CHAPTER 6

Narrative Data Analysis and Interpretation

"Flirting" With Data

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Questions to Consider

- How do we transform the "messy" data to meaningful stories?
- What are the methods of narrative data analysis and interpretation?
- What does narrative analysis look like in each narrative genre?

Introduction

Bryan left my office after venting his frustration over his interview skills, and I didn't hear from him for a while. I decided no news was good news, meaning he must have been working hard, collecting data in the field. I knew he would visit me sooner or later, and I was right.

So, on a Monday morning during my office hours, Bryan showed up with a stack of paper along with a thick notebook. His first words came out before even saying hi to me.

Bryan: I am overwhelmed, Dr. Kim. Look at these pages of transcripts and I still have more interviews to transcribe. By the way, how are you?

Me: Fine, thank you for asking. And you?

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Bryan: I would feel better if I were done with this stuff.

Me: What stuff?

Bryan: This research stuff. It is so time consuming to get an interview tape transcribed. I have transcribed three so far and I have five more to go. It is so time consuming and overwhelming.

Me: Welcome to my world, Bryan. It's good that you're trying to transcribe your tapes yourself. I commend you. It's tedious, but worth it. Believe me. When I finished my data collection, I was overwhelmed, too. I had a thick notebook filled with observational notes of my fieldwork and had 13, 120-minute-long microtapes to be transcribed. I also had a huge box full of artifacts to look at. Yes, transcribing the interview tapes seemed to take forever. I didn't hire a transcriptionist, not just because of my tight budget but also because of the importance of the initial learning opportunity about my interview data. And then, I had to read, re-read and re-re-read the transcripts and field notes for analyses. This process was really daunting and even depressing. I didn't enjoy it much, I admit. But I felt a tremendous responsibility and accountability, realizing that I was "the" researcher for the first time with a mountain of my own serious data! And, you know something? I didn't know it during the data analysis period, but after finishing it, I felt like I went through a rite of passage to my researcher-hood, and THAT was exciting.

Bryan: Wow, a rite of passage to the researcher-hood!

Me: Yes, Bryan. Think of it as a rite of passage into researcher-hood. You're not the only one. I had other doctoral students literally crying in my office, overwhelmed. But they made it! You'll pass through this, too. So, go have some fun flirting with your data.

You will enjoy doing the fieldwork after finally gaining access to your research site. Like Bryan, however, you will also feel overwhelmed by the amount of data you accumulate over time, not knowing what to do with them. You are about to enter the maze of data analysis and interpretation, which is the focus of this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to help you with narrative data analysis and interpretation through which you will excavate meaningful stories to (re) tell. We will learn to "flirt" with different methods of narrative data analysis and interpretation to find narrative meanings in the collected data. After going through data analysis and interpretation, you will feel as if you have experienced a rite of passage into researcher-hood. It is an integral process of becoming an independent narrative researcher.

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On Flirtation

You have just finished typing the field notes from your final observation of the study and you proceed to file them. There, facing you, is all the material you have diligently collected. An empty feeling comes over you as you ask, "Now what do I do?" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, pp. 172–173)

Faced with the data that you have collected through the methods described in Chapter 5, you may have an overwhelming feeling of "Now, what do I do?" It is a common feeling among researchers to feel "terrified and overwhelmed" and "at a loss as to where and how to begin" (Kiesinger, 1998, p. 84). All the textual, visual, and audio data, and the artifacts in the cabinet of curiosities feel like a steep mountain whose trail is strenuous, zigzagged, and unexplored. However, if you don't have such an overwhelming feeling about your collected data, it may be because you don't have much data to analyze, which should be more worrisome. So, I want to assure you that being overwhelmed by the amount of data is a good thing and it is just an initial feeling that will be followed by a sense of accomplishment sooner or later!

Now that we have admitted to being overwhelmed, it is time to find ways to convert our field texts into research texts through the process of data analysis and interpretation, a process that all researchers must go through. Remember I wanted us to think of narrative research design as "aesthetic play" (Chapter 3)? We discussed how aesthetic play encourages us to be open-minded, experimenting with many different, possible ideas out of curiosity. I wanted us to conceive of research design and methods *playfully and seriously* at the same time. In keeping with this spirit, the notion of *flirtation* seems fitting here in the discussion of data analysis and interpretation.

Bear with me for a moment if you think that I am using a "bad" term, as we usually think that the word ***flirtation*** has the negative connotation of being uncommitted, referring to a relationship to people. But in psychoanalysis, flirtation is associated with Freud's notion of free-floating attention, or free association, which is the psychic act of detaching one's devotion to internal censors (Phillips, 1994). That is, the idea of flirtation asks us to undo our commitment to what we already know and question its legitimacy. Thus flirtation is considered an "unconscious form of skepticism" (Phillips, 1994, p. xii). In any transition or in any shift of allegiances, Phillips argues, there may have to be some flirtation. By engaging in flirtation with ideas, we get to know them in different ways since "flirtation keeps things in play" (p. xii). Flirting with ideas allows us to dwell on what is unconvincing, uncertain, and perplexing, rendering surprises and serendipities, and of course, disappointments as well.

To summarize Phillips's ideas on flirtation, flirtation:

- Exploits the idea of surprise and curiosity;
- Creates a space where aims or ends can be worked out;
- Makes time for less familiar possibilities; and
- Is a way of playing with new ideas without letting these new ideas be influence by our wishes.

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So, I hope you are on the same page with me on using Phillips's ideas on flirtation as an approach to narrative data analysis and interpretation. Flirting with data is an attempt to analyze and interpret the research data to exploit the idea of surprise and curiosity, as we don't know what is going to evolve and emerge until we deal with the data; it creates a space for us where we can discover ways to reach and negotiate our research aims with data; it encourages us to make time to embrace less familiar possibilities; and it is a way of cultivating ideas for finding yet another story, "one we haven't necessarily bargained for" (p. xxv). Data analysis and interpretation as flirtation is a "transitional performance" (p. xviii), moving from data collection to data analysis and interpretation, allowing room for surprises and curiosities to explore "which ways of knowing, or being known, sustain our interest, our excitement" (p. xviii). This transitional performance as flirtation is important because as you know, we often interpret events "as we wish to see them, not as they are" (Wragg, 2012, p. 51). With that in mind, let's go on to the topic of this chapter, narrative data analysis and interpretation.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Understanding qualitative research data analysis is definitely the first step to conduct narrative data analysis. I always think that we are qualitative researchers before narrative researchers. Hence, understanding qualitative research analysis will greatly inform us, who are about to go into the details of narrative data analysis. I assume that you have taken one or two (or more) qualitative research courses as part of your program of study. As you know, data analysis in qualitative research in general is comprised of: examining raw data; reducing them to themes through coding and recoding processes; and representing the data in figures, tables, and narratives in a final research text. This is the general process that qualitative researchers typically use, with some variations (Creswell, 2007). So, you will first go through multiple coding processes in which you attempt to find a word or short phrase that can be an attribute for a portion of your data (see Saldaña, 2009, for coding manuals). Then, you find relations between similar codes and combine them to make a category. And then, you identify an emerging pattern in each category, which then can be built as a theme (see Figure 6.1).

Qualitative data analysis may look simple because I have just reduced the complex process of analysis to four basic elements: codes, categories, patterns, and themes. But you know that this is just a tip of the iceberg and that each stage involves much deliberation and recursion. Creswell provides a data analysis spiral where these four elements feed into a loop of description, classification, and interpretation (see Creswell, 2007, p. 151). As qualitative researchers go through this data analysis process several times, they will engage in a detailed description of what they discover from the analysis, classify the information for the reader (discussing emergent themes), and provide an interpretation of the findings in light of the literature and their theoretical perspectives.

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Figure 6.1 Basic Elements of Qualitative Data Analysis

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Theorizing Narrative Data Analysis and Interpretation

Narrative researchers point out that much attention has been given to the various issues of narrative research, but relatively less attention to the theoretical concerns that underlie the processes of analysis and interpretation (Josselson, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1995). In an effort to address this concern, I would like to discuss some theoretical issues related to data analysis and interpretation before getting into the methods of analysis.

First of all, I want to point out that data analysis involves interpretation, which in turn affects our choice of representations of stories. Some might think that analysis and interpretation are two different concepts, as analysis implies objectivity and interpretation implies subjectivity. However, although they are not identical concepts, they work in tandem because we analyze narrative data in order to develop an understanding of the meanings our participants give to themselves, to their surroundings, to their lives, and to their lived experiences through

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storytelling. Narrative researchers try to interpret meanings through an analysis of plotlines, thematic structures, and social and cultural referents. These meanings are to be analyzed and interpreted concurrently in a transitional period to the research text.

Josselson (2006) emphasizes that narrative research is "always interpretive at every stage" (p. 4), from conceptualization of research, to data collection, to writing a research text. That is, we narrative inquirers do not stand outside in a neutral, objective position, merely presenting or analyzing "what was said," says Riessman (2008), who defines narrative analysis as "a family of methods for interpreting texts" (p. 11). Chase (2003)[1] also talks about how she encourages her students to write interpretive comments while analyzing interview data. She suggests: "avoid being too descriptive on the one hand and overinterpreting on the other hand. Do interpret what is being said and try to articulate your reasons—give evidence—for your interpretations" (pp. 92–93).

Narrative Meaning

As we understand that narrative data analysis and interpretation work in tandem, I want to suggest that narrative analysis and interpretation is an act of finding *narrative meaning,* following Polkinghorne (1988). Recall that narrative inquiry is a way of understanding human experience through stories that, in turn, help us better understand the human phenomena and human existence. Polkinghorne equates narrative inquiry with the study of narrative meaning because the aim of narrative inquiry is to understand human experience that is meaningful, and our human actions take place informed by this meaningfulness, projected in stories and narratives. Polkinghorne defines narrative meaning as "a cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes" (p. 1). Narrative meaning concerns diverse aspects of experience that involve human actions or events that affect human beings. Individual stories have their own narrative meanings, and cultures also maintain collections of typical narrative meanings in their myths, folk tales, and histories, accumulated over time. Thus, the aim of the study of narrative meaning, according to Polkinghorne, is to "make explicit the operations that produce its particular kind of meaning, and to draw out the implications this meaning has for understanding human existence" (p. 6). Based on this remark, I would suggest that narrative data analysis and interpretation is a meaning-finding act through which we attempt to elicit implications for a better understanding of human existence.

Polkinghorne posits that research into meaning is "the most basic of all inquiry" (p. 9), and the realm of meaning is "best captured through the qualitative nuances of its expression in ordinary language" (p. 10). However, he also cautions that there are some inherent problems in the study of meaning:

- Meaning is not tangible, nor static, thus it is not easily grasped.
- We do not have direct access to the realm of meaning of others. We are at the mercy of the storyteller's recollection or introspection.

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- Information about other people's realms of meaning can be gathered through the narratives and stories. These narratives are context-sensitive, hence, they are not to be treated in isolation.
- The analysis of narrative data makes use of hermeneutic (interpretative) reasoning, thus the analysis methods are not as precise as quantitative tools.
- The realm of meaning appears in various modes of presentation, such as perception, remembrance, and imagination. These complex connections among images and ideas make the realm of meaning difficult to investigate. (pp. 7–8)

I find Polkinghorne's cautions insightful. He reminds us that narrative data analysis and interpretation as an act of finding narrative meaning is not a straightforward enterprise; rather, it may pose challenges and potential dilemmas. However, his intention is not to discourage us from engaging in understanding narrative meaning, but to help us be more attuned to the nuances of narrative meaning that has the following characteristics. According to Polkinghorne, narrative meaning:

1. Functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units;
2. Provides a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions; and
3. Is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful. (p. 11)

With an understanding of narrative meaning, including its challenges and functions, we can better flirt with data through the process of data analysis and interpretation.

Narrative Smoothing

One of the major means of narrative data analysis and interpretation involves narrative smoothing. Last April, I attended a talk by Curator Jorge J. E. Gracia, who organized a very interesting exhibition titled *Painting Borges: Art Interpreting Literature,* at the Beach Museum in my institution. Professor Gracia is also a philosopher teaching at the State University of New York, Buffalo. For this exhibition, Curator Gracia selected 24 paintings done by contemporary Argentinean and Cuban artists, who created their artistic representations based on Jorge Luis Borges's most famous stories about identity and memory, freedom and destiny, and faith and divinity. Gracia calls these artistic representations "painted stories" (Gracia, 2012), which I think is a lovely phrase, and these painted stories showcased the interpretation of literature by the selected visual artists. In his talk, Gracia spoke about the concept of interpretation in lay terms to help the audience (mostly undergraduate students and non-philosophers like me) understand,

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rather than using complex philosophical terms, like hermeneutics.[2] He said, there are two general types (or goals) of interpretation: one is an *act of understanding* (to develop an effective interpretation to understand); and the other is *instrumental understanding* (to mediate an effective understanding). And, there are usually five strategies involved in interpretation: *focus, omission, addition, appropriation,* and *transposition.*

I think the types of interpretation that professor Gracia addressed can be transferred to an act of interpretation and analysis in narrative research. That is, we can interpret our data (1) to understand the phenomenon under study (as an act of understanding); and (2) to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon under study for the reader (as an instrumental understanding). For this act of interpretation, we can employ the five strategies: *focus, omission, addition, appropriation,* and *transposition.*

Since narrative data analysis deeply involves interpretation, we are about to engage in arbitrary subjectivity, which puts us in a "tricky" situation. The use of arbitrary interpretation (especially when we "appropriate" data to fit our philosophical orientation, or "transpose" the data from one situation to another) often becomes a mode for saying what we want to say or hear instead of really listening to or seeing what is being said (Munro Hendry, 2007). Further, while undertaking an analysis and interpretation of narrative data, we might find ourselves in a dilemma, realizing that a faithful account (faithful to what the participant said) is not necessarily going to be a "good" story that we'd like to present, or that a "good" story might not be a faithful account. Spence (1986) points out how researchers have a tendency to write "a good story more than a faithful account" (p. 212) through subjective interpretation. Spence calls this involvement of subjective interpretation *narrative smoothing,* which can be used to mask our subjective interpretation as explanation, and to present a "good" story that is not necessarily a "faithful" account (see "fidelity" in Chapter 3).

Narrative smoothing is an interesting concept. It is a necessary method that many narrative researchers including myself use to make our participant's story coherent, engaging, and interesting to the reader. It is like brushing off the rough edges of disconnected raw data. However, it can also be problematic because it involves certain omissions, such as the selective reporting of some data (while ignoring other data), or the lack of context due to the researcher's assumption that what is clear to him or her will also be clear to the reader. Spence (1986) states:

> By failing to provide the background information and context surrounding a particular clinical event, by failing to "unpack" the event in such a way that all its implications become transparent, the author runs the risk of telling a story that is quite different from the original experience. (p. 213)

Spence (1986) gives us an example. Spence argues that Freud presented the story of his patient, Dora, as an "intelligible, consistent, and unbroken" account (p. 212) by filling in the gaps in her account, thus leading to conclusions that were not supported by the evidence.

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Spence problematizes this kind of narrative smoothing where we might be able to provide a good, "intelligible, consistent, and unbroken" story, but that it may be a far different story from the original account told by our participant (hence, not a faithful account). This kind of problem—failing to produce a faithful account—creates an ethical issue, which seems to happen to us quite often if we use strictly standardized narrative rules of "deletion-selection-interpretation" (Mishler, 1986a, p. 238), or the five strategies of *focus, omission, addition, appropriation,* and *transposition* that Gracia (2012) mentioned, without paying attention to the nuances that are involved in the interpretation process. Therefore, the ethics of interpretation has to be carefully considered (Squire, 2013). Spence (1986) suggests that we can address the ethics of interpretation (a) by being more nuanced and sensitive, (b) by recognizing the fact that the stories are not fixed and the referents can be ambiguous, (c) by guaranteeing confidentiality at the expense of some of the data's richness, and (d) by taking the participant and the reader into consideration.

In lieu of the ethics of interpretation, we can further consider Josselson's (2006) following question:

> Does the interpreter/researcher privilege the voice of the participant, trying to render the meanings as presented in the interview—or does the researcher try to read beneath—or, in Ricoeur's metaphor—in front of the text—for meanings that are hidden, either unconscious or so embedded in cultural context as to make them seem invisible? (p. 4)

The point Josselson is making here is whether we should look at our data with faith or with suspicion in an effort to find narrative meaning, which I will discuss next.

The Interpretation of Faith and the Interpretation of Suspicion[3]

Josselson (2004) provides an insightful account about interpretation in narrative research drawing upon Ricoeur (1970, 1991, 2007), who distinguishes between two forms of hermeneutics: a *hermeneutics of faith* and a *hermeneutics of suspicion*. Based on Ricoeur's distinction, Josselson proposes a hermeneutics of restoration (faith) and a hermeneutics of demystification (suspicion) that can be applied in the practice of analysis and interpretation in narrative research. This distinction is an issue we will always encounter during the data analysis of our participants' stories, so it needs some elaboration.

First, we can approach our narrative data from the perspective of an **interpretation of faith** in the stories told by our participants. That is, this perspective is operationalized based on the belief that what our participants are telling us is a story that is true and meaningful to their sense of their subjective experience. We take the story at face value. So, the aim of this approach is "to represent, explore and/or understand the subjective world of the participants and/or the social and historical world they feel themselves to be living in" (Josselson, 2004, p. 5). We retell or

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recount a participant's stories with faith, which is a result of the genuine personal encounter with the participant. Thus, the narrative meaning of the stories represented or retold from this perspective can be found in collaboration between the researcher and the participants through empathic understanding. Most narrative inquirers would initially use this approach, which is probably sufficient to meet most research purposes in narrative inquiry.

Another approach we can take is the **interpretation of suspicion** *in addition to* the interpretation of faith. Please note that I, following Josselson (2004), am trying to outline each approach without subscribing to either-or, binary thinking, in hopes that both approaches will be used in tandem. This approach of suspicion will, along with the interpretation of faith, help us go deeper with our analysis and interpretation as it aims to find hidden narrative meanings that might be lurking in the data. The interpretation of suspicion lets us think again about what we might take for granted in the approach of the interpretation of faith. This is "a less favored mode" (Josselson, 2004, p. 15) because it might give the impression that we have to undermine research relationships with our participants by being "suspicious" or skeptical of what they said. However, let's be clear that this approach is not about suspecting that what our participants told us might not be true, but rather it is about decoding or demystifying the implicit meaning that might go unnoticed in the first approach. For example, we might want to pay extra attention to any play on words, contradictions, or rhetoric. The participants might use their own tactic of "narrative smoothing" in their narration, although Spence did not talk about narrative smoothing from the narrator's perspective, omitting things that they don't want to say for some reason, or assuming that the researcher should know what the participants are talking about, thus not providing sufficient context for the story. Thus with this approach, we are after "surface appearances that mask depth realities; a told story conceals an untold one" (Josselson, 2004, p. 13).

The role of the narrative inquirer as midwife that I discussed in Chapter 3 allows us to pay attention to both approaches to find narrative meaning. We can deliver the stories of our participants at face value, but we should also carefully look for any "red flags," especially if the research topic is about challenging the status quo, or social justice, based on critical theory, critical race theory, or a poststructuralist framework. A good narrative analysis, as Riessman (2008) notes, "prompts the reader to think beyond the surface of a text, and there is a move toward a broader commentary" (p. 13).

Finally, we have to remember that interpretations are fluid and temporal (Gadamer, 1964); that is, our interpretations will change over time as our horizon changes. Thus, we cannot claim that there is a single valid interpretation even within a single researcher. Wolcott (1994) also states, "Qualitative researchers are welcome to their opinions, but focused inquiry is not a soapbox from which researchers may make any pronouncement they wish" (p. 37).

To summarize theoretical issues of narrative analysis and interpretation:

- Narrative analysis and interpretation work in tandem.
- Narrative analysis and interpretation is an act of finding narrative meaning.

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- Narrative meaning has inherent problems along with its functions.
- The aims of interpretation are:
  - to understand the phenomenon under study
  - to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon under study for the reader
- Narrative smoothing is a method of interpretation that involves five tactics: focus, omission, addition, appropriation, and transposition.
- Two approaches to interpreting narrative data are: the interpretation of faith and the interpretation of suspicion.

Methods of Narrative Data Analysis

So, what methods for narrative data analysis are available to us? Methods of analysis do not emerge out of thin air, as Holstein and Gubrium (2012) point out. That is, finding an appropriate method of narrative data analysis for your inquiry should be informed by and contingent upon your narrative research design (Chapter 3) and the narrative inquiry genre you have in mind (Chapter 4), based on the narrative data you have (Chapter 5). Hence, the analysis and interpretation should be done holistically, heuristically, whole-heartedly, and most of all, narratively. I do not intend to present a prescription of one "best" method here, nor do I dare to try to provide you with various "how-to" methods. If I did, I would probably end up pigeonholing each method, causing you to search for where and how you can fit your data analysis into one particular method, like the Procrustean bed that I mentioned in Chapter 2. I encourage you to avoid the Procrustean bed if possible, and find varied narrative meanings through narrative data analysis and interpretation. This is why we should "flirt" with the data during this transitional performance stage from field texts to research texts, exploiting the idea of surprise and curiosity, creating a space where aims can be worked out, allowing room for less-familiar possibilities, and playing with new ideas.

For the methods of narrative data analysis that allow us to engage in flirtation, I will present Polkinghorne's analysis of narratives and narrative analysis, and Mishler's typology of narrative analysis, which encompasses Labov's narrative analysis model. And then I will provide how analysis/interpretation can be done in different narrative genres.

Polkinghorne's Analysis of Narratives and Narrative Analysis

Like many other narrative researchers, I find Polkinghorne's distinction between *analysis of narratives* and *narrative analysis* very useful and I use it quite often as an analytical framework for my work. This distinction is important to us because it points out that narrative research, with its unique and distinctive features, straddles the worlds of both qualitative research and arts-based research.

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Based on his understanding of Bruner's two modes of thought, the paradigmatic mode and narrative mode (as discussed in Chapter 1), Polkinghorne (1995) posits that narrative inquiry has two types of analysis: one is an *analysis of narratives* that relies on paradigmatic cognition and the other is *narrative analysis* that depends on narrative cognition.[4]

Analysis of Narratives (Paradigmatic Mode of Analysis)

The **analysis of narratives,** or the **paradigmatic mode of analysis,** relies on paradigmatic cognition, a thinking skill that we humans primarily use to organize experience as ordered and consistent while attending to its general features and common categories and characteristics. A paradigmatic mode of knowing is an effort to classify such general features into different categories. It attempts to fit individual details into a larger pattern. According to Polkinghorne (1995), paradigmatic cognition "produces cognitive networks of concepts that allow people to construct experiences as familiar by emphasizing the common elements that appear over and over" (p. 10). We can use this paradigmatic thinking in narrative data analysis, which Polkinghorne calls an *analysis of narratives* (paradigmatic mode of analysis).

Qualitative research generally employs a paradigmatic type of analysis in which particular pieces of evidence are identified to form general concepts and categories. It seeks to identify common themes or conceptual manifestations discovered in the data. Thus, when we use this method, we examine the narrative data to focus on the discovery of common themes or salient constructs in storied data, and organize them under several categories using stories as data.[5]

Polkinghorne suggests that two types of paradigmatic analysis of narratives are possible: (a) one in which the concepts are derived from previous theory or logical possibilities that can be applied to the data; and (b) one in which concepts are inductively derived from the data (just like Glaser and Strauss's [1967] grounded theory notion). I would also add that another type of paradigmatic analysis of narratives is derived from the predetermined foci of one's study. For example, when we interview several veteran teachers about their teaching experiences, we could predetermine such categories as the first year's teaching experiences, coping strategies, challenges, and the like.

So, in the analysis of narratives (paradigmatic mode of analysis), findings would be arranged around descriptions of themes that are common across collected stories, just like many other qualitative research studies do (Polkinghorne, 1995). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also note, "An inquirer composing a research text looks for the patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across an individual's experience and in the social setting" (p. 132). By identifying general themes and patterns, the goal of the analysis of narratives will be to minimize ambiguity and emphasize "reference at the expense of sense" (Bruner, 1986, p. 14).

Polkinghorne's analysis of narratives (paradigmatic mode of analysis) can be summarized as follows:

- It describes the categories of particular themes while paying attention to relationships among categories;

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- It uncovers the commonalities that exist across the multiple sources of data; and
- It aims to produce general knowledge from a set of evidence or particulars found in a collection of stories, hence underplays the unique aspects of each story.

Narrative Analysis (Narrative Mode of Analysis)

Narrative analysis or narrative mode of analysis is based on narrative cognition that attends to the particular and special characteristics of human action that takes place in a particular setting. Polkinghorne (1995) remarks, "Narrative reasoning operates by noticing the differences and diversity of people's behavior. It attends to the temporal context and complex interaction of the elements that make each situation remarkable" (p. 6). Therefore, *narrative analysis (narrative mode of analysis)* that promotes the narrative mode of thought is about "the configuration of the data into a coherent whole" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15) while sustaining the metaphoric richness of a story. It is a method of emplotting the data, in which we would analyze narrative data that consist of actions, events, and happenings, in order to produce coherent stories as an outcome of the analysis. We create stories (storying and restorying) by integrating events and happenings into a temporally organized whole with a thematic thread, called the plot. In this process, we use the method of narrative smoothing (Spence, 1986), as discussed earlier, to fill in the gaps between events and actions. In such stories we can capture "the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11), which cannot be expressed in "definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions" (p. 6). The purpose of the narrative mode of analysis is, then, to help the reader understand why and how things happened in the way they did, and why and how our participants acted in the way they did. The final story configured through the narrative mode of analysis has to appeal to readers in a way that helps them empathize with the protagonist's lived experience as understandable human phenomena. Polkinghorne's concept of the narrative mode of analysis has become an impetus of burgeoning "experimentations with a variety of literary genres for emplotting their data" (Barone, 2007, p. 456) (also discussed in Chapter 4). For a more detailed process of narrative mode of analysis, see Coulter and Smith (2009).

Polkinghorne's narrative analysis (narrative mode of analysis) can be summarized as follows:

- It focuses on the events, actions, happenings, and other data elements to put them together in a plot;
- It uses to-and-fro, recursive movement from parts to whole or from whole to parts;
- It fills in the gaps between events and actions using a narrative smoothing process;
- It maintains that narrative analysis is not merely a transcription of the data, but is a means of showing the significance of the lived experience in the final story;
- It makes the range of disconnected data elements coherent in a way that it appeals to the reader;

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- It makes the final story congruent with the data while bringing narrative meanings that are not explicit in the data themselves; and
- It emphasizes connotation and sustains the metaphoric richness of a story.

Mishler's Models of Narrative Analysis

Elliot Mishler (1995) proposes a more detailed and comprehensive typology (than Polkinghorne's) of the models of narrative analysis that encompasses most of the narrative approaches available in the field of narrative inquiry. As he states, the models of narrative analysis reviewed in his typology demonstrate "the depth, strength, and diversity of the 'narrative turn' in the many sciences" (p. 117). Mishler's typology attempts to cover the ways in which narrative researchers "story the world," focusing on making meaning of events and experiences through the researcher's tellings and retellings of stories for different purposes in various contexts through various genres. That is, Mishler delineates a comparative perspective on differences of narrative inquiry in terms of theoretical aims and assumptions, types of data, analytic methods and strategies, and genres, based on the triad of language functions proposed by Halliday (1973): "reference, structure, and function" (p. 89). Mishler believes that narrative inquiry is a "problem-centered area of inquiry" (p. 89), hence, the models of narrative analysis we will use depend on our research problems. With his typology in which each model has its central task for narrative analysis, he provides a framework that will allow us to compare the problems, aims, foci, and methods across the different models (see Table 6.1).

I will explain what Mishler's typology entails in a minute, but I find his typology enlightening although Mishler humbly states that his proposed typology is "preliminary, tentative, incomplete" (Mishler, 1995, p. 89) with blurred boundaries. What is more encouraging, though, is that he cautions that narrowly focused approaches can be limiting, hence, it is important "to pursue alternative, more inclusive strategies that would provide a more comprehensive and deeper understanding both of how narratives work and of the work they do" (p. 117). I feel that he gives us permission to flirt with his typology as a departing point to "pursue alternative, more inclusive" methods of narrative analysis.

I have therefore slightly modified[6] his original typology in a way that would help me and other visual learners like some of you make better sense of it (see Figure 6.2). This modified version is also "preliminary, tentative, and incomplete"; therefore, I invite you to flirt with it to fit your analysis frame.

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Overview of Mishler's Typology

To briefly provide an overview of Mishler's narrative typology, the methods in the first category, *Reference and temporal order: The "telling" and the "told,"* focus on reference as a problem of representation; specifically, looking for a correspondence between the temporal sequence of

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Table 6.1 Mishler's Original Typology

Models of Narrative Analysis: A Typology
Reference and temporal order: The "telling" and the "told"
Recapitulating the told in the telling
Reconstructing the told from the telling
Imposing a told on the telling
Making a telling from the told
Textual coherence and structure: Narrative strategies
Textual poetics: Figuration, tropes, and style
Discourse linguistics: Oral narratives
Narrative functions: Contexts and consequences
Narrativization of experience: Cognition, memory, self
Narrative and culture: Myths, rituals, performance
Storytelling in interactional and institutional contexts
The politics of narrative: Power, conflict, and resistance

(Mishler, 1995, p. 90)

action events and their order of presentation in the data. The methods in the second category, *Textual coherence and structure: Narrative strategies,* are grounded in the structuralist theory of language, for example, deep structure and surface structure. They correspond with linguistics and narrative strategies, looking for ways in which unity and coherence are maintained in the narrative. These methods are more inclined toward spoken discourse than written texts, thus interested in ways of talking and telling, using the communicative functions of talking in their examination. Finally, the methods in the third category, *Narrative functions: Contexts and consequences,* correspond with "cultural, social and psychological context and functions of stories" (p. 90). The focus of the analysis of these methods is to illuminate the larger society through personal and group stories, using theoretical frameworks.

In this chapter, I focus on Category 1 only because the second category (textual coherence and structure) is extensively addressed in Riessman (2008) and Gee (2011), and it is also beyond the scope of this book. And the methods in the third category (narrative functions) can be explored based on your theoretical framework (see Chapter 2) and the narrative genre you employ (see Chapter 4).

Category 1. Reference and Temporal Order: The "Telling" and the "Told"

In narrative research, we frequently talk about "temporal order." According to Mishler (1995), there are two kinds of temporal order: *the order of the told* and *the order of the telling*. The former

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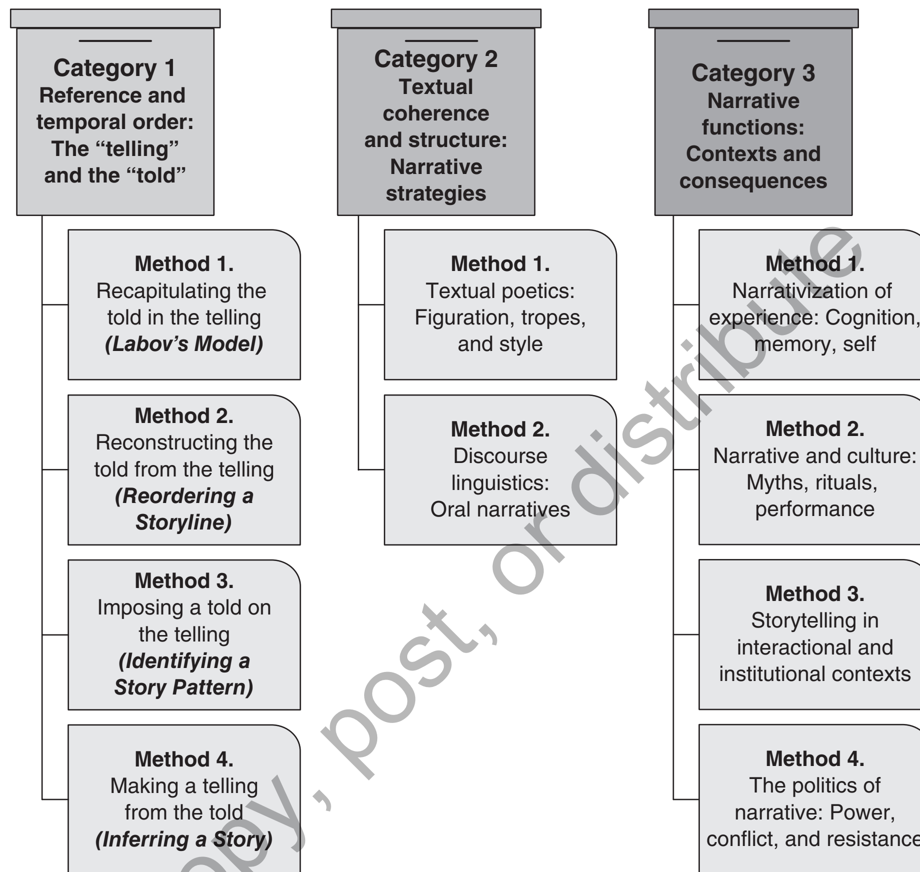

Figure 6.2 Modified Version of Mishler's Typology: Methods of Narrative Analysis

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refers to the order of the narratives of events and action that were told by our participants, and the latter refers to the order of the narratives of events and action that we will represent in our research text. Thus, our central task in this category would be to establish a balance between the two kinds of temporal order. The *telling* means the researcher's narrating, and the *told* means the data that are told by the participant. From this perspective, the story (or stories) the researcher (re)tells will be "a series of temporally ordered events" (Mishler, 1995, p. 90) that represents the interpretation of the researcher. This category prioritizes sequences of events and their textual representations for the analysis, which includes four methods: *Recapitulating the told in the telling (Labov's model), Reconstructing the told from the telling, Imposing a told on the telling,* and *Making a telling from the told.*

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Labov's Model[7]

Method 1. Recapitulating the Told in the Telling

This analysis method is used to identify what the "told" story is about. For this method, Mishler uses the sociolinguist William Labov's model as a conceptual framework since Labov specialized in an analysis of narratives of personal experience connecting the elements of language, meaning, and action. Mishler (1986a, 1986b, 1995) believes that **Labov's model** is a major resource for a narrative analysis method, and uses it as a point of departure and of reference. Although the limitations and criticisms of the Labovian model have been identified (see, for example, Patterson, 2013; Squire, 2013), his model still remains influential and is being used as a major framework of a method of narrative analysis with some modifications and adjustments (see Mishler, 1986a, 1986b, 1995; McCormack, 2004; Patterson, 2013; Riessman, 2008). It emphasizes recapturing the action and meaning of personal experience. I think that the Labovian model can serve as a narrative mode of thinking (Polkinghorne's narrative analysis) if we use it in a "flirting" manner to overcome possible criticism.

Labov defines narrative as a "recapitulation of experience that maintains the strict temporal ordering of events as they occurred in the real world" (cited in Mishler, 1986a, p. 236). Mishler (1995) adapts Labov and Waletzky's model (1967, cited in Mishler, 1995) in which the structure of a fully developed personal narrative consists of the following six components (see also Mishler, 1986a):

1. ***Abstract:*** a summary of the story and its points;
2. ***Orientation:*** providing a context such as place, time, and character to orient the reader;
3. ***Complicating Action:*** skeleton plot, or an event that causes a problem as in 'And then what happened?';
4. ***Evaluation:*** evaluative comments on events, justification of its telling, or the meaning that the teller gives to an event;
5. ***Result or Resolution:*** resolution of the story or the conflict; and
6. ***Coda:*** bringing the narrator and listener back to the present.

These six elements of a personal narrative give us a framework in which we can analyze the told stories. We could use them to reconstruct stories or to retell stories. Out of these six components, the fourth component, evaluative statements, is the most important element because these statements "reveal the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others" (Labov & Waletzky, 1967, cited in Mishler, 1995, p. 94). They are critical to our interpretation since they give us clues to understand the meaning that the tellers (our participants) give to their experiences.

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The Labovian model has been influential in providing a means to analyze oral storytelling with plot or thematic criteria (the six components) as principles of structural organization in narrative. The main advantage is it helps us answer the question of what the story is about (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; Mishler, 1986a; Patterson, 2013). Mishler (1986a), for example, points out that determining the point of a story (what the story is about) is an important investigative problem because the main point of the story may not always be stated explicitly by the storyteller. Thus, finding out what the story is about from data requires our inference and interpretation. We can use the Labovian model to extract a core story in the process of narrative analysis by identifying the six elements from the told. We can also identify what our participant intends to communicate as the meaning of his or her narrative account. Another advantage of Labov's model is that it provides a general frame for understanding the narrative structure cross-culturally, bridging the gap between literary and vernacular storytelling (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). Moreover, it provides guidelines for "comparative analysis of collections of narratives from many respondents" (Mishler, 1986a, p. 236). For example, we could compare the type of evaluation, multiple participants' different evaluations of the same event, or changes of the evaluation within the same interview (Patterson, 2013). Or, we could compare the evaluations of the experience of the same event made by different storytellers based on race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and more.

However, these advantages come with shortcomings. If you are interested in conversational narratives, interactional discourses, or co-construction of the story between you and the participant, the Labovian model will not fit, hence, you might want to think about using the methods in Category 2. The critique is that Labov's model largely depends on monological narratives told in interviews, such as oral history interviews or life story interviews (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012) rather than conversational interviews.

Now, is it possible to flirt with the Labovian model in an effort to address such criticisms? I think so. How about adding another component? For example, the third component, *Complicating Action,* refers to an event that causes a problem. However, I would say that it's not just an event that will create a problem. Other human issues like anxieties, expectations, desires, wishes, failures, future developments, and the like, which are not considered events by Labov, might have complicated our storyteller's life. Or there might be epiphanies. Turning points. Can we include them as a narrative component? Why not? In fact, Mishler advises us not to follow the Labovian model as fixed and absolute, which is considered one of the problems of the model. He says we can use it as a point of departure. Using the Labovian model as a foundation, we can create our own model, depending on what the focus of our research is. To me, the Labovian model can be expanded, modified, and elaborated. Thus, we can flirt with it. Patterson (2013) seems to agree with me as she states, "There are many ways in which narrative analysts can utilize the valuable aspects of Labov's work by using more inclusive definitional criteria" (p. 43).

Method 2. Reconstructing the Told From the Telling: Reordering a Storyline

This analysis is about putting the told in temporal order, or reordering a storyline. When you analyze the data, you will probably realize that the told (stories told by your participant) is not

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in order (e.g., chronologically or conceptually) in a way that would make sense to you or the reader, which is a typical problem narrative researchers encounter in data analysis. Participants may not tell their stories in any particular order, hence their stories are somewhat inconsistent, and they often digress from a storyline or make general comments that don't have a clear focus. Our participants may not be linear thinkers; they might zigzag with their stories depending on what they believe is important for the moment. In addition, we have multiple sources of data from which we need to extract sense-making stories. Faced with these issues, we'll have to reassemble or rearrange the told from interviews and other sources of data into chronologically or thematically coherent stories (depending on your research purpose), which is similar to Polkinghorne's narrative mode of analysis (narrative analysis). We have to reorder (reconstruct) a storyline from the telling(s). And this reconstructed story becomes the "narrative for further analysis" (Mishler, 1995, p. 95).

Method 3. Imposing a Told on the Telling: Identifying a Story Pattern

This method is about having predetermined themes for a story, or identifying a story pattern. For example, if you have a large set of data from a large number of participants, you may want to find some commonalities, generalities, and differences across the data (similar to Polkinghorne's analysis of narratives). To be able to compare and contrast different stories, you might want to have a standard format to elicit narrative accounts on the same topics from multiple participants. It is like having structured interviews with many different participants. You will have a list of standardized questions that are constructed around the topics that you want. According to Mishler, this method is effective when we have a large number of participants and want to discover generalities from the large data sets. We will give instructions to our participants to tell a story on certain topics. For example, in Veroff and colleague's study of newlyweds, the selected couples were asked to

> [t]ell a story of their relationship in their own words, following a storyline guide that read: "how you met; how you got interested in one another; becoming a couple; planning to get married; what married life is like right now; and what you think married life will be like in the future." (Veroff, Chadiha, Leber, & Sutherland, cited in Mishler, 1995, p. 99)

Hence, the story patterns identified were the way of a couple's meeting, the way a couple got interested in each other, the way they become a couple, and so on. This method will be good for standard coding procedure because story sequences will be invariant and good for constructing a "prototypical narrative representation" (Mishler, 1995, p. 99) of a certain topic, for example, what it is like to lose the first job.

However, I want to point out that themes are not always predetermined. In fact, often times, themes are later identified as you analyze the data (identifying emergent themes). Hence, I would extend the meaning of "imposing a told on the telling" from predetermined patterns to include emerging ones.

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Method 4. Making a Telling From the Told: Inferring a Story

This method is to infer a story from nonverbal data. It will be useful especially when we have multiple types of data, such as visual data or artifacts that are not in a spoken or written form. That is, if you have data that are storied in visual or archival forms, or in artifacts, you will have to *make (infer)* a telling from the told. Making a telling means that you the researcher will write a story inferred from the told in non-textual form. For example, historians will have to use a huge amount of archival data to narrate large-scale social processes and events. If you have visual data, photographs, drawings, or artifacts, you'll have to "make a telling from the told" in a way that complements or counters other types of narratives. In this method, it is you the researcher who is representing a temporal ordering of events and action; as Mishler (1995) states, "It is the researcher who is doing the telling" (p. 102).

Flirting With Polkinghorne, Mishler, and Labov

You see that I embrace Polkinghorne, Mishler, and Labov here. Why? They all help us excavate stories from our data rather than decontextualize them into bits and pieces that we see in qualitative research in general. They ask us to see narrative meanings reflected in recapitulated or reconstructed stories. In particular, what I like about Mishler is that he does not ask us to favor one method over the others. Rather, he encourages us to learn from different methods and value each of them:

> Those of us who study narrative genres and strategies of textualization might strengthen our research, both theoretically and empirically, by attending more explicitly to the contexts of tellings and their personal and social functions. And the parallel point: Analyses of psychological and political functions of narratives might benefit by detailed analyses of their structures and modes of textualization. (Mishler, 1995, p. 117)

Polkinghorne (1995) complements Mishler's open-mindedness by stating:

> Although both types [analysis of narrative and narrative analysis] of narrative inquiry are concerned with stories, they have significant differences. The paradigmatic type collects storied accounts for its data; the narrative type collects description of events, happenings, and actions . . . that produce storied accounts. . . . Both types of narrative inquiry can make important contributions to the body of social science knowledge. (p. 21)

Polkinghorne, Mishler, and Labov allow us to let stories be told in different narrative genres through the methods of narrative analysis, which then become the basis for further discussions and implications.

One good example study that utilizes both Polkinghorne and Mishler's Method 1, *Recapitulating the told in the telling (Labov's model),* is McCormack (2004). She explains how to

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story stories based on Polkinghorne's distinction between narrative analysis and analysis of narratives, and suggests locating a story in the data that incorporates Labov's model of the six story components. McCormack asks us to compose an interpretive story after each interview as an alternative to the traditional approach. These interpretive stories, then, will be "nested" (p. 13) within a personal experience narrative that is produced as our final product. For McCormack, hence, narrative analysis becomes "the process of storying stories" (p. 13).

Figure 6.3 summarizes my flirtation with Polkinghorne, Mishler, and Labov, echoing their open-mindedness and open-heartedness (like we saw in Dali's sculpture in Chapter 1), which may result in one of the narrative genres.

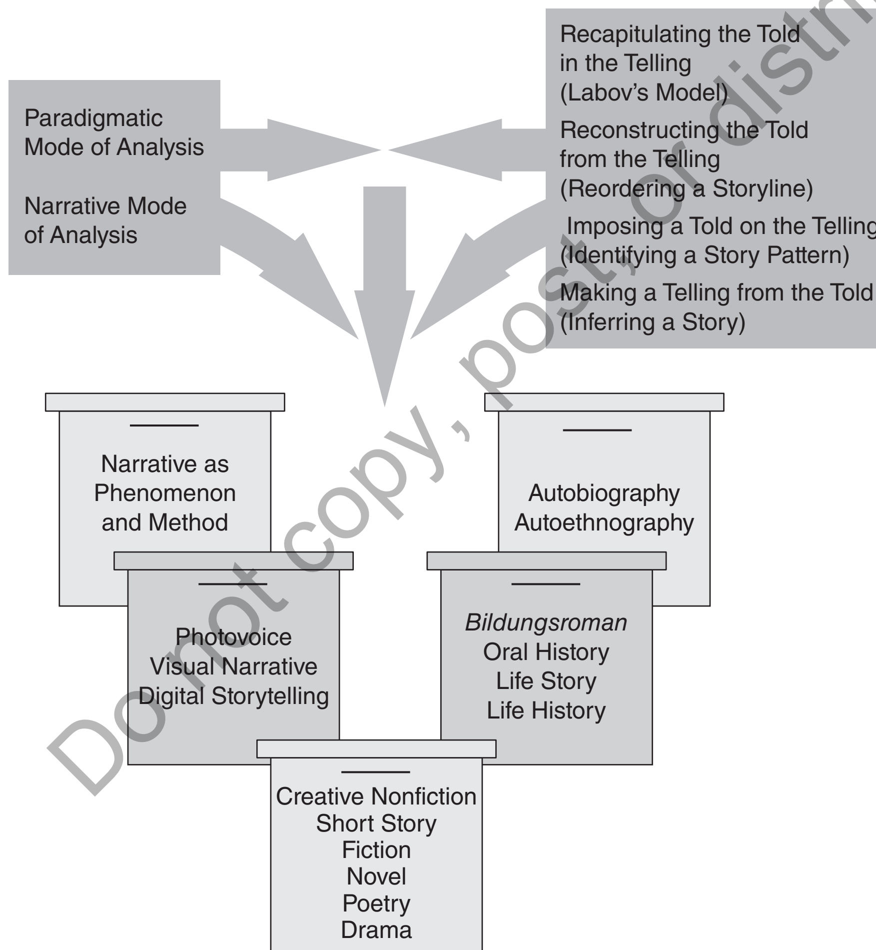

Figure 6.3 Flirting With Polkinghorne, Mishler, and Labov

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Narrative Analysis in Narrative Genres

Recall a discussion in Chapter 4 (Narrative Genres) about how our task as "researcher-storytellers" (Barone, 2007, p. 468) is to mediate stories into being as the story is "always mediated" (Abbott, 2002, p. 20). Hence, we are to undertake "this mediation from beginning to end" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 8). For the role of mediation of stories, I used a metaphor of a midwife who is positioned as a mediator between the demands of research that addresses the larger landscape and the personal meaning in individual stories. The midwife is to apply her *phronesis* (wise, ethical judgment) as "particular kinds of wakefulness" (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 21) to the stories we mediate, while taking into consideration the three dimensions of narrative inquiry: temporality, the personal and social, and the place. We researcher-storytellers mediate stories, sustaining the spirit of "flirtation" that asks us to challenge our tendency or adherence to what we already know and to question its legitimacy by dwelling on uncertainties and perplexities (interpretation of suspicion).

With this in mind, now, let's look into how these narrative analysis methods are utilized in different narrative genres. Some examples will help.

Analysis in Narrative as Phenomenon and Method: Broadening, Burrowing, and Restorying

When Connelly and Clandinin (1990) established the importance of narrative inquiry as an educational research methodology, they viewed narrative inquiry as both phenomenon and method. First, narrative inquiry as a phenomenon is the "what" of the study, that is, to study an experience as phenomenon. Hence, we need to think about how to respond to the following questions: What is my narrative inquiry about? What experience am I studying? The "what" of the study as research phenomenon is not like a still life painting. It's always shifting, moving, and complex. Hence, we cannot assume that our research phenomenon will be the same one that was explained clearly in the proposal (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is highly recommended that we identify our inquiry phenomena as they appear in the data during data analysis.

Next, narrative inquiry as method refers to thinking narratively as a way of thinking about phenomena, as we discussed in Chapter 3. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that thinking narratively during analysis involves "negotiating relationships, negotiating purposes, negotiating ways to be useful, and, negotiating transitions" (p. 129) while keeping in mind theoretical, methodological, and interpretive considerations. To get to a meaningful act of narrative analysis with the approaches of both faith and suspicion without compromising our ethics of interpretation, we will need to *narratively code* our field texts to find narrative meanings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For example, we will pay careful attention to:

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> names of characters that appear in field texts, places where actions and events occurred, story lines that interweave and interconnect, gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities and discontinuities that appear are all possible codes. . . . However, it is responses to the questions of meaning and social significance that ultimately shape field texts into research texts. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131)

For narrative coding, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest three analytical tools for narrative inquiry: *broadening, burrowing,* and *storying and restorying.* They used these analytical tools to analyze and seam together the narrative material they gathered. With the assistance of these interpretive devices, they transitioned from their interim field texts to research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The first tool, *broadening,* has to do with looking for a (broader) context of the story, including a description of the participant, implied in a told story. It is about making a general description of the participant's character or values, or of the social, historical, or cultural milieus in which your research takes place by looking at your field notes and the literature review. Similarly, Mishler (1986a) calls the concept of broadening *expansion.* He suggests that the narrative researcher introduce more general knowledge of the culture than is contained in the text itself to be able to interpret a broader cultural framework of meaning as part of narrative analysis. Through the analytical tool of broadening or expansion, we are to bring into the analysis "what else we know about the storytellers and their local and general circumstances" (Mishler, 1986a, p. 244).

Another tool is *burrowing.* It is used to focus on more specific details of the data. We make a thorough investigation of our data. For example, we pay attention to the participants' feelings, understandings, or dilemmas, or a certain event's impacts on the participants or the surroundings. We also ask questions about why and how the happenings have influenced the lived experiences of our participants. Burrowing relates to the details that are experienced by our participants from their points of view.

The third analytical tool is *storying and restorying.* After broadening the data and burrowing into them, we find ways to story and restory them so that the significance of the lived experience of the participant comes to the fore. Craig (2012), for example, uses these three analytic tools to excavate teachers' knowledge in context. She transforms the field texts into research texts using the three devices. With broadening, she situates the particular reform endeavor of her research school within the history of school reform in the United States; with burrowing, she concentrates on a certain phenomenon, such as an individual teacher's unfolding image of teaching. As for storying and restorying, Craig captures a story of her participant while revisiting past experiences across time and place.

Some of you might wonder whether to use computer software for narrative analysis, such as Atlas.ti., NVivo, or HyperResearch. More and more qualitative researchers increasingly use them to alleviate the complexity and complication of the analysis process. However, these computer programs should be used with caution and adaptation in narrative research as they

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are paradigmatic analysis in which codes, patterns, and themes are identified. For example, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) do not find these programs particularly useful for narrative inquiry. You have to determine for yourself how computer software will be helpful in storying and restorying to fit your research agenda.

Analysis in Autoethnography

As I quoted in Chapter 4, Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) state, "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze *(graphy)* personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (para. 1, italics added). They posit that autoethnography is not only a process and product but also a method that we use to systematically analyze the researcher's personal experience. Then, how do we systematically analyze our own personal experience, giving rise to the "I," the self? What are the possibilities?

Autoethnography writes about our past experiences in retrospect. We will select particular epiphanies from our past experience. Epiphanies are sudden leaps of understanding of events that have significantly impacted the trajectory of our life. They are "recollections, memories, images, feelings—long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 6). Epiphanies that reflect a culture, or one's cultural identities, are selected for an analysis. Ellis et al. (2011) maintain:

> Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. (para. 9)

If you are more inclined to analytic autoethnography in which you would collect data from and about people other than you, the researcher, including other data sources such as official documents and media accounts (see Vryan, 2006), you might want to pay attention to five key features that Anderson (2006) proposes:

- The researcher is a full member in a research group or setting;
- The researcher uses analytic reflexivity;
- The researcher presents narrative visibility of the researcher's self in the written text;
- The researcher engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self; and
- The researcher is committed to developing theoretical understanding of broader social phenomena.

I present Ronai's layered account (1995) as a good example of autoethnographic analysis. It uses methodological tools and research literature to analyze the researcher's personal experience. It is aesthetic, evocative, as well as analytic. It engages the reader, and maintains the characteristics of autoethnography, discussed in Chapter 4.

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Example: Autoethnographic Analysis (A Layered Account)

A layered account is a juxtaposition between the author's experience and relevant literature. It is a narrative form designed to present to the reader a continuous dialogue of experience between the author and the author's self, emerging from the multitude of reflexive voices that simultaneously describe, analyze, critique, and interpret a text (Ellis et al., 2011). It presents layers of experience and analysis in which spaces are created for readers to fill with their own interpretation of an autoethnographic story. The layered account illustrates how story and analysis can proceed simultaneously, embodying "a theory of consciousness and a method of reporting in one stroke" (Ronai, 1995, p. 396).

Carol Rambo Ronai (1995), an established autoethnographer in sociology, wrote an autoethnography in a layered account to convey her story of being a survival of child sex abuse. To analyze the participant observational data of her own experience, Ronai used systematic sociological introspection as her method, as she wrote:

> When I write about my social world, I codify myself on paper. I produce an ad-hoc self, . . . reflecting and changing my words in a reflexive manner. I write myself, I edit myself, interacting with the self I wrote by objectifying it, judging it, and rewriting it in response. Each time I write and reflect, I view myself as an object while simultaneously being an active subject. The writing subject interacts with the written object. The written self is adjusted or rewritten in response to changes in the internal dialogue about the self. The dialogue about the written self emerges from being the audience while reading the text, making a judgment while in that pose, and then reflecting on that particular presentation of self. (p. 399)

For her method, the layered accounts are separated by dots between the layers, to compare and contrast her personal experience of child sexual abuse against existing research to make a point that her experience is unique on the one hand, but also how the existing literature shows she is not unique on the other (p. 402). She and her self become the subject and the object of her autoethnography, using her own case as data. Here is an excerpt.

* * *

> These memories sicken me. They simultaneously interfere with the righteousness of my victim status and stagger me with the realization of how victimized I was. That I orgasmed makes what he did "not so bad." To my father, that meant I like it and should not complain. The confused little girl I was believed that there was something wrong with her because she did not always like it, that she was "just a big baby."

* * *

> Child sex abuse establishes relations between the victim and society. The enforcement of law as against child sex abuse involves serious consequences, such as breaking up the family through arrest of one or both parents (Bagely & King 1990). Social interaction flows more smoothly when child sex abuse is not discussed because it is easier not to take action. (p. 417)

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Ronai writes her autoethnography to produce "aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 14). She engages the reader in a way that appeals to "the authority of the readers' own experiences of the text" (Ronai, 1995, p. 399), creating internal dialogues among the readers themselves provoked by her text. Ronai writes an evocative autoethnography to use it as a bridge spanning "the gulf between public and private life" (p. 420) by making intimate details of her life accessible in public discourse. In doing so, she makes the personal social to reach broader and more diverse audiences that traditional research has usually failed to reach.

Analysis in *Bildungsroman*: Story of Personal Growth

In Chapter 4, we discussed that *Bildungsroman* is a story of one's *Bildung* that cultivates and forms one's disposition of mind through intellectual and moral endeavor. It is a story of developing oneself and of one's journey of becoming. It is a story of a quest to find one's true self, whose process consists of life challenges, conflicts between "the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by social order" (Dunlop, 2002, p. 218). Given the features of *Bildungsroman* that we discussed in Chapter 4, our analysis of *Bildungsroman* will focus on:

- The idea of an inner or spiritual journey of personal growth;
- The tension between the ideal and the reality;
- The importance of context in which the protagonist's personal journey takes place;
- The role of enhancing the *Bildung* of the researcher and the reader;
- The importance of questioning, dialogue, and doubt in personal journey; and
- The elements of striving, uncertainty, complexity, and transformation.

(Adapted from Roberts, 2008)

Example: Female *Bildungsroman*

Boundary Bay (Dunlop, 1999) is Rishma Dunlop's dissertation novel based on her research on the lives of beginning teachers, university professors, and programs of teacher education. It is the story of Evelyn Greene, a newly appointed university professor teaching in a faculty of education. Dunlop (2002) explains the process of how she came to work on a female *Bildungsroman* through her narrative inquiry:

> *Boundary Bay* began with tape-recorded data collection in the form of semi-structured qualitative research interviews with a group of five volunteer participants, newly graduated teachers from the same teacher education program (specializing in secondary art and English). Specific questions were explored, dealing with the nature of the first year of teaching experience and the transition from teacher education training into the classroom. The purpose was to conduct a narrative inquiry into the nature of lived experiences in the first years of teaching, the integration of experiences in

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> teacher education and classroom teaching, and the negotiation of mentorship and educational experiences at the university level. Of particular interest was the implementation of English literature and arts-based curricula.
>
> Over a period of two and a half years, I realized that the narrative inquiry we were collectively engaged in had come to include some difficult stories about the personal, emotional, and intellectual impact of teaching lives at multiple levels of institutional life. I also felt that I could convey these stories in the form of fiction, a novel that could uphold the literary traditions of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of education or formation, and the *Künstlerroman*, the novel of the artist's growth to maturity. In addition, as a challenge to the conventions of the male hero of the *Bildungsroman*, this novel is a woman's story, told primarily from a female narrator's perspective with a central focus on concerns about women and education. (p. 219)

Dunlop's *Bildungsroman* is a research product that consists of her own interpretation of a broad range of considerations based on her research findings. She states that her work is not a critical analysis; rather, it is a work of art that attempts to interpret the world, and is open to interpretation by readers. She shows us how her dissertation process evolved into a *Bildungsroman,* a move "far beyond her original intention of working with transcribed narratives" (p. 219).

Analysis in Biographical Narrative Inquiry

In Chapter 4, we learned that a biographical movement spread all over the world in the 1980s. We also learned that biographical narrative inquiry informs us of the knowledge that is historical, social, and personal. Biographical narrative inquiry includes oral history, life story, and life history, which focus on people's lives as a way of knowing.

As we attempt to analyze other people's stories, understanding some cautions about biographical narrative approach might be critical. Munro (1998) states that she engages in life history research with some suspicion although she is so attracted to it. First, she understands that life history is a method that would "give voice" to people who have traditionally been marginalized, but the talk of "giving voice" implies an unequal power structure between the researcher and the participants. Second, a focus on the individual story tends to romanticize the participant and thus reify notions of a unitary subject/hero, deviating from the complexities of the individual life that is mired in racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. Lastly, Munro is concerned about a reiterating potential of colonizing effects of life history research as it might reproduce "positivistic notions of power, knowledge and subjectivity despite claims to the contrary" (p. 12). Munro's point is that narrative does not automatically provide a better way of knowing truth. Therefore, Munro (1998) posits that we need to:

> Attend to the silences as well as what is said, that we need to attend to how the story is told as well as what is told or not told, and to attend to the tensions and contradictions rather than to succumb to the temptations to gloss over these in our desire for "the" story. (p. 13)

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Example: Life History

Petra Munro's *Subject to Fiction* (1998) is a life history of three women teachers, whom Munro called life historians, including Agnes, Cleo, and Bonnie. Munro states, "The heart of the book is the three narratives that I have constructed" (p. 13). From a poststructural feminist perspective, Munro interrogated ways to think about the agency and resistance that permeate women teachers' stories, challenging the notion of gendered construction of teaching (as "schoolmarms," for example) and ways of treating women teachers as objects of knowledge. The research questions that guided her research were:

- How do women teachers resist the naming of their experiences by others, which distorts and marginalizes their realities?
- How do they construct themselves as subjects despite the fictions constructed about women teachers? (p. 3)

To answer these questions, Munro focused on "the manner of the telling," which she viewed as "the authoring of oneself through story" (p. 5), in which she treated her participants as life historians or authors of their life who gave meanings to their own lives. Munro used interviews as the primary source of data, including in-depth life history interviews. In order to establish a broad context for understanding these life histories, Munro had supplementary interviews with colleagues, administrators, and students. Other sources of data were artifacts, which include teaching materials, photographs, journals, school documents, favorite books, and newspaper articles, and historical data regarding the communities. With this wide range of data sets, here is how Munro worked on her participants' stories:

> My relationships in the field not only provided my primary source of data, but these relationships became the epistemological base from which my interpretations and knowledge claims originated. In constructing the stories of Agnes, Cleo and Bonnie, I incorporate my own story throughout as a means of acknowledging the intersubjective nature of knowledge. I weave my own story of the research process throughout the life histories as a way to create a "tapestry" of our lives, an interweaving of connections, which is not only central to women's survival, but an epistemological act. (p. 11)

The stories of the three women teachers are examples of how Munro reconstructed the told from the telling as in Mishler's method, focusing on the told in the telling. Each story is indeed a "tapestry" of the told (narratives) and Munro's constant reflexive accounts as a way to rethink notions of power, agency, and subjectivity.

Example: Oral History

Leavy and Ross (2006) examined an oral history of Claire, a college student with an eating disorder, to create a link between personal problems and social problems. Their project began

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because Claire wanted to share a story about her own battle with a life-threatening eating disorder with the hopes of helping others. Claire's story focused on her own question, "How did I get here?" and revealed that "her eating disorder began in college, but her story began in childhood" (p. 66). Using one woman's narrative about a personal eating disorder, Leavy and Ross intended to illuminate a larger social phenomenon, provoking the reader's "sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959) at the intersection of the personal biographical history and the social one. They analyzed Claire's story with a thematic analysis that attended to what is said, or *the told* in Mishler's term, adopting the method of *the analysis of narratives* in Polkinghorne's term. They wrote:

> We analyzed the transcripts from the oral history, which include researcher notes added during transcription, in three phases: 1) line-by-line, 2) thematically, and 3) holistically by hand. First, through line-by-line analysis major code categories began to emerge. Next, we placed excerpts from the transcript under thematic codes that developed inductively out of the analysis process. These codes include perfectionism, control, independence/autonomy, disappointment, and projection of self. When discussing "disappointments" we placed this code under the larger category of "triggers," which is common terminology in regard to eating disorders. (2006, p. 68)

Then Leavy and Ross developed these codes into the themes of: *Striving for Perfection, Yearning for Control, Autonomy as a Central Value,* and *A Web of Pressures: Look at Me, I'm Shrinking,* and each theme was discussed through the analysis of Claire's narratives, interweaving their interpretations in the discussion (see Chapter 9 for more discussion on this article). As they retold Claire's story, they also realized how these themes were interconnected, shedding light on the reasons why some people might be more susceptible to an eating disorder than others. They noted that it was not until data analysis that they were able to understand the presence of particular themes at various moments throughout Claire's life.

Leavy and Ross conclude that during data analysis of the interview transcript both "thematically and holistically" (p. 81), they were able to see how Claire's unique personal story is linked to the general sociological "story" of eating disorders, common among college-age females. They show how oral history narratives can become a vehicle for personalizing social problems or socializing personal problems. They state, "Through the process of interpretation we have been able to use Claire's story to personalize the much more general matrix of eating disorder vulnerability" (p. 81).

The thematic analysis Leavy and Ross adopted for their oral history project is commonly used by narrative inquirers. The emphasis is on "the told," the events or the content of the narratives, paying little attention to how a story unfolds in a conversational exchange between the interviewer and the participant (Riessman, 2008). In thematic narrative analysis, we are not necessarily interested in the form of the narrative, but rather its thematic meanings and points as they emerge in the process of recapitulating the told in the telling (Mishler, 1986a). Thus, the focus is on "the act the narrative reports and the moral of the story" (Riessman, 2008, p. 62).

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Example: Life Story

Gubrium and Holstein (1995) analyze their biographical work (life stories) of ethnographic narratives gathered in nursing homes, family therapy, and community mental health agencies. They asked their participants to tell their life stories in relation to the quality of their life and the care they received in nursing homes. With the following focus question, "If residents were asked to be the ethnographers of their own lives in the nursing home, how would the quality of those lives be construed?" (p. 48), they analyzed the interview data using three analytic terms as guides to the participants' interpretive practice through which research participants understand, organize, and represent experience. The three analytic terms are *narrative linkages, local culture,* and *organizational embeddedness.*

First, *narrative linkages* refer to "the experiences that residents linked together to specify the subjective meaning of the qualities of care and nursing home living" (p. 48). The participants' interpretive practice appearing in the narrative linkages becomes the researchers' focus, as the narrative linkages can tell the researchers how the participants came to understand the quality of their nursing home living. Narrative linkages can inform researchers that narratives are carefully constructed communications in a certain time and context, offering a "complex sense of biographical patterning" (p. 48). Through the analysis of narrative linkages, Gubrium and Holstein found that residents' narratives had clear implications for the quality assessment of the nursing home from their own terms, suggesting that a standardized quality assessment system is irrelevant.

Another analytic term is *local culture,* which "refers to the locally shared meanings and interpretive vocabularies" (p. 50) that participants use to construct their experience. Gubrium and Holstein compared how two different family therapy programs have their own local culture that interprets the meaning of functional/dysfunctional families differently from each other. Thus, each local culture provides particular interpretive resources through which participants assign meaning to their life experiences. This local culture, which is diverse and context specific, can illuminate the more abstract, larger culture shared by the general public.

The third, *organizational embeddedness,* shows how the structure of an organization, including its missions, professional visions, and mandates, affects the participants' interpretive practice, projecting "institutionally salient priorities and agendas" (p. 53). Gubrium and Holstein provide the case of Charles, a twelve-year-old client, as an example of how the various departments and programs of a multidisciplinary child guidance clinic interpreted Charles's life and problems differently, eventually referring him to different service programs, from the clinic's delinquency-prevention program, to the psychosocial intervention program, and to medical treatment for hyperactivity. Gubrium and Holstein observed, "As the case moved between these organizational and professional outlooks, its interpretive jurisdiction changed. In the process, Charles's life was alternatively characterized in related biographical vocabularies" (p. 55).

By foregrounding the life stories of participants, Gubrium and Holstein articulated how participants' interpretive understandings are mediated through the three analytic terms, *narrative linkages, local culture,* and *organizational embeddedness,* offering more distinctive and meaningful understandings about social issues and problems.

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Analysis in Arts-Based Narrative Inquiry

In Chapter 4, we learned how arts-based narrative inquiry has the benefits of promoting empathy, esthetic experience, and epiphanies that will enlarge the reader's horizon. There are many researchers in the social and human sciences who use the arts as a method and a product of their research. In fact, arts-based research is currently thriving. However, here I limit my discussion of arts-based inquiry to narrative inquiry that uses the arts to enhance its role. I focus on literary-based narrative inquiry (Creative Nonfiction/Short Story/Fiction/Novel) and visual-based narrative inquiry (Photographic Narrative/Photovoice/Archival Photographs).

Example: Literary-Based Narrative Inquiry (Literary Storytelling)

My beloved doctoral advisor, Tom Barone, who has been happily retired to his home state, Louisiana, for a couple of years now, has written numerous influential books and articles on narrative inquiry and curriculum. As I mentioned before, he is the one who helped me develop the love of narrative inquiry through his teaching. His research and teaching have made an enduring influence on me as a teacher and researcher of narrative inquiry. One of his well-known books, *Touching Eternity: The Enduring Outcomes of Teaching* (2001), is an investigation of the meaning of teacher-student encounters within the life narratives of those who lived them. More specifically, it is a quest for the long-term influences a high school teacher in North Carolina, Don Forrister, had on some of his former students. The shape of this book, Barone explains, was influenced by the turn toward "narrative research" and "a literary turn in human studies" (p. 2). The life stories of the teacher and his nine former students, Barone states, "generally exhibit characteristics of imaginative literature, including expressive, evocative language and an aesthetic form. The book may, therefore, be considered a work of *arts-based research*" (p. 2, italics in original). So, what does arts-based narrative research (literary-based) look like?

Based on interviews and other supplementary research materials, Barone presents an exemplary **literary-based narrative inquiry**. To provide life stories of his participants as "literary constructions" (p. 35), he flirts (or "experiments" [p. 35], to use his own word) with the raw data to try out different discursive features such as textual formatting, language style, narrative tone, and emplotment strategies. Barone frequently uses "fashion," "craft," "construct," "compose," and "reconfigure" to signify his engagement with literary-based narrative inquiry. Barone uses Polkinghorne's narrative analysis (or what Barone calls narrative construction) as his main narrative strategy, while incorporating Mishler's models to present biographical and autobiographical stories that are crafted around themes identified by the informants.

Barone emphasizes the use of story titles or subheadings as the theme "related to prominent shifts in life plots" (p 168), which serves as a means to structure the interviews and the emerging story as well as a means for "qualitative control" of each story that helps the researcher determine details to be elicited and included (and those to be ignored and excluded) in the developing story. He uses the *narrative smoothing* strategy based on his interpretation of the data, carefully

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enough to leave the choice of theme "sacred, untouchable" (p. 169), as he never attempts to influence an informant's judgment about the teacher's significance in his or her life story.

Part II of the book consists of nine students' stories and Part III is the story of Don Forrister. In the beginning of each story, Barone briefly explains his "experiments" with textual formats, some of which I provide below, as they give us valuable insights into how we can flirt with our own literary-based narrative inquiry.

- The Story of the College Teacher[8]

> The life story of former student, now college teacher, Carolyn Wilson (pseudonym) represents a joint effort. The story is crafted primarily out of the information that I gathered in conversations with Carolyn and autobiographical materials previously written by her. In fashioning the life story, I have employed a particular literary conceit in order to avoid a relatively seamless chronological story form. (p. 36)

- The Story of the Waiter

> The following life story is an experimental blend of biography and autobiography. The story is crafted out of the memories of Barry Larson (pseudonym) and the results of his conversations with significant others in his life, as related in several interview sessions. . . . It moves beyond the interview text only in the spirit of Barry's theme. This is primarily a work of nonfiction (in the usual sense of that term). I have, however, taken certain storytelling liberties, while always remaining faithful to Barry's sense of the essential impact of Forrister on his life. (pp. 55–56)

- The Story of the Teacher, Don Forrister[9]

> Composed out of lengthy discussions between Forrister and myself, this section focuses on the person who is Don Forrister, revealing the origins of his artistic nature and the wellsprings of his pedagogy, even the content of his dreams . . .
>
> Although the story is cast as a biography, written in the third person, it is autobiographical insofar as it recounts an honest version of life experiences from Forrister's perspective. (p. 105)

Barone also notes that Don Forrister's persona is reconstructed and reconfigured through the prisms of the stories of many former students, as well as his own and the researcher's own. In so doing, certain familiar events are revisited, and sometimes rewritten, seen from a different angle, even an opposing slant, thus suggesting the fragility of memories.

Barone's work teaches us how we can transition from field texts to research text using narrative analysis (narrative mode of analysis) to create literary-based narrative inquiry, including creative nonfiction, biography, or life history. While Barone acknowledges that his book does not reach the level of metaphor-laden imaginative literature, he places his work more toward the "narrative/artistic side of the research continuum" (p. 155) than the paradigmatic mode of knowing. For this narrative construction (which is the same as Polkinghorne's concept, narrative analysis), Barone explains that he had to use his imagination to "fill in holes" to compose a vivid story while remaining faithful to the theme of the interview (narrative smoothing method). Thus, Barone becomes "the biographer of teacher and students, even as they tell stories about themselves and others" (p. 167). In so doing, he

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attempts to "play two games at once" (p. 171). That is, on the one hand, he has a felt need to speak in an analytical voice about motifs confronted within his conversations with the participants. On the other, he wants to honor the life stories of participants before theorizing them.

Example: Visual-Based Narrative Inquiry (Visual Storytelling)[10]

In Chapter 4, I drew upon photographic narratives, originated from Conceptual Art, to discuss how we can use visual data to broaden/deepen/strengthen narrative inquiry. **Visual storytelling** is a powerful means to help us better understand human experiences. The visual turn in narrative studies is an intersection between visual studies in the social sciences and narrative studies. For example, the use of photography (along with other visual images) is valued for its potential to redirect, contest, and unlock the gaze in order to promote social awareness and justice (Luttrell, 2010). Riessman (2013) points out, "Photographers and other visual artists sequence images in ways that invite narrative inquiry" (p. 258). However, according to Riessman, one of the untapped areas in narrative research is using visual materials that tell stories.

Photovoice

A popular method of collecting visual data is **photovoice**, which was briefly discussed in Chapter 4. It is a method that allows participants to produce images, and more specifically, it "puts cameras in the hands of people who have been left out of policy decision-making, or denied access to and participation in matters that concern their daily lives" (Luttrell, 2010, p. 226). Luttrell conducted a longitudinal study in an elementary school that is located in a neighborhood that is racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse. She used the photovoice method to interrogate the relationships between image, voice, and narrative that were constructed by the child participants from their own perspectives. The participating children, mainly in fifth and sixth grade, were each given a disposable analog camera with 27 exposures and either four days or one to two weeks to take pictures of their school, family, and community lives. They were given little guidance except for basic instructions about using the camera and a discussion about the ethics of picture-taking issues. Following the picture-taking sessions, the participants were interviewed individually and in groups, four times, about their pictures. The aim of the study was "to use the children's photographs, narrations and self representations with teachers and educators-in-training as a means to enhance their awareness of children's funds of knowledge" (p. 226). Luttrell carried out a picture content analysis and an analysis of the children's narratives about their photographs. Below is a list of sample coding systems that Luttrell used for the picture content analysis:

- Setting (e.g., family, school, community, inside, outdoors);
- People (e.g., children/adults, male/female, age and gender mix);
- Things (e.g., technological, household items, personal possessions, toys and games);
- Genre (e.g., snapshot, landscape, portrait);
- Social relationships;

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- Activity types (e.g., work, play, socializing);
- Activity level (e.g., low, medium, high);
- Gaze (e.g., looking at the camera, looking away from camera with smile or not), and;
- Things that the children noticed in each other's photographs (e.g., brand name items, hand signs, and babies).

While she provides some cautions about conducting a photovoice project with young people, Luttrell (2010) points out what children's (photo)voices and narratives imply:

> In a context of neo-liberal social policies that have had adverse effects on young people's care worlds—whether immigration policy, welfare reform or a test-driven educational system that pushes out those who cannot measure up—these young people's images and narratives provide a glimpse of the social connections that they see and value, if not fear may be at risk. Perhaps the children's voices and concerns are ahead of social theorists and policy makers who have ignored the centrality and intimacies of care giving and care taking, and we need to take heed. (p. 234)

Archival Photographs: Parallel Stories Between Visual Data[11] and Textual Data

I wish I had incorporated visual images into my narrative inquiry dissertation in the early 2000s. More specifically, I wish I had known Richard Ross at that time. It was serendipity that I had a chance to meet Ross recently. My museum director friend, Linda, encouraged me to attend Ross's talk held at the Beach Museum of Art in February 2014. Ross is a photographer, researcher, and professor at the Department of Art in the University of California, Santa Barbara. His talk was about his recent project, Juvenile-in-Justice, for which he took photographs of youths in 250 prisons in thirty-one states. He interviewed over 1,000 kids in jail. His photographs document "the placement and treatment of American juveniles housed by law in facilities that treat, confine, punish, assist and, occasionally, harm them" (www.richardross.net). In his talk, Ross emphasizes how he uses art as a "weapon to change the future." He further elaborates that as an artist and activist, his goal is to give visual tools to advocates to help reduce mass incarceration and change such ineffective and often harmful practices for our next generations to come. Ross shared a collection of disturbing but powerful images of young teenagers locked down in the jail, along with their narratives. While being struck by parallel stories between his images and my research participants in an alternative school, I was deeply inspired by the power of visual storytelling that Ross presented to the audience on a very cold February evening.

Below, I provide a possibility of combining visual data and textual data by juxtaposing Ross's photos and some part of my research on at-risk students to illustrate similar stories presented in both pictures and written texts. These visual images could have been incorporated into my written texts as a way to make connections between the lives of at-risk students in alternative schools and the larger social structures such as juvenile detention centers. In retrospect, my previous work on alternative schools and the lived experience of students who were at risk of school failure would have benefited from the incorporation of these visual images, since visual

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data can help the unnoticed aspect of human activity and social organization "become noticed and taken into account in understanding the production of social life" (Bell, 2013, p. 144).

In my previous work (Kim, 2011), I described one of the three images of alternative schools as that of a juvenile detention center, like Image 6.1. I wrote:

> US public schools and alternative schools, in particular, increasingly resemble prisons as they invest in school security apparatus such as metal detectors, police presence, surveillance cameras, chain-link fences, surprise searches, and more (Saltman, 2003). Further, *lockdown* is becoming the pervasive language for "at-risk" youth in public alternative schools in which students are increasingly subjected to physical and psychological surveillance, confinement, and regimentation (Brown, 2003). . . . This concern has resulted in the burgeoning growth of alternative education programs and services directing juvenile delinquents to alternative schools or programs before they end up in prison. (pp. 79–80)

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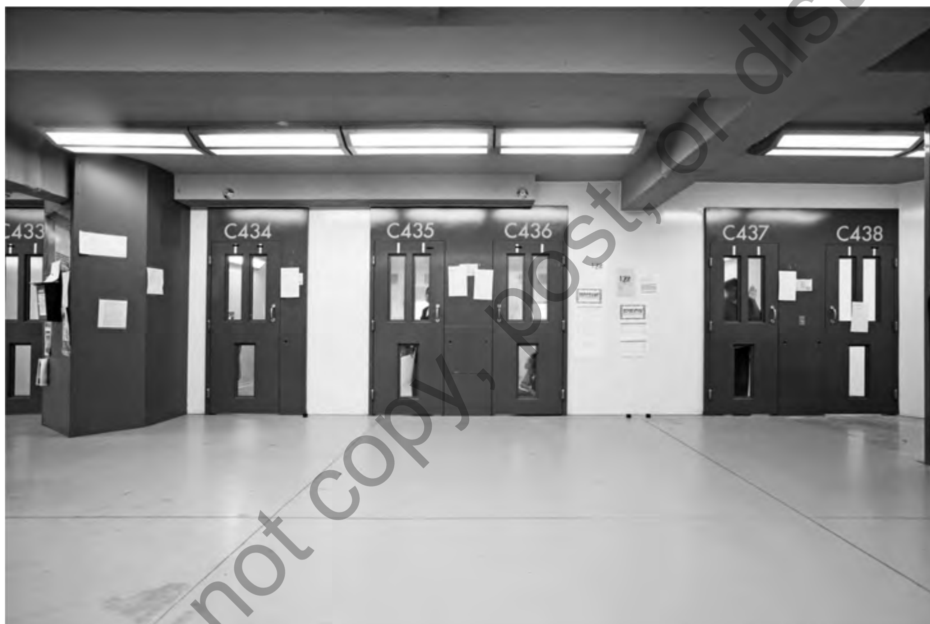

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Image 6.1 Juvenile Detention Center, Houston, Texas.

Next, take a look at Image 6.2 (S. T., age 15) and Image 6.3 (C. T., age 15). Read their narratives from interviews conducted by Ross.

> S.T's Story: I was with a group of guys when I was 13. We jumped this guy near the lake. We got about $400. They gave me the gun 'cause I was the youngest. I been in Juno cottage for two years. I was coming back from the med unit with a homie and we broke into the canteen through

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a window and ate all the candy bars we could find. He got sick and we only had a five-minute pass so they caught us. I got sent to Valis but got played by a staff there so they sent me here to Martin.

C.T's Story: I got kicked out of school for partying and truancy. I use meth. They have had me here for two weeks. I think they keep me here because they think I am a risk of hurting myself. When they want to come in, they come in, they don't knock or anything—this is the observation room. There are five other girls here I think for things like running away and curfew violations . . . lewd and lascivious conduct, selling meth, robbery, weed . . . stuff like that. (http://richardross.net/juvenile-in-justice)

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Image 6.2 S.T., age 15, Ethan Allen School, Wales, Wisconsin.

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Image 6.3 C.T., age 15, Southwest Idaho Juvenile Detention Center Caldwell, Idaho.

S.T. and C.T. are the kinds of students who would have attended the alternative school that was my research site, as I wrote about the reasons why students were expelled from their regular school and transferred to an alternative school:

In 2001, NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) conducted the first national study of public alternative schools and programs serving at-risk students. . . . Roughly half of all districts with alternative schools and programs identified appropriate reasons for removing at-risk students from a regular school and transferring them to an alternative school. The reasons include: possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs (52 percent); physical attacks or fights (52 percent); chronic truancy (51 percent); possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm (50 percent); continual academic failure (50 percent); disruptive verbal behavior (45 percent); and possession or use of a firearm (44 percent); teen pregnancy/parenthood (28 percent); and mental health (22 percent). (Kim, 2005, p. 11)

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Now, take a look at Image 6.4, showing arms that exhibit razor cuts. It reminds me of Kevin in my study, who also had a chronic habit of razor cutting. Kevin narrated:

> We had our own family drama today. Yelling, shouting, cursing. . . . It's part of our home life. I stopped understanding my mom a while ago when she announced her third marriage. Now she's with her fourth husband. I don't trust her any more. I don't feel connected with her any more. Living in this mess—living with my mom's fourth husband and his two children—is just hopeless. Everything looks so meaningless: home, girls, friends, school, and life. . . . Nobody knows me. Nobody cares about me. Nobody understands me. I am so lonely and depressed.
>
> I'm doing it again. I'm cutting myself again. My arms, my belly, and my legs . . . with a razor. . . . I'm bleeding, bleeding a lot. It's painful, but . . . bleeding makes me feel good. I'm numb to pain. If I disappear now, would anybody care? (Kim, 2011, p. 87)

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Image 6.4 A female juvenile with scars from cutting herself that read "Fuck Me." At Jan Evans Juvenile Justice Center, Reno, Nevada.

Many images and stories from the juvenile detention center that Ross has collected have striking similarities with the kinds of stories that my alternative school research participants shared with me. Ross's photographs preserve fragments of stories that my students shared. Stories in both visual and textual forms present each teenager's unique situation but they all share the common background: teenagers whose life stories simply reflect the lack of surrounding

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adults' attention, love, and caring for them. The adults are parents, educators, administrators, the public, and society. These intersections between the written texts and the visual texts confirm and affirm research findings.

Working with images, according to Riessman (2008), can deepen and thicken interpretation as images evoke emotions and imaginative understanding, often lacking in social science writing. The use of visual data in narrative inquiry will allow many aspects of human experiences that might otherwise go unnoticed to be recognized and afforded visual voices (Luttrell, 2010).

Conclusion: Variegations of Narrative Analysis and Interpretation

In this chapter, we have discussed issues related to narrative data analysis and interpretation. What is presented here does not cover all the possible ways of narrative analysis methods. Far from it. However, by approaching narrative data analysis and interpretation with a notion of flirtation, using our imagination and creativity, we can adapt, modify, and deepen existing analysis methods to address our individual narrative research design and purpose. I hope that this chapter has provided you with guidance in such a direction.

The variegations of conducting narrative analysis suggest how much can be learned from a narrative perspective on human action and experience. As Mishler (1995) notes, we narrative inquirers have a firm foothold within social and human science research and our job is to continue gaining in depth and significance of the narrative work. Mishler writes:

> The diversity of narrative models invites, and indeed demands, a more reflective stance for researchers. It is clear that we do not *find* stories; we *make* stories. We retell our respondents' accounts through our analytic redescriptions. We too are storytellers and through our concepts and methods—our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives—we construct the story and its meaning. In this sense, *the* story is always co-authored, either directly in the process of an interviewer eliciting an account or indirectly. (p. 117, italics in original)

Hence, after flirting with data through the analysis and interpretation process, we'll need to think about writing a text that *desires* the reader, that is, writing a text that invites the reader to play with our narrative writing, framed in one of the narrative genres, presented in Chapter 4. Some of you might be curious how the analytic process can go hand in hand with the creative process. No worries. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) suggest CAP (creative analytical processes) writing, arguing that "any dinosaurian beliefs that 'creative' and 'analytical' are contradictory and incompatible modes" (p. 962) are doomed for extinction in the wake of postmodernist critiques of traditional qualitative writing practices. So, we have the postmodern thinkers' blessing to write creatively, analytically, narratively, and imaginatively, engaging in one of the narrative research genres.

For further learning about narrative analysis, I would encourage you to check out some of the suggested readings.

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Suggested Readings

For Narrative Analysis

De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing narrative: Discourse and sociolinguistic perspectives.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gee, P. (2011). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Holstein, J., & Gubrium, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Varieties of narrative analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

For the Labovian Model

McCormack, C. (2004). Storying stories: A narrative approach to in-depth interview conversations. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 7*(3), 219–236.

Patterson, W. (2013). Narratives of events: Labovian narrative analysis and its limitations. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (pp. 27–46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

For Visual Narrative Analysis

Bell, S. E. (2002). Photo images: Jo Spence's narratives of living with illness. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine, 6*(1), 5–30.

Pink, S. (2004). Visual methods. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), [Special issue] *Qualitative Research Practice* (pp. 361–378). London: Sage.

See also *Visual Studies* (2010), Vol. 25, No. 3.

Questions for Reflection

- What type of narrative analysis method will you use?
- How will you flirt between the methods of Polkinghorne and Mishler to address your research purpose?
- What kind of visual data will you have?
- Can you create your own narrative analysis method based on your understanding of data analysis and interpretation?

Activities

1. Using the interview transcript you have from one of the activities in Chapter 5, try to analyze it using either the Polkinghorne model or the Mishler model.

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2. Using the same interview transcript, write a story or reorder a storyline based on the six components of the Labovian model (Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Result, and Coda).

3. Find a narrative analysis model that fits your research design. Flirt with the model and come up with your own analysis model and justify it.

Notes

1. See Chase (2003) for wonderful class activities for narrative data analysis and interpretation.
2. If you are interested in a more serious study of interpretation, I would recommend Paul Ricoeur's *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Ricoeur, 2007).
3. Ricoeur's terms are the *hermeneutics of faith* and the *hermeneutics of suspicion,* while Josselson modifies them to the *hermeneutics of restoration* and the *hermeneutics of demystification.* However, for the purpose of this chapter, I have modified the terms to *the interpretations of faith* and *the interpretations of suspicion.*
4. Readers may confuse Polkinghorne's term *narrative analysis* with Mishler's use of narrative analysis. While Polkinghorne uses it to refer to one of the *types* of analyzing narrative data, Mishler uses it to refer to an *act* of analyzing narrative data in general. Most narrative researchers use the term *narrative analysis* to mean the latter, like Mishler does. To minimize the confusion, I use the *paradigmatic mode of analysis* to refer to Polkinghorne's *analysis of narratives*, and the *narrative mode of analysis* for Polkinghorne's *narrative analysis.*
5. Polkinghorne (1995) uses narrative and story interchangeably, as in "storied narrative."
6. Changes are identified in bold and italic font.
7. Although Labov's model is treated as one component of Mishler's typology, I treat Labov's model separately because of Labov's deep influence on narrative.
8. Barone notes that story titles refer to the occupations of protagonists at the time of writing.
9. Barone devotes all of Part III of the book to the life story of Don Forrister, while the nine students' narratives make up Part II.
10. I focus on visual images such as photographs and paintings rather than video clips.
11. All the images here are from Richard Ross's personal website, http://richardross.net/juvenile-in-justice, with his permission.

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Chapter Topics

- On Coda
- Research Signature
- Answering the Question "So What?"
- "Desiring" the Audience
- Avoiding an Epic Closure
- Theorizing Findings
- Planting the Seed of Social Justice
- Becoming a Scheherazade
- Conclusion: Ongoing Stories

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