorty argues that the practice of science (in contrast with its rhetoric) in fact grows out of the values of a particular culture—that is, it is a sign of solidarity (or "ethnocentrism") among scientists. As such, the practice of science differs little from the practice of the humanities, where interpretation and argument grow out of particular cultural contexts as well.

While it is Rorty's hope that seeing science as solidarity might place the work of humanists on an equal footing with scientists, his work, together with the work of the sociologist Bruno Latour (1979; and others doing social studies of science), has had another effect, weakening the hold that the natural sciences have over some

social sciences. In its simplest form, Latour's work shows that scientists' laboratory work is influenced both by personal history and the culture of their particular laboratories and research specialties.

This insight has borne rich theoretical insights into the work of science, but its greatest contribution to narrative inquiry has been in its opening a space where scientists and social scientists from outside the mainstream of science culture have been able to question that culture. The questioning has drawn scientists and social scientists to investigate the history of the disciplines, both scientific and social scientific. Both investigations have been useful for narrative inquiry. In the hard sciences, Sandra Harding (1991) and others have shown the gendered (and more recently, race-d and class-ed) nature of science. Perforce some of that demonstration has been narrative, as women scientists have described their own difficult paths to professional success and historians of science have uncovered the stories of earlier generations of women who practiced science in the shadow of their male colleagues (e.g., Sheffield, 2001). In the social sciences, historians and anthropologists have uncovered the narrative pasts of their disciplines, in some cases turning them to theoretical ends (e.g. Clifford & Marcus, 1986; White, 1987), in others using narratives to do academic work that could not be done by other means, whether that means describing culture through multiple frames or uncovering voices that would otherwise be hidden in the social sciences (Glassie, 1995; Marcus, 2005; White, 1998).

To this point, we have perhaps implied that the move away from scientific objectivity and toward narrative has happened largely within the academy. That is only partly true, for while the academy has moved down certain paths toward narrative, the larger culture has done the same. The past 20 years have hosted a flowering of narrative in the broader culture—memoir and creative nonfiction have been among the most successful genres in popular publishing; museums have embraced the stories of individuals as a way of making connections with the public (Handler & Gable, 1997); new confessional and “reality” shows populate television; and blogs, Web pages, and podcasts have granted individuals both the audience and the freedom to narrate. In essence, then, social science and public culture are converging on stories. The blurred nature of knowing provides narrative inquirers space and tools for exploring these concerns.

## Conclusion

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This chapter does not argue for an academy-wide move to narrative. Nor, in contrast to positivist social science, does it assume that there should be unanimity among narrative practitioners on key points of philosophy, method, or argument. This is both a strength and weakness of the movement toward narrative—a strength because multiple views make for closer attention to a wider variety of human experience; a weakness because it seems unlikely that narrative will ever come to dominate the academy in the way that positivism has done since the beginning of the 20th century. While narrative is still in its infancy, narrative

practitioners will eventually have to come to grips with this problem, either to rethink the political and social impact of their work or to accept the place of narrative on the margins of academic work.

In the movement toward narrative inquiry, each of the turns represents a philosophical turn from four important assumptions that underlie what Bruner calls paradigmatic knowing.

The first of these assumptions, intertwined with the second, is the assumption of reliability. Anchored in the use of numbers as data, the assumption of reliability is founded on the realist conception that what we choose to study can be thought of as having an “independent, objectlike existence with no intrinsic meaning” (Smith, 1983, p. 7). When social facts, like rocks, can be treated as “thinglike,” then researchers can measure them and number them, believing that they can create a number trail that allows the measurement of feeling, thinking, and caring to be consistent, accurate, and metaphor free. The language of numbers is basic to the use of statistical inference and probability, which ultimately provide foundational criteria for knowing. What distinguishes narrative inquiry is the understanding that all research is based on language whether in the language of numbers or the discourse of researchers and those being researched. Rather than imposing the antiseptic, narrow, and confining definition of scientific discourse heralded as necessary for “normal” social science (Kuhn, 1970), narrative inquirers embrace the metaphoric quality of language and the connectedness and coherence of the extended discourse of the story entwined with exposition, argumentation, and description.

The second assumption is objectivity—what has been expanded to be “scientific” objectivity and characterizes the basic relationship between the researcher and what is being researched. The assumption is made that what is being studied has the properties of a “thing,” with an existence that is separate from and not connected to the researcher. Indeed, research is a neutral activity. Such a position denies human connectedness and growth. It fails to take into account the fact that researchers choose to study one thing rather than another and that just the facts of choice, curiosity, and interest without considering passion, caring, or insight connect the researcher in a nonneutral way to what is being studied. In denying the nonneutrality of curiosity and interest, a stance of objectivity ignores as well what Bruner (1986) identifies as the scientist’s use of “wild metaphors” to climb the mountain of abstraction that is most often the foundation of the conceptualization of scientific inquiry and their subsequent “forgetfulness” regarding the metaphoric basis for an embracing of a logical reworking of the insight gained through insight and metaphor. What fundamentally distinguishes the narrative turn from “scientific” objectivity is understanding that knowing other people and their interactions is always a relational process that ultimately involves caring for, curiosity, interest, passion, and change.

The third assumption that narrative inquirers turn from is generalizability. This assumption dismisses the value of the local and particular in favor of the power of prediction and control provided by the universal. Social scientists embraced positivistic research processes because of the seductive quality of generalizability.

Researchers in the social sciences wanted to be able to discover universal laws that could be used in any context to account for and guide prediction about and thus help control humans and human interaction. Behaviorism—the search for a single mechanism to account for learning—is the most severe and extreme example of this desire. Through controlled treatments and manipulation of variables and randomization, researchers determined that they could account for and remove the power of context in human relationship and interaction. What distinguishes narrative inquirers is their understanding that understanding the complexity of the individual, local, and particular provides a surer basis for our relationships and interactions with other humans. Schank and Abelson's (1977) work on schemata demonstrated that humans appear to build up from particular experiences ways of acting in their world. Expert-novice research reveals the ways in which a deep understanding of the particular forms the basis for valuable and insightful action in virtually all settings (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). Geertz (1983) argues convincingly that local knowledge forms the most important basis for understanding human culture and personal interaction.

The final assumption that narrative inquirers turn from is a positivistic conception of validity. Validity and insistence on the necessity of particular kinds of evidence for epistemology narrow the arena of epistemology from broader conceptions of knowing, the properties of knowledge, and the ways of knowing to one of a rigidified insistence on one way of moving "true belief" to knowledge, which is anchored in an objective relationship of researcher and researched, based on the use of reliable and numeric measurements such that settings can be controlled or manipulated so that generalizable research findings can be applied. The insistence on this particular conception of validity, which relies on statistics, denies the variety of ways of knowing and questioning of what counts as knowledge and insists on a single kind of truth, indeed denying what Lincoln and Guba (1985) label *Truth 1*—the metaphysical beliefs, the true beliefs that form the basis from which positivistic researchers design their research studies. What distinguishes narrative inquirers is their desire to understand rather than control and predict the human world.

The convergence between social science and the public is undoubtedly good for narrative. It grants stories both popularity and credence. But it also raises a set of questions, about power (Who owns a story? Who can tell it? Who can change it?), about authority (Whose version of a story is convincing? What happens when narratives compete?), and about community (What do stories do among us?). These are questions about philosophy, but even more, they are questions about method. Academic narrative inquirers have developed a set of methods that give narrative credibility on campus. The challenge now is to enter conversations with the rest of our communities to develop a method—a way of talking and asking and answering and making sense—that will allow narrative to flourish in this congenial moment for stories.

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