

Considering Counter-Narratives

Narrating, resisting, making sense

Edited by Michael Bamberg
and Molly Andrews



STUDIES IN NARRATIVE

Considering Counter-Narratives

Studies in Narrative

Studies in Narrative (SIN) comprise studies using narratives as approaches or methodological tools to explore aspects of life, language, and literature as well as studies that explore and contribute to the notion of narrative from theoretical and epistemological perspectives. Volumes published in this series draw on a variety of approaches and methodologies cross-fertilizing different traditions and disciplines.

Series Editor

Michael Bamberg (Clark University)

Advisory editorial board

Susan Bell (Bowdoin College)
Jerome Bruner (New York University)
Jennifer Coates (University of Surrery Roehampton)
Michele L. Crossley (Edge-Hill University College)
Carol Gilligan (New York University)
Rom Harré (Linacre College, Oxford)
David Herman (North Carolina State University)
Janet Holmes (Victoria University of Wellington)
Charlotte Linde (Institute for Research Learning)
Dan McAdams (Northwestern University)
Allyssa McCabe (University of Massachusetts, Lowell)
Eric E. Peterson (University of Maine)
Catherine Kohler Riessman (Boston University)
Ted Sarbin (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Deborah Schiffrin (Georgetown University)
Margaret Wetherell (Open University)

Volume 4

Considering Counter-Narratives: Narrating, resisting, making sense
Edited by Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews

Considering Counter-Narratives

Narrating, resisting, making sense

Edited by

Michael Bamberg

Clark University

Molly Andrews

University of East London

John Benjamins Publishing Company
Amsterdam/Philadelphia



™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Considering counter-narratives : narrating, resisting, making sense / edited by Michael Bamberg, Molly Andrews.

p. cm. (Studies in Narrativity, ISSN 1568-2706 ; v. 4)

Chiefly articles previously published in Narrative Inquiry.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

1. Discourse analysis, Narrative. 2. Narrative (Rhetoric) I. Bamberg, Michael G.W., 1947- II. Andrews, Molly. III. Narrative inquiry. IV. Series.

P302.7. C66 2004

401'.41-dc22

2004051822

ISBN 90 272 2644 X (Eur.) / 1 58811 542 9 (US) (Hb; alk. paper)

© 2004 – John Benjamins B.V.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, photoprint, microfilm, or any other means, without written permission from the publisher.

John Benjamins Publishing Co. · P.O. Box 36224 · 1020 ME Amsterdam · The Netherlands
John Benjamins North America · P.O. Box 27519 · Philadelphia PA 19118-0519 · USA

Table of contents

Introduction to the book	IX
<i>Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews</i>	
Opening to the original contributions	
Counter-narratives and the power to oppose	1
<i>Molly Andrews</i>	
Memories of mother: Counter-narratives of early maternal influence	7
<i>Molly Andrews</i>	
COMMENTARIES	
Blame it on psychology!?	27
<i>Carlos Kölbl</i>	
Accidental cases: Extending the concept of positioning in narrative studies	33
<i>Catherine Kohler Riessman</i>	
Politicising mothers: Counter-narratives of mothering experience	38
<i>Coombes and Mandy Morgan</i>	
Socially organised use of memories of mother in narrative re-construction of problematic pasts	42
<i>Kyoko Murakami</i>	
RESPONSE by <i>Molly Andrews</i>	51
Negotiating “normality” when IVF fails	61
<i>Karen Throsby</i>	
COMMENTARIES	
IVF failure: Reproductive normativity and dealing with disappointment	83
<i>Keith Tuffin</i>	
When IVF fails – the success of science and medicine	91
<i>Michele Crossley</i>	
On identifying counter-narratives of failed IVF	100
<i>Susan E. Bell</i>	
RESPONSE by <i>Karen Throsby</i>	105

Photographic visions and narrative inquiry	113
<i>Barbara Harrison</i>	
COMMENTARIES	
Photographs and counter-narratives	137
<i>Alexander Poddiakov</i>	
Hearing what is shown and seeing what is said	143
<i>Richard Chalfen</i>	
Show is tell	151
<i>Michael Rich</i>	
RESPONSE by <i>Barbara Harrison</i>	159
“That’s very rude, I shouldn’t be telling you that”: Older women talking about sex	169
<i>Rebecca L. Jones</i>	
COMMENTARIES	
Narratives as <i>drawn-upon</i> and narratives as <i>occasioned</i> :	
Challenges in reconciling an emic and etic analysis	191
<i>Neill Korobov</i>	
“But what’s at stake?” Older women talking about sexuality	199
<i>Jill McLean Taylor</i>	
What discourse analysis reveals about elderly women, sex and the struggle with societal norms	205
<i>Janet Spreckels</i>	
RESPONSE by <i>Rebecca L. Jones</i>	213
White trash pride and the exemplary black citizen: Counter-narratives of gender, “race” and the trailer park in contemporary daytime television talk shows	221
<i>Corinne Squire</i>	
COMMENTARIES	
Social identity work in storytelling:	
Methodological remarks	239
<i>Heiko Hausendorf</i>	
Talking and acting:	
Making change and doing development	245
<i>Jaan Valsiner</i>	
The context of race in reading narratives on daytime talk shows	256
<i>Fern L. Johnson</i>	

Day-time talk shows as a forum for social critique	263
<i>Aneta Pavlenko</i>	
Meta-narratives of cultural experience: Race, class, gender	270
<i>Joanna Thornborrow</i>	
RESPONSE by <i>Corinne Squire</i>	277
Charting the narrative unconscious:	
Cultural memory and the challenge of autobiography	289
<i>Mark Freeman</i>	
COMMENTARIES	
Discussing nonconscious processes involved in autobiography	307
<i>James C. Mancuso</i>	
Constructing the narrative unconscious	317
<i>Jonathan D. Raskin</i>	
Possible lives	323
<i>Jens Brockmeier</i>	
Working the narrative unconscious:	
Positioning theory and moral order	333
<i>Mandy Morgan</i>	
RESPONSE by <i>Mark Freeman</i>	341
Considering counter narratives	351
<i>Michael Bamberg</i>	
Index	373

Introduction to the book

Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews

This book started out with the original idea of one of the editors (Molly Andrews) to bring together a number of articles on the topic of ‘counter narratives’ for a special issue of *Narrative Inquiry*. Already within the reviewing process, several reviewers started to dialogue with the authors (and Journal editor), resulting in the attempt, after the reviews had come in, to elicit a number of commentaries to the six original articles. It was at this point when things began to develop very rapidly. Within the next few weeks, twenty-five scholars announced their interest in writing a commentary, and three others became inspired to answer the six articles with a full contribution to the journal. There simply was no way to publish these commentaries and new articles together in the form of a single special issue.

We proceeded to collect the articles for the first issue of volume 12 of *Narrative Inquiry*, along with ten commentaries, which in turn were followed by another 12 commentaries in the second issue. In addition, two response articles have been submitted to the journal, one of them still in the reviewing cycle, the other in print in the first issue of volume 14. At this point, we decided we needed to further develop this discussion. We felt that we could round up the dialogue by giving voice to the original authors with a response, and we also thought that a concluding chapter could resolve some of the contestation that had evolved in the dialoguing between the authors and the commentators. However, when we started to discuss how to contribute to a resolution of the debates, we quickly realized that this was not possible.

Thus, we decided to bring together in this volume the different perspectives on the topic of counter-narratives the way they emerged in the publication process of the two issues of *Narrative Inquiry*, now followed by six responses of the original authors, and one new chapter that attempts to open up the dialogue further (rather than concluding it). It is, we think, very fitting, that the format of dialogue and contestation is central to the presentation, and

it is our intention that many of the questions which are raised in these pages will encourage others to contribute to what has already been a very stimulating discussion. In each of the contributions, authors contemplate the meaning of counter-narratives and their relationship to master or dominant narratives. Clearly this is a topic which breeds contention, and it is our hope that the lively debate is only beginning. Counter-narratives only make sense in relation to something else, that which they are countering. The very name identifies it as a positional category, in tension with another category. But what is dominant and what is resistant are not, of course, static questions, but rather are forever shifting placements. The fluidity of these relational categories is what lies at the center of our considerations in this book. As we try to understand how speakers position themselves in the tales that they tell, and the complexity of the inside/outside dynamics, which form the context for these tales, we consider closely the question of audience. The stories that we, as researchers, gather from others, and the stories which we tell about those stories, are highly influenced by whom we think we are telling and who we are in relation to them. What can we reasonably expect an anticipated other to be able to hear, and what claims might we adjust in their presence? This process is negotiated in every phase of our research, by those who share their lives with us, by ourselves as researchers, and by those who read what we have written. The vast potential of positioning theory is only just being realized, and there is much work needed in this area. The discussion of counter-narratives is ultimately a consideration of multiple layers of positioning. As the editors of this volume, we are struck by the diversity of the arguments being made here, and of the intense differences staked out by some of the contributors in relation to one another. At this point, we feel that it is important to hold on to the complexity of these discussions, and to resist the temptation to resolve differences prematurely and/or artificially. It is our conviction that these contributions can be used as a reference platform for future explorations.

Molly Andrews
London, England
March 6th, 2004

Michael Bamberg
Worcester, Massachusetts
March 6th, 2004

Opening to the original contributions

Counter-narratives and the power to oppose

Molly Andrews

The issue of *Narrative Inquiry* in which the six articles were originally published was intended to explore the phenomenon of counter-narratives, the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives. The authors of these articles ask how it is that people frame their stories in relation to the dominant cultural storylines which form the context of their lives, especially when those storylines don't seem to fit. One of the key functions of master narratives is that they offer people a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience. In this way, such storylines serve as a blueprint for all stories; they become the vehicle through which we comprehend not only the stories of others, but crucially of ourselves as well. For ultimately, the power of master narratives derives from their internalisation. Wittingly or unwittingly, we become the stories we know, and the master narrative is reproduced. But of course it is not so simple. When, for whatever reason, our own experiences do not match the master narratives with which we are familiar, or we come to question the foundations of those dominant tales, we are confronted with a challenge. How can we make sense of ourselves, and our lives, if the shape of our life story looks deviant compared to the regular lines of the dominant stories? The challenge then becomes one of finding meaning outside of the emplotments which are ordinarily available. We become aware of new possibilities.

Often people who construct personal stories which go against the social grain, do so with a consciousness of being a member of an outside group. While they might position their stories as being on the margin, they do not consider them to be unique. In this sense, narrative work has a particular attraction for those who are members of 'outgroups', or "groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose

consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized” (Delgado 1995, p. 64). The stories, or counter-stories, which members of outgroups tell to themselves and others, help to document, and perhaps even validate, a ‘counter-reality’ (Delgado 1995, p. 64). In this sense, counter-narratives, like the dominant cultural narratives they challenge, might be experienced and articulated individually, but nonetheless they have common meanings. Even the most individualised and emotionally charged narratives belong to specific communities with specific scripts (Seale 2001); this too is true of the counter-narratives related in these pages.

Counter-narratives, or counter-stories – here I use the terms interchangeably, though others may not – have recently developed a sort of currency not only in narrative research (Talbot, Bibace, Bokhour, & Bamberg 1996), but in other disciplines as well, such as law (Carney 2001; Delgado 1995), women’s studies (Romero & Stewart 1999), sociology (Plummer 1995), and psychology (Fine & Harris 2001). However, the concept of ‘master narratives’ – and related ideas such as those of ‘culturally available narratives’ and ‘dominant discourses’ – not surprisingly, has been around considerably longer (Talbot et al. 1996). Counter-narratives exist in relation to master narratives, but they are not necessarily dichotomous entities. Indeed, as the title of the *Critical Psychology* Special Issue on counter-stories indicates, they can often be read ‘under the covers’ of master narratives. As Tore et al. (2001) write “critical stories are always (and at once) in tension with dominant stories, neither fully oppositional nor untouched” (p. 151).

Sometimes master narratives are presented by speakers, only to be subverted by the new interpretations they bring to them. One of the most commonplace dominant narratives surrounds the myth of the family, and of motherhood more particularly. As Romero and Stewart (1995) comment:

Motherhood narratives are especially potent cultural forms, and only a few dominate the landscape. In the most popular account, every woman is a potential mother waiting to fulfil this role. How we become mothers and “do” mothering is culturally prescribed, although motherhood and mothering are written as “natural phenomenon”; anything “different” is “unnatural.”

(pp. xvi–xvii)

Several articles in the original issue (and reprinted in this volume) contest the sacred ground of motherhood. There are very clear expectations surrounding appropriate and inappropriate ways to mother; when women fail to adhere to these norms, the price for the child is deemed to be great. In the article on retrospective narratives of the long-term role of mothers in psychological

development (Andrews), speakers often began their interviews by commenting upon the importance that their mother played in the person they ultimately became. The master narrative becomes challenged, however, when the listener learns that of the four case studies, two concern physical abuse of children, one is about a boy whose mother died when he was seven, and the fourth concerns a child's perspective on his mother's battle with depression which came and went over more than two decades. But the narrators of these tales, all in their eighth and ninth decades as they spoke, bring to their stories a level of personal and political understanding, which allows them to escape the deterministic fate of victim, which such stories would ordinarily point to. They implicitly question the validity of the universal model of white, middle class mothers, invoking instead, for instance, descriptions of a childhood lived in the context of severe economic deprivation. In the stories they tell, the speakers reveal the power of counter stories to "expose the construction of the dominant story by suggesting how else it could be told" (Harris, Carney, & Fine 2001, p. 13).

Karen Throsby's article also challenges the master narrative of motherhood as being the natural and inevitable life course for women. Throsby's article is based on her interviews with forty-one people exploring the end of in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatment. Despite the fact that over 80% of all cycles of IVF end in failure, the dominant social and cultural representations of IVF is as successful. There is, she reports, an absence of a positive discourse through which to articulate the end of IVF treatment. Women for whom IVF treatment is not successful must confront the question of what it means to be childless in a 'family-centred' society, which defines 'family' by the existence of biological children. Throsby's article documents the effect of the dominant discourse about family and motherhood on women and couples who are denied access to this group. Our society has very clear ideas about is (and/or should be) a family, and who is not; the counter-narratives presented here offer a different way of telling the same story. One witnesses in the stories presented here inspiring efforts to resist the pain of exclusion which follows from standing outside of the master narrative. As Harris, Carney, and Fine (2001) comment, "... master narratives do exist, and their real-life presence/impact is experienced with particular clarity by those for whom they do not speak and about whom they do speak" (p. 8).

Questions of inclusion and exclusion, the social construction of normalcy and the effects of the pressures of social expectation come to light in a different way in Barbara Harrison's article on photographic narratives. Here, one key dominant narrative is not only the expectation to take pictures, but to take (and have, and display, and exchange) particular kinds of pictures. One takes

pictures of weddings and brides, not of funerals and coffins. To do anything else is considered at best a bit bizarre. If a parent chooses not to purchase their child's school picture, they must have a good reason, if only to explain to their child why they, alone amongst parents in the class, are declining the offer. Photographs help to mark the moments, and the people, we are told should be special in our lives; thus most everyday photography is of either tourism or the family. The family album is 'living proof' that one is part of a family, regardless of the quality of this membership. In discussion based partially on her own empirical data, Harrison addresses the complex issue of audience: photographs are not only taken of someone or some place, but they are taken by a particular individual with the intended destination of a particular viewing audience. Photographs can function as counter-narratives by their content, photographing those moments and/or objects we all know exist but which are meant to remain invisible, by implicating the presence of the person who took them, and by who ultimately is permitted to see them

Rebecca Jones also addresses the relationship between counter-narratives and contexts of production and consumption. Drawing on interviews which she conducted with twenty-three women between the ages of sixty-one and ninety, she describes the levels of complexity involved in identifying counter-narratives. It is all, she argues, a matter of perspective. A tale in and of itself – what happened to whom, when, where, etc.-is neither dominant nor resistant. Rather, Jones argues, their status is determined "by participants' orientations or by explicit analysts' identification" (p. 174). As researchers, we have our own preferred storylines; in the context of our research, are these the master narratives? What happens when the people with whom we speak have story different from the one we want to hear? From whose perspective is any particular story a counter-narrative, and how can we as researchers in this field negotiate between the sometimes conflicting stories our participants want to tell and those stories we as researchers want to hear? And then, what of the role of the reader? If counter-narrative is wholly a matter of perspective, how do we and how should we integrate these multiple perspectives into our interpretations?

For Corinne Squire, too, in her analysis of day-time television talk shows, the boundary between dominant and counter-narratives is not hard and fast, but is largely influenced by who the 'teller' is. Thus, even when members of the audience produce what through content alone might be considered a dominant narrative about families, for instance, "that story takes on a very different character within popular media when it is articulated by black men and women" (p. 234). Dominant narratives can be transformed into counter-narratives, revealing that they are "always less stable and unified than they appear, more

susceptible to fracture and subversion” (p. 235). If the dominant narrative of day-time television talk shows is the great romance of the American dream, as Squire argues it is, its counter-narrative is not a failure of that dream as such, but rather “a more insidious story of uncertainty that engages with yet ironically undercuts the romance” (p. 231). The counter-narrative is one of disruption, fragmentation, and incoherence, often marked by cutting to a timely commercial break.

The sense of discontinuity and rupture also lies at the heart of Mark Freeman’s use of the term counter-narrative. Counter-narratives are those “culturally-rooted aspects of one’s history that have not yet become part of one’s story” (p. 298). In contemplating the meaning of a profound, and unsettling experience he had in Berlin, he questions the relationship between the manifest narratives of one’s life – those things one knows about, the stories which we live and tell that make us the way we are – and “those more disruptive counter-narratives that sometimes surge into reflection, infusing one’s history with new meaning, complexity, and depth” (p. 3). This leads Freeman to question the legitimate boundaries between the individual and the collective, between the self and culture. ‘My autobiography’ can never be just about me, as we live and breathe stories and influences of which we are not even aware. We have within us, Freeman argues, rich narrative reserves of untold and unwritten stories which are both personal and cultural, and in this he finds much potential for identifying new and different forms of making sense of our lives.

Although the proposal which I initially sent to potential contributors to this volume did position counter-narratives in relation to master narratives, or dominant cultural narratives, I intentionally avoided giving my own definition of ‘counter narratives.’ It has been particularly interesting for me to watch how each writer has developed this concept in relation to her/his work. While there exists a strong thread of commonality amongst them – particularly along the lines of counter-narrative as resistance – there are important differences as well. As the articles began to come in, I realized that the potential for this discussion was even richer than I had anticipated. Each of the contributions, in important but different ways, illustrates the power of individuals to challenge the constraints of the dominant stories which surround them; these are counter-narratives of gentle defiance and resistance. The collection of these six articles will, I hope, provide fertile ground for future conversations in this journal and beyond.

References

- Carney, S. (2001). Analysing master narratives and counter stories in legal settings: Cases of maternal failure to protect. *Critical Psychology*, 4, 61–76.
- Delgado, R. (1995). Legal storytelling: Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A Plea for narrative. In R. Delgado (Ed.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (pp. 64–74). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Fine, M., & Harris, A. (Eds.). (2001). Under the covers: Theorising the politics of counter stories [Special issue]. *Critical Psychology*, 4.
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories: Power, change and social worlds*. London: Routledge.
- Romero, M., & Stewart, A. (Eds.). (1999). *Women's untold stories: Breaking silence, talking back, voicing complexity*. London: Routledge.
- Seale, C. (2001). Resurrective practice and narrative. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, S. Sclater, & A. Treacher (Eds.), *Lines of narrative: psychosocial perspectives* (pp. 36–47). London: Routledge.
- Talbot, J., Bibace, R., Bokhur, B., & Bamberg, M. (1996). Affirmation and resistance of dominant discourses: The rhetorical construction of pregnancy. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 6, 225–251.
- Tore, M. E., Fine, M., Boudin, K., Bowen, I., Clark, J., Hylton, D., et al. (2001). A space for co-constructing counter stories under surveillance. *Critical Psychology*, 4, 149–166.

Memories of mother

Counter-narratives of early maternal influence

Molly Andrews

University of East London

One of the most dominant cultural narratives is ‘the story of mothering’ but as many researchers have documented, there is a large chasm between this cultural product and individuals’ lived experiences of mothering and being mothered. When individuals talk about their relationships with their mothers, they locate themselves – knowingly or not – politically, economically, and historically. This article analyses data based on in-depth interviews with four men and women between the ages of seventy-five and ninety, and explores the stories they tell about the role of their mothers in relation to the children they were and the adults they became. Of the four cases presented, two involve child beating, in one the mother is absent from the time of the speaker’s early childhood, and one is an account of maternal depression. However, as these individuals recount their early memories of their mothers, they do so as people who have developed significantly since that time. Implicitly challenging the deterministic mother-blaming which lies at the heart of key cultural narratives, these men and women reveal a deep level of understanding – both personal and political – of the difficult circumstances which form the context of many peoples’ experiences of mothering and being mothered.

I don’t know what’s made me have the values that I have today. I’m not conscious of ever having decided to be this or that. I think it’s your conditioning in your early life. In my case I think it is. Because it was a hard life and I had a very strong and dominant mother.

So began my life history project with Helen. In the opening lines of this first conversation together, Helen creates a framework of meaning for the whole of her life in which the role of her mother in her early years is central. In the sentence “Because it was a hard life and I had a very strong and dominant mother” the word ‘and’ is intriguing. What exactly does Helen see as the relationship be-

tween these two statements? As the tale unfolds, it is clear that more than eight decades later, Helen believes that the way she was treated by her mother in her childhood has had long-term implications for the person she has become. However, this lingering “maternal influence” is not deterministic, but rather is mediated by Helen’s interpretations of her early experience. The framework of meaning suggested by Helen both mirrors and challenges the master narrative of the role of mothers in the long-term psychological development of their children.

One of the most dominant cultural narratives is that of ‘the story of mothering’:

... In its essentials, this patriarchal story of mothering is of a woman, entirely nurturant and provident, whose shadow side – potential or realized – is entirely wicked and withholding ... It is understood in this story that only the selflessly loving mother is good. (Pope, Quinn, & Wyer 1990, p. 441)

This perspective is both mirrored in, enhanced by, and reproduces, ‘expert knowledge’ on natural maternal ‘instinct.’ This has not only been true historically – a by-product of the Industrial Revolution, which created a new “emphasis on domesticity and child-rearing as the major preoccupation of the middle-class family – and especially on the role of women as custodians of the domestic retreat” (Hareven 1995, p. 130) – but is also evident in advice offered in contemporary “baby bibles.” Consider, for example, the words of British childrearing expert Penelope Leach (1997).

Mothers start out with an irreplaceable bio-emotional advantage in relating to their infants, and fathers start out with a lesser one that still puts them ahead of any outsider. That does not make every natural mother or father a ‘good parent’ nor handicap every infant raised otherwise, but it does stack the odds and should inform the debate. (p. 386)

However, for many there exists a large chasm between this discourse of motherhood and the lived experiences of mothering and being mothered. When mythology and the reality collide “it is the mythology that tends to prevail, as the language and the conventions of the story shape not only what is thought but also what can be said, not only what is heard but also what can be understood” (Pope, Quinn, & Wyer 1990, p. 445).

But whose voices are included in these master narratives on the attributes of the idealized mother, and the potentially lethal effects of her ‘getting it wrong’? Rarely mothers or children. (One exception to this is the “mommy did it to me” school of thought [Walters 1992, p. 207] evident in books and films by adult children of famous people, as seen, for instance, in the grotesque *Mom-*

mie Dearest, Christina Crawford's contribution to her mother's legacy.) This article, in contrast, explores four individuals' implicit assessments of the long-term developmental implications of the "primary" mother-child relationship as they experienced it in their own lives. The stories simultaneously reveal and challenge the power of the developmental narrative, whereby early childhood influences and deprivations in general, and the role of the mother in particular, are perceived to be critical over the whole of the life-span. While superficially the narratives presented here may appear to fit within this master narrative, closer reading of them reveals a more complex picture. As Tore et al. (2001) comment "critical stories are always (and at once) in tension with dominant stories, neither fully oppositional nor untouched" (p. 151). The task of analysis, these authors argue, then becomes one of "looking beneath the covers" (p. 159) to see how these dominant stories are being used to tell different stories. Speakers in my study dip in and out of dominant cultural scripts of motherhood, manipulating and reformulating them in ways that are not always immediately apparent. The end result is an unanticipated and very subtle subversion of the well-worn tale, with the mythology of motherhood at its centre.

Motherhood and its discontents

Morss (1996) argues that developmental psychology is one of the 'grand narratives' by which modern industrialised societies regulate themselves through the 'selves' of their citizens. At the heart of the developmental project is the role of the mother.

Mothers, positioned as the objects and sources of children's affections, feature in terms of their success or failure in promoting the child's development ... [there is] a theoretical legacy which positions women as responsible not only for the care of their children, but also for their current and future development. (Burman 1994, p. 79–81)

By the close of the twentieth century, however, the institution of motherhood, and its concomitant ideology, had become the focus of much feminist research (Arnup, Levesque, & Pierson 1990; Bassin, Honey, & Kaplan 1994; Glenn, Chang, & Forcey 1994; Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd 1991; Pope et al. 1990; Walkerdine & Lucey 1989), challenging the implicit, and sometimes explicit, mother-blaming characteristic of much developmental work. Ambert (1994), for instance, specifically targets the "notion of parents, especially of mothers, as the necessary source of children's current and later personal stability"

which, she says, holds neither cross-culturally nor historically (p. 531). Many researchers do, however, operate on this empirically unsubstantiated principle, referencing previous researchers with shared assumptions. One of the defining features of dominant narratives are their ability to evade analysis. They enjoy a status more or less unchallenged, relying instead on commonly held assumptions about the nature of reality. Not surprisingly, academics are no more immune to the influence of these narratives than any other sector of society. We, like all others, live out our lives in storied forms, and those stories tend to be framed by the cultures in which we live.

The relationship between the academic literature and commonsense notions is a symbiotic one; researchers in the field begin with their assumptions of the centrality of the mother figure in the long-term development of the child, and produce findings based on this conceptual framework. The findings, in turn, are fed back into the community, elevating the notions from the level of commonsense to that of scientific knowledge. And the cycle repeats itself. As an academic discipline with long tentacles into applied areas, developmental psychology has had a particularly legitimating role to play in reproducing the mythology of motherhood:

Psychology, particularly developmental psychology, has provided support for ideas on motherhood that are held by many politicians, paediatricians, obstetricians and popular writers . . . although they [psychologists] consider themselves to be using objective measures, they take 'commonsense' ideas about motherhood for granted without recognizing that these have specific ideological underpinnings. (Phoenix & Woollett 1991, p. 20)

Phoenix and Woollett (1991) comment on the "normalized absence/pathologized presence" which characterizes much of the psychological research on mothers and mothering. There is an overrepresentation of white, middle-class mothers in studies of "normal" development, while in studies of pathological development, it is black and working class families who are over represented. Psychological studies of normal motherhood tend to take no account of structural differences between mothers (Phoenix & Woollett 1991, p. 18). Instead, what is produced is an homogenized model of a good mother and appropriate mothering practices, based on research with white, middle class women (Walkerdine & Lucey 1989). When marginalized others (women of colour, working class women) offer different models of mothering, they are regarded as deviant, and sometimes pathological.

The attempts by some feminist scholars to deconstruct the mythology of motherhood has not been without its own problems; Hill Collins (1994) com-

ments upon the “exclusion of race and/or class from feminist theorizing generally and from feminist theorizing about motherhood specifically” (p. 57). Experiences of mothering and being mothered are socially constructed; while the dominant narrative essentializes, even biologizes what is assumed to be a primary – if not the primary – bond of an individual’s life, “motherhood occurs in specific historical contexts framed by interlocking structures of race, class and gender” (Hill Collins 1994, p. 56). Hill Collins (1997) argues that “the themes implicit in these white perspectives on motherhood are problematic for Black women and others outside of this debate” (p. 326). Contesting an enforced homogeneity, she offers a view of “a distinctly Afrocentric ideology of motherhood” (p. 326), which challenges some of the most basic premises of the master narrative. She questions, for instance, the universal applicability of the idea that “mothering occurs within the confines of a private, nuclear family household where the [biological] mother has almost total responsibility for childrearing” (p. 326). Thus, when individuals talk about their relationships with their mothers, they are, amongst other things, telling cultural stories. In discussing what might appear to be ‘just personal’ details, they locate themselves politically, economically, and historically. Ultimately, in rendering the maternal relationship into storied form, individuals both reproduce and implicitly evaluate theories of maternal influence. Gubrium and Wallace (1990) use the term “ordinary theorizing” to describe this phenomenon, arguing that ordinary men and women engage in “everyday theorizing,” and this theorizing “has striking parallels with the theoretical products of professional[s]” (p. 131). Moreover, people commonly “theorize subjectivity in the process of conveying it” (p. 140). But not only does life resemble theory, but theory resembles life; as Paul Valery comments “There is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography” (cited in Crane 1996, p. 5). Here, one can see evidence of the symbiotic relationship between personal biography and the master narratives available for people to draw upon in relating their experiences to themselves and others.

In this paper I will examine four person’s descriptions of their early childhood memories involving their mothers. Unless otherwise stated, all of the data presented was gathered as part of a larger study (Andrews 1991) on life-time socialist commitment. My examination of what sustains political commitment focussed on fifteen life histories I conducted with British women and men between the ages of 75 and 90. Because of the ages of the participants, they were relating to me experiences which had occurred primarily in the first two decades of the 20th century – a critical time in the development of the discourse(s) of motherhood, heavily influenced by sociological research into

sex differences (Lewis 1990). As we will see, their stories are not only very personal – how could recollections of one’s mother be otherwise? – but are historically located; indeed the interpretations that the speaker’s lend to the events they recount can only be understood within the context that experiences occurred.

The interviews were semi-structured, although respondents were strongly encouraged to explore any aspect of their lives which they felt had significantly contributed to their self-identity. The opening questions of first interview asked for a general biographical overview. Usually respondents chose to begin their stories with accounts of their early family life. Indeed, all of the fifteen respondents spoke in some detail about their parents. Interestingly, when I originally collected the data, between 1986–1989, I was not a mother. Ten years and two children later, I now see in the data themes which did not strike me as important in my first analysis. (For a moving account of the personal and methodological benefits of revisiting old data, see Catherine Kohler Riessman 2002.)

My selection of the stories of Helen, Ann, Joe and Peter for this paper was based not on their exceptionalism in the study, but rather on the challenges which I think their particular tales pose for the implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumptions in psychology regarding the deterministic role of maternal influence throughout the lifespan.

Helen: The fight to be free

Much of Helen’s description of her early childhood features her ongoing struggle with her mother. The opening lines of this paper indicate the importance she attributes to the influence of her “strong and dominant mother.” Helen’s childhood stories take place within a context of poverty, which is apparent not only in the details she relates, but also in her own interpretation of why things happened, and people behaved, as they did. Helen was the second oldest of six children. Her older brother caught meningitis. “He was always regarded as being delicate, so he got a bit softer treatment. Myself, I got the hard treatment.” Helen shared a 3/4s size bed with two of her siblings. “The bedroom just fitted the bed – up to the wall on three sides.” Helen began work $\frac{1}{2}$ time at the local mill when she was twelve. She began her day at 5:30 am., walked $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to work, worked for ten hours, and returned home by 6:30. At the end of each week, she received fifteen pence. By time she was thirteen, she left school to work at the mill full-time.

She explains her mother’s attitude towards her working:

... she had some peculiar idea that she thought that we all ought to be workers. Work hard. And she was very hard with us We were brought up with the idea that you always had to pay them back, in money, that you owed them something. And I said, well I didn't ask to be born. And she said "you cheeky little bitch."

What is critical for Helen in the story she tells about her youth is that she stood up to her mother. Throughout our conversations together, Helen relates the events of her childhood with a strong temporal perspective; her positioning (Talbot, Bibace, Bokhur, & Bamberg 1996) in the her stories is as one who is making claims about who she is in the present, and assessing the role that past experience has played within this. When I ask her how old she was at the time of the exchange reported in passage above, she responds "I should think about eight or nine I was always answering back and I think if I hadn't done so, I wouldn't be the person I am." The tension between Helen and her mother escalated, and Helen continued to regard resistance as her only means to psychological survival. However, fighting back also meant putting herself at physical risk.

My mother she used to give us good hidings as well. She used to beat us. And for some reason I always fought against it, I never gave in I was terrified of my mother [but] I couldn't understand why I was so frightened of her, because I used to say to myself I don't care if she kills me. I didn't care. And so the good hidings never punished me really. In fact I didn't mind them at all, it didn't worry me. Because inside I was sort of fighting back anyway.

Although Helen was, as she says, frightened of her mother, she was even more frightened of subservience. For Helen, the lesson of her youth was that it is not only possible, but imperative to stand up for yourself. The worst that can happen is that it will cost you your life; the alternative is a worse fate still. As she grew older this would translate itself into a profound social responsibility – a perpetual commitment to fighting the good fight, against all odds.

When I ask Helen what it was that she thought she was fighting against, she answers: "The one thing I always wanted was to be free. Always, always looking to the day when I would be free. It was the shining star, it was a thing that I always wanted to get hold of. To be free." This was the heart of her struggle with her mother, this quest for her own freedom. For Helen, her mother represented all that was keeping her back. I asked her how long this battle with her mother continued.

Until she died really. And I was out at work all day, but I had to work at night and she was ill for a period, and it was my job to look after her and sleep in

the same room. And whilst I felt – I knew she was going to die – I felt terribly distressed at the thought of anybody dying, but I could only also look at it in terms of what it was going to mean to me.

...

MA: What did you think it was going to mean to you?

DG: That I was going to be free... As soon as my mother died, I started going to night school...

Throughout our many meetings together, Helen never passes judgment on her mother. She neither villanizes her, nor makes excuses for her. Rather, the way in which she makes sense of her early experiences, and her mother's treatment of her in particular, is in terms of the socio-economic conditions in which she lived. Helen clearly locates her mother's behaviour within a context of poverty, and it is this positioning which gives Helen an understanding of the misery she was made to endure.

But the past is more than past; it lives in her, in the present construction of who she sees herself as being. Although she is in no sense romantic about life in poverty, she does regard this as an important influence in her own life. For instance, she describes her experience of serving as a court magistrate, which she did for more than twenty years:

I think my early training in life served me well there. Made me, I could feel at one with most of these people that came before the bench. I couldn't look at them and be anything different than myself. I think that was a big thing.

Even her battles with her mother, bitter as they were, served their function:

I've always been a woman in my own right. I've never felt I need to be submissive to any man. I've always felt I was the equal to any man, anywhere, whatever situation I've been in. Now where that comes from I don't know. ... I think probably that comes from again having to fight for your rights as a youngster.

Again, we can see clear evidence of Helen's positioning of her past within her present self. Helen's pronounced sense of politics allows her to understand – but not condone – how she was treated by her mother in her youth. Moreover, it is perhaps her own early suffering which led her to dedicate the whole of her adult life to trying to improve the living conditions of those in her community living in poverty.

Ann: Frustrations and radical thinking

The day before I came to begin our life history project, Ann collected material – diaries, photographs, letters – which she thought would help to set the stage for the many stories she would tell me. Ann describes her family as “bourgeois.” They lived in a mill village, and her father was a wool buyer. “We lived in a little villa which was really a company house . . . to me as a child it seemed very, very elegant . . . it was very beautiful inside.” When I turned on the tape recorder, her first comment to me was “It was good for me looking at my mother; you’ve done me a good turn already . . . my mother had a great influence on my radical thinking, negatively and positively.” The tension between her mother’s negative and positive role modelling was a theme which reappeared many times throughout our conversations. What happened, and didn’t happen, in Ann’s mother’s life had far reaching implications for Ann’s own early life.

In fact, Ann describes herself as having had “two mothers” as her father’s sister lived in the family home. (Although having ‘two mothers’ might be considered unusual in a white, middle class family such as Ann’s, Hill Collins 1997, comments that “. . . ‘othermothers,’ women who assist blood-mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities, traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood,” p. 329.) Auntie Katie “had a great sense of humour,” and Ann describes her as someone who “took great delight in all things. She was happy with the rose that had just come out in the garden or a little violet she found in the hedgerows and she taught me to appreciate the value of everyday life.” Ann believes that the effect that this arrangement had on her biological mother was that that it made her “bitterly frustrated by having a third person in the house whom her daughter got on with much better. Which was very sad.”

Ann describes the dynamics of her relationship with her mother: “To the day my mother died we never got very intimate in those ways [discussing ideas about the world, and discussing personal insecurities] . . . but she was always very helpful when I was in crises. [Me: In what way?] In a practical way, really. By offering me bed and board. But she made her demands on me, which spoilt it, you see. She’d offer me bed and board and then ‘you can’t have your meal outside because I want you to have it with me, even though it’s sunny,’ that kind of thing. And that was the terrible tragedy.”

Ann had one sibling, a younger brother, who at the age of five caught tuberculosis. Ann’s mother took him to Africa for two years for recuperation. Ann describes the effect of this arrangement on her relationship with her mother. “I was left alone at the age of ten with my aunt, so she did become a mother just at

my coming into puberty. All that happened when she [her biological mother] was away. So she [Auntie Kate] was very much a mother figure." Upon return from Africa, Ann's brother was healthy; nonetheless, the mother's treatment of him remained throughout Ann's childhood "very gentle."

With Ann, however, her mother was "... very tyrannical and I'm sure it was because of those frustrations that she had ... she was very tyrannical with me." The term Ann uses most frequently when discussing her mother is "frustration" (in contrast with Auntie Katie, who she describes as "not frustrated"). As a young woman, she had been denied the opportunity to continue her education, though she had excelled at school. Her own path contrasted with that of her twin sister, who, by mere chance, had been allowed to take up the one position available for student teaching at the local school. The arbitrary – and seemingly unjust – choice of her mother's parents to send her mother's twin rather than her mother would have long-term consequences for both sisters.

Now the other twin was not bright ... my mother was intellectually much stronger and I think she never got over that. She had a much better intellect, much more searching and she asked the questions. Molly [the sister] became a teacher, and mother after that really lived vicariously. Because, again the thing about my radicalism, if you like, my aunt brought up home to Yorkshire every holiday her friends from teaching, they were all unmarried because the men had been killed in the war, and they were very wonderful teachers from London with red hair, beautiful beads and clothes, they sang, they were talented. And my mother took their breakfast trays up in the morning, and that must have been quite bitter. But they became her friends and she sewed clothes for them and I can just think what must have gone on underneath it all.

The colourful imagery which Ann evokes when describing her mother's sister and her friends contrasts sharply with her descriptions of her own mother:

I saw how she had to go to my father for money, she never had any money of her own and if she wanted clothes, if she wanted to do anything she had to say "John, I need money" and I found that so subservient and I just used to cringe for her. She was very strong and very tough and became very aggressive ... I'm sure a lot of my feminist feelings and the radicalism came from those experiences, when I was quite a little girl.

While Ann cringed for her mother, her mother suffered the torment of a frustrated woman who both wants more for her daughter, and who uses her daughter as a repository for her own difficulties. Ann suffered beatings from her mother as a regular feature of her young life. "She was so frustrated I think, that it took that form ..." Ann explains.

On the positive side, Ann's mother was absolutely determined that Ann should pursue the education that she herself had been denied.

I think she – particularly on the feminist issue – she gave me a lot there because in those days girls were not considered – it wasn't considered necessary for girls to have higher education . . . And my mother had none of those ideas . . . [She thought] girls have to be educated. And she pushed me all the time. She was very keen I should go to Oxford or Cambridge and because she was so keen, I said 'No, I'm not sitting an exam.' So I went to London to a women's college . . . she always encouraged me . . .

As a consequence of being surrounded by strong women figures like the schoolteachers who came to visit her family in the holidays, and the women she met at school and at university, Ann declares "I had plenty of heroines when I was a girl, and I think latterly, it's been heroes."

Like Helen, Ann never passes judgment on her mother. Her persistent invocation of her mother's frustration is the dominant feature of her explanatory framework of her early years. Yet, despite the frustrations, or maybe even because of them, Ann's mother was determined that her own daughter's destiny would be different from her own. Ann's positioning of herself in relating this story is as a strong feminist, who regards the curtailment of opportunity in her mother's life as a critical influence in the way in which she herself was treated at the time, as well as the person she subsequently became.

Joe: Motherhood and sacrifice

When Joe talks about his early life, he describes himself as an orphan. As I'm aware that Joe's father didn't die until Joe was fifteen, I query his use of this term. Implicitly equating all parenting with motherhood, he explains: "I was an orphan in the sense of having no mother." Although Joe's mother died from tuberculosis when he was seven, his memory of her – both direct and as passed down to him from his older brothers – looms large in his stories of his youth. "... we had such a hard life, and we'd been evicted many times . . . and [my mother] used to walk the streets singing and selling boot laces, with me in her arms." As with Helen, Joe's reconstruction of his mother is clearly situated within the context of poverty. This class positioning is the most prominent theme in Joe's personal biography, and it is not surprising then that it is the key feature of his recollections of his mother (and later, of her absence). When Joe is asked about the origins of his politics, he explains

I'm a gut communist. I've been hungry. When I look back on my childhood, my mother was evicted and I come home from school and all the bits of furniture had been taken away and she was sitting on a bucket outside an empty house, waiting for me to come home, crying. I mean these things are unforgettable. You see, I've been in orphanages, and poor law schools and that ...

The experiences of his childhood have been a critical formative influence on his understanding of the world; as with the other case studies presented here, it is his understanding of those experiences, rather than the experiences themselves which form the backbone of who he has become.

Joe's construction of his mother is both particular and general. Several times, he refers to the fact that she was in the theatre, and on occasion he evokes particular Dickensonian scenes in which she features, as in the excerpts above. More often, however, the mothers of the neighbourhood in which he grew up, in their collectivity, represent the icon of motherhood. He describes himself as a child as being hungry and orphaned.

... And the women would send their kids out to find me and take me in and give me a meal. There was that one woman, she had thirteen kids. ... [she'd say] 'go out and look for Joe' and they'd take me in and give me a big slice of bread and margarine and [she'd] say 'Now git that down yer. That's all I've got.' And that stayed with me ... That's why I've, apart from the sexual side, I've got a strong feeling for women, apart from sex, especially the married mothers, because I know that a married mother, particularly from the industrial working class, well I suppose the agricultural working class, and always making sacrifices, to the family. I always found you get much more help from a woman than you would from a male.

Joe's mother becomes virtually subsumed in his construction of working class mothers in general. They are more than generous, they are self-sacrificing. They are more willing to give of themselves, to be of help, than men.

... when I think of womanhood and I know from my own experience that no matter how poor they are, when the dinners come on the table, mum's got the smallest [portion]. Still making that sacrifice like she did when she gave birth from the womb, she still makes that sacrifice. Working class mothers, to me, there's nobody like them.

Lewis' (1990) research provides historical evidence for Joe's anecdotes. There was, she writes, "a serious amount of ill-health among working-class women during the early part of this century. Working women's experience of wifehood and motherhood was dominated by their responsibility for managing the fam-

ily economy and solving the food/rent equation, which they often did only by going short of food themselves" (p. 8). In the above passage, womanhood is transformed into mum, who in turn becomes working class mothers. For Joe, class politics, biology, and sexual politics are all intertwined.

Although Joe's mother's death is a critical event in his young life, he does not experience her absence as a form of "maternal deprivation." Rather, he derives solace from other mother figures – working class mothers in particular. The sacrifices of his mother, and mothers more broadly, are, if anything, inspirational for him, a source of strength.

Peter: "She had that gift"

Peter describes the environment in which he grew up:

The world of these three quarters of an acre of land became very complete, because you didn't have to go outside it for anything. Everything was provided for, and the environment was lovely to play in ... one went into the fields and occasionally one went into the town, but one lived in a very sort of protected, insulated, cosseted environment.

Peter was born the middle child of five – "a brother either side of me and a sister at either end" – in a family he describes as "very close." Peter's rich description of his early life vividly depicts a relationship with his mother which is marked by extreme admiration combined, intermittently, with resentment. In his first mention of his mother, he describes her as someone who was "extraordinary, in that whenever she came into the room, everything seemed more interesting and exciting. She had that gift." Later in our interview, he elaborates on "that gift":

... she made us feel valued and she made us feel as though we were somebody and she took a great interest in anything we wrote or drew or made ... one felt enhanced by her, at least I did. And very much affected by her imagination, she was a very remarkable poetess, with a very powerful imagination, and a very strong personality.

Not all of the five children, however, experienced the mother's presence in the same way as Peter. As with the cases of Helen and Ann described earlier, sons and daughters received different treatment from their mother.

my mother didn't get on nearly so well with her female children as she did with us ... she somehow pressured them, to such an extent that my sister her whole life in a way has been distorted by that, by her feelings that she wasn't living

up to her mother's expectations. But this is a very common thing between mothers and daughters, I believe.

Here Peter implicitly makes use of two dominant narratives, that of the stormy relationship between mothers and their daughters, and, in the previous line, the "mommy did it to me" genre, referred to earlier. But Peter both voices and challenges this master narrative, offering an unusual explanation for the difference between his mother's treatment of his sisters and himself: "I was in a very good position because by the time you get to the third child, you're not so ambitious for them as for the first one or two; you've seen two go by and you think 'Oh, this one might be all right, or might not, it doesn't really matter.' So you have a kind of relaxed attitude."

In contrast to feeling that he was not meeting his mother's expectations, Peter himself "didn't feel pressure, in any way at all." Rather, he revelled for most of his childhood in the support he felt from his creative, imaginative mother, in whose presence the world, for him, seemed a bigger place. In his late teens, this changed quite dramatically, when his mother became severely depressed.

She [the mother] had a number of very serious . . . nervous breakdowns in her life, some of which lasted for years, and in between she treated herself as an invalid, spent a lot of time reclining either in bed or in a . . . little wooden hut, which could be revolved to face whichever way she chose, and she read, she wrote, she had a voluminous correspondence with a lot of people . . .

Peter's descriptions of his mother's illness tend to focus on the reactions it provoked in him; indeed, he is highly self-critical when he describes the effect of her illness upon him.

I'm ashamed to say that it had the effect of making me resentful partly because it made her negative, critical, fussy, interfering rather, and one had a feeling she didn't really care, it was interfering for the sake of interfering, and to make life as dismal for everybody else as it was for her . . . I was quite strongly resentful . . . in a very uncompassionate and uncaring sort of way, which I think is very bad. I didn't understand . . .

The first bout of depression lasted for six years. Then, as quickly and unexpectedly as the clouds had descended, they disappeared. She came out of her depression in late spring 1940,

. . . with German bombers overhead, all hell beginning to break loose. And she was OK, she immediately became very, very vital and full of creativity and writing and entertaining and running the house, terrific gusto that lasted right through for twenty years or thereabouts, until her final illness . . .

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (1972) comments on 'role conflict and discontinuity' experienced by many middle class women in the late 19th century, and indeed cites depression as a common theme in accounts of hysteria from this time. There was, she argues "a dichotomy between the ideal woman and the ideal mother. The ideal woman was emotional, dependent and gentle . . . The ideal mother, then and now, was expected to be strong, self-reliant, protective, an efficient caretaker in relation to children and home" (p. 656). Many women were unable to balance these contradictory requirements, and simply "took to their beds. Some remained there for years" (p. 653). It is possible that this conflict of roles may have been a contributing factor to Peter's mother's moving in and out of depression.

Peter's description of his mother during the "twenty years of sunshine" or "the good years" is reminiscent of his image of her during his early childhood. She, like the sun itself, is forever glowing, almost too radiant.

... during the good years 1940-'60 roughly, she was so vital and we all got somewhat irritated with her because she was very demanding and she made a great deal of psychological noise, so to speak. On the other hand, we were vastly entertained by her and full of admiration. She always retained that quality of enhancing everything. With her around, everything got more vivid and more exciting.

Peter's narrative of his own development is intertwined with accounts of his mother's movements in and out of depression. Rather than charting his growth, however, when measured by this particular yardstick, Peter finds himself wanting. He uses the events he recounts as evidence of who he wasn't.

Twenty years after her original illness, upon realizing the imminence of her own death, Peter's mother relapsed into depression: "she knew she was going to die, she didn't want to, and this terrible depression came back, right up to her death, alas. The sun never shone again . . ."

This relapse occasioned in Peter, once again, strong feelings of resentment. Here his narrative weaves in upon itself; it is in his experience of the depression second time around that Peter comes to know what he had felt towards his mother's illness as a younger man.

But what I noticed in my reactions was that all the feelings I'd had when I was seventeen, eighteen, nineteen [during her first bout of depression] of resentment came back. That's how I know what they must have been. I'd forgotten them, they'd been overlaid by twenty years of sunshine, so to speak. And then when she got like this again, suddenly without my wanting them at all, I found feelings of anger and repulsion coming back. I thought, "God how awful, my own mother is almost in hell and all I can do is be resentful," and I was very

shocked. But at the same time it did reveal to me what our relationship had been during those bad years from '34-'40 I was disgusted at being that way and retrospectively disgusted that I'd felt that way when I was younger. Retrospectively saddened, let's say. You can't criticize yourself all that much for feelings you had when you were only seventeen.

When they [his feelings of resentment re-emerged, provoked by the recurrence of her depression] came back, I thought 'Oh yes, I've been here before.'

The "anger and repulsion" which Peter feels towards his mother is accompanied by feelings of self-disgust, combined with a recognition that "I've been here before." But he also stops short of being too harsh on his younger self. There is in Peter's accounts of himself a fluid temporal dimension. There is the younger Peter, who is seventeen when his mother becomes ill; Peter who, twenty years later, is a father of two, but much unchanged in his impatience with his mother's difficulties; and finally, the Peter with whom I sit in conversation. Throughout his narrative, Peter exhibits a high level of reflexivity. Some thirty years after his mother's death, he is highly self-critical about his deficiencies when the sun was not shining. But he has changed much in the course of his life. When I first got to know Peter, his wife of nearly fifty years had a degenerative, debilitating disease from which she ultimately died. Throughout her years of suffering, he looked after her in every detail; anger and repulsion, it appears, had been replaced by compassion.

Notably, then, the effects of his mother's depression were not those anticipated by the bulk of research into this area. Ambert (1994) notes a "problematic, unidirectional causal pattern" of many clinically oriented journals, "with maternal depression as the current crown jewel of this genre of mother-blaming" (p. 31). In Peter's case, we see evidence of something quite different: it is not the experience of his mother's depression, but rather his interpretation of that experience and his own role within it, which prove to be the most influential in his own life.

Interestingly, Peter is one of only two respondents in my study who speak of the importance of feminism in their lives. With the notable exception of Ann, the other respondents, in contrast, were either indifferent, or – more commonly – openly hostile to the label of feminism, which they perceived as being in conflict with their Marxist politics (see Andrews 2002). For Peter, feminism is central to his belief system. It is, he says, "a new emergence as important as any our species has so far experienced, comparable with the advents of speech, of writing, of philosophy, of science . . ." But feminism is not just theory, but a politics of "who does the washing up or fetches the children from school."

I now feel that politically I have arrived, I'm not going to change again, I'm not going to get off the bus I'm in now onto some other bus that I don't yet know about. Because this bus seems to be the right one, in the sense that it correlates with everything else in life ... I don't mean that I've arrived at some sort of plateau or summit of knowledge and understanding from which no further advance is possible. That's an absurd notion ... I simply mean that I think my general orientation is right, that I have before me the possibility of travelling intelligently ... If I say 'I've arrived' I only mean I've arrived at what Carlos Castaneda ... called 'a path with heart' ... a path one can follow with the consent of all one's being.

What role, if any, his mother's depression may have had in arriving at this politics, one can only conjecture. The connection between the two is not a subject I explicitly explored, nor one which Peter himself spontaneously suggested. But one can say with some confidence that Peter, through whatever combination of his life experiences, has ultimately grown considerably from the person who felt repulsed by his mother's suffering. While Peter recalls his mother has having had the gift of making people feel enhanced by her presence, the more I am with him, the more I come to suspect that this very gift has been passed down a generation.

Narrative psychology and social resistance

In the above four narratives, the speakers spontaneously address the important influence of their mothers on their early lives; in some sense, they can be said to be following a dominant cultural script which explicitly emphasizes the role of the mother in early development, as discussed earlier. However, the stories which they tell, while at some level mirroring this script, at the same time challenge it. Of the four stories, two involve child beating, in one the mother is absent from the time of the speaker's early childhood, and one is an account of maternal depression. Each of these stories relates a problematic situation in which the mother plays a crucial role. And yet, the consequences of the difficult circumstances which the four individuals encounter are neither debilitating nor devastating. Each of the speakers exhibits an understanding of their mother's situation, and it is this understanding rather than the harmful effects of faulty maternal care which forms a cornerstone of their identities. Helen explains her mother's treatment of her in terms of the effects of poverty; Ann sees her mother as essentially frustrated, and from this stems much of Ann's own commitment to combating women's oppression; Joe uses the imagery of

self-sacrificing working class mothers to hang his ideals of class solidarity; and Peter, while berating himself for his lack of understanding towards his mother while she was alive, shows in his later life a commitment to feminist politics which he lives both personally and politically. Each narrator's understanding of their lives elevates them beyond the status of victim, the destiny to which they might be relegated in dominant cultural scripts of maternal influence. Through their reflexive, analytic capabilities, Helen, Ann, Peter and Joe craft their own lives, though not – at least initially – in conditions of their own making.

A narrative theory of the self implies that individuals make sense of their experiences when they tell stories about them. But how and why do individuals select certain experiences to be included in the stories they tell about themselves? Equally important, on what basis are other experiences excluded, or only partially rendered? Here, the relationship between memory and culture is critical “to do memory is essentially to engage in a cultural practice. Instances of self memory . . . take place within and are shaped by social process” (Gergen 1994, pp. 88–89). To do memory is to perform memory, and “one *performs* personal memory . . . as an effective participant in the culture” (Gergen 1994, p. 101). Thus we do not, cannot remember simply as “individuals”; we embody the social in our very beings. Personal memory is always connected so social narrative . . .” (Lambek & Antze 1996, p. xx). What is most powerful about the stories presented here is that they expand the boundaries of the dominant cultural narrative. Harris, Carney, and Fine (2001) state that counter stories “expose the construction of the dominant story by suggesting how else it could be told. In providing an example of how it could be otherwise they disrupt the hegemony of the monolingual master narrative” (p. 13). Helen, Ann, Joe and Peter suggest a very different way in which to construct the ‘mommy story.’ Each of these narratives offer us an inspiring example of making sense of, and ultimately moving beyond, early childhood trauma. In this sense, they are tales of profound hope, arrived at through political understanding.

Terry Arendell (2000) concludes her review of the last decade's scholarship on motherhood by saying “We especially need theory building grounded in mothers' experiences” (p. 1202). I believe that the four case studies presented here reveal another potential: these personal narratives on the long-term effect of mothering suggest that the dominant motherhood story not only fails those who mother. Equally, it fails those of us who have been mothered. In listening to the stories people tell about their early memories of their mothers, the specificity as well as the cultural location of the mother-child relationship becomes increasingly apparent. But Helen, Ann, Joe and Peter do much more than relate the raw facts of their early childhoods. Each brings to the story he or she tells a

level of understanding – personal and political – which prohibits the possibility of mother-blaming. This is liberating not only for their mothers, nor even just for mothers in general. Rejecting the deterministic individualism implicit in the developmental narrative is ultimately liberating for them, grown children who both author and live the story of their lives.

References

- Ambert, A-M. (1994). An international perspective on parenting: Social change and social constructs. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 56, 529–543.
- Andrews, M. (1991). *Lifetimes of commitment: Aging, politics, psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Andrews, M. (2002). Feminist research with non-feminist and anti-feminist women: Meeting the challenge. *Feminism and Psychology*, 12, 55–77.
- Andrews, M., Day Sclater, S., Squire, C., & Treacher, A. (Eds.). (2000). *Lines of narrative: Psychosocial perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Arendell, T. (2000). Conceiving and investigating motherhood: The decade's scholarship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1192–1207.
- Arnup, K., Levesque, A., & Pierson, R. (1990). *Delivering motherhood: Maternal ideologies and practices in the 19th and 20th centuries*. London: Routledge.
- Bassin, D., Honey, M., & Kaplan, M. M. (Eds.) (1994). *Representations of motherhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Burman, E. (1994). *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Crane, S. (1996). (Not) writing history: Rethinking the intersections of personal history and collective memory with Hans von Aufess. *History and memory: Studies in representation of the past*, 8 (1), 5–29.
- Fine, M., & Harris, A. (Eds.). (2001). Under the covers: Theorising the politics of counter stories [Special issue]. *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 4.
- Gergen, K. (1994). Mind, text and society: Self-memory in social context. In U. Neisser & R. Fivush (Eds.), *The remembering self: Construction and accuracy in the self-narrative* (pp. 78–104). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Glenn, N., Chang, G., & Forcey, K. R. (Eds.) (1994). *Mothering, ideology, experience and agency*. London: Routledge.
- Gubrium, J., & Wallace, J. B. (1990). Who theorizes age? *Ageing and Society*, 10, 131–149.
- Hareven, T. (1995). Changing images of aging and the social construction of the life course. In M. Featherstone & Wernick (Eds.), *Images of aging: Cultural representations of later life* (pp. 119–133). London: Routledge.
- Harris, A. (2001). Dodging and weaving: Young women countering the stories of youth citizenship. *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 4, 183–199.
- Hill Collins, P. (1994). Shifting the centre: Race, class, and feminist theorizing about motherhood. In D. Bassin, M. Honey, & M. M. Kaplan (Eds.), *Representations of motherhood* (pp. 56–74). New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Hill Collins, P. (1997). The meaning of motherhood in black culture and black mother/daughter relationships. In M. Gergen & S. Davis (Eds.), *Towards a new psychology of gender* (pp. 325–340). London: Routledge.
- Lambek, M. & Antze, P. (1996). Introduction: Forecasting memory. In P. Antze & M. Lambek (Eds.), *Tense past: Cultural essays in trauma and memory* (pp. xi–xxxviii). London: Routledge.
- Leach, P. (1997). Nurseries and daycare centers do not meet infant needs. In M. R. Walsh (Ed.), *Women, men and gender: Ongoing debates* (pp. 386–390). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lewis, J. (1990). ‘Motherhood issues’ in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In K. Arnup, A. Levesque, & R. Pierson (Eds.), *Delivering motherhood: Maternal ideologies and practices in the 19th and 20th centuries* (pp. 1–19). London: Routledge.
- Morss, J. (1996). *Growing critical: Alternatives to developmental psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Phoenix, A., & Woollett, A. (1991). Motherhood: Social construction, politics and psychology. In A. Phoenix, A. Woollett, & E. Lloyd (Eds.), *Motherhood: Meanings, practices, and ideologies* (pp. 13–27). London: Sage.
- Phoenix, A., Woollett, A., & Lloyd, E. (Eds.) (1991). *Motherhood: Meanings, practices, and ideologies*. London: Sage.
- Pope, D., Quinn, N., & Wyer, M. (Eds.) (1990). Editorial: The ideology of mothering: Disruption and reproduction of patriarchy. *Signs*, 15 (30), 441–447.
- Riessman, C. K. (2002). Doing justice: Positioning the interpreter in narrative work. In W. Patterson (Ed.), *Strategic narrative: New perspectives on the power of personal and cultural stories* (pp. 195–217). Landham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Smith-Rosenberg, C. (1972). The hysterical woman: Sex roles and conflict in 19th century America. *Social Research*, 39, 652–678.
- Talbot, J., Bibace, R., Bokhur, B., & Bamberg, M. (1996). Affirmation and resistance of dominant discourses: The rhetorical construction of pregnancy. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 6, 225–251.
- Tore, M. E., Fine, M., Boudin, K., Bowen, I., Clark, J., Hylton, D. et al. (2001). A space for co-constructing counter stories under surveillance. *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 4, 149–166.
- Walkerdine, V., & Lucey, H. (1989). *Democracy in the kitchen: Regulating mothers and socialising daughters*. London: Virago.
- Walters, S. (1992). *Lives together/worlds apart: Mothers and daughters in popular culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Woollett, A., & Phoenix, A. (1991). Psychological views of mothering. In A. Phoenix, A. Woollett, & E. Lloyd (Eds.), *Motherhood: Meanings, practices, and ideologies* (pp. 28–46). London: Sage.

COMMENTARIES

Blame it on psychology!?

Carlos Kölbl

Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Essen, Germany

My commentary focuses on Andrews' account of what master narratives are, how they are supposed to come into existence, and the role they play in everyday sense-making strategies. In all three respects I argue for a less homogenizing and more empirical strategy, one that shows or documents more specifically how narrators position themselves vis-à-vis what they encounter and what they explicitly or implicitly address as delineating and constraining factors. (*Master Narratives, Narrations, Everyday Sense-making, Positioning, Methodology, Methods, Developmental Psychology, Maternal Influences*)

Molly Andrews analyzes the biographical accounts of four elderly people with special focus on the question of how these men and women, who either have been beaten as children (two of them), or had to cope with a mostly absent or a depressive mother, narratively construct these early maternal influences with respect to their whole lives. The author reads her subjects' stories against the backdrop of "deterministic mother-blaming" which she considers to be at "the heart of key cultural narratives" (p. 7), and comes to the conclusion that the accounts of Helen, Ann, Joe and Peter (the participants of her study) do not fit this perspective at all. On the contrary, they radically challenge it.

Andrews' interpretations are full of empathy, often enlightening and sometimes also moving. Moreover, her attempts to turn psychology's attention towards the lived experiences of being mothered are very promising. However, a critical look at her main arguments confronts us with three interrelated issues.

One of the author's basic assumptions is – roughly speaking – the existence of a "master narrative of the role of mothers in the long-term psychological development of their children" (p. 8). This "story of mothering", one of the "most dominant cultural narratives", centers around the idea that "only the selflessly loving mother is good" (p. 8); and if mothers are not selflessly loving, the influence on their children's psyche will be catastrophic and long lasting.

At this point, every empirically-minded social scientist will almost inevitably ask: But how do we know that this really is the/a master narrative, especially when considering that at least “we” in the western world live in different and internally highly differentiated societies with numerous coexisting and interacting (and often also conflicting) life-forms? Where is the evidence? Andrews supports her claims with evidence that is borrowed from the large array of child-rearing literature (in particular, contemporary “baby bibles”) and from colleagues who have engaged in the business of ‘deconstructing’ developmental psychology, such as Burman (1994), Morss (1996), and Phoenix and Woollett (1991). In my opinion, this is a good start, but ultimately not enough and not convincing.

First, I would like to ask what we mean by master narrative. Is it a narrative version (or rather discourse) that is most commonly spread within a particular population, in the sense that we could empirically test it? Or is it a particular discourse or ideology that is most dominant in the public sector, e.g., in such cultural artifacts as books, films, newspaper articles, etc.? Or is it an ideology or way of talking that constrains the actions of a particular population in very specific ways? Or, last but not least, is it a particular way of talking that impacts (only) on how people tell their stories, but has no, or only limited, consequences on how people think and how they act? – None of this is meant to imply that I deny the intersection of narrative, sense-making and peoples’ actions in their everyday lives. However, what I am proposing here is to spell out our theoretical assumptions about the connection between so-called master narratives at the cultural and social level (as discourses and ideologies) and individuals telling stories in interview settings.

I would hold that not every master narrative is equally relevant for everyone; or, that the tendency to homogenize may actually run counter to what we have tried to open up by turning to narrative and narrating as our window into how people organize their personal domain of sense-making. It is in this respect that I see the author as dangerously close to a practice that she herself vehemently criticizes: “The relationship between the academic literature and commonsense notions is a symbiotic one; researchers in the field begin with their assumptions of the centrality of the mother figure in the long-term development of the child, and produce findings based on this conceptual framework. The findings, in turn, are fed back into the community, elevating the notions from the level of commonsense to that of scientific knowledge. And the cycle repeats itself” (p. 10).

Incidentally, the whole issue of how to validly identify a dominant narrative or discourse is obviously crucial (but as far as I can see, often remains unre-

solved) for many empirical studies in the tradition of discursive analysis which operate precisely with concepts such as dominant and counter-narratives.

Another pivotal question concerning dominant cultural narratives concerns their origins. Andrews also offers an answer for her own case. It is this answer I would like to turn to now.

According to Andrews, psychology as an academic discipline has undoubtedly made important contributions to the scientific impregnation of everyday culture in many respects. It should come as no surprise that the sub-discipline of developmental psychology “with [its] long tentacles into applied areas” (p. 10) can be assigned a major role within the overall impact of psychology in the formation of our everyday world. This of course also holds true for the more specific topic of early maternal influence and its long-term effects.

Up to this point I can easily agree with Andrews. The problem starts when the author claims that it is precisely these contributions of academic psychology that are the main origin of the above mentioned, supposedly dominant, cultural narrative (in particular, pp. 7–11 and 24 f.).

Sigmund and Anna Freud, Erikson, Ainsworth, Chodorow, Gilligan and many others have theorized extensively and/or conducted empirical research, including some very sophisticated longitudinal studies, in the field in question. I do not want to deny that the diffusion of their respective works into our life-world (“Lebenswelt”) can and should be viewed critically. The sheer diversity of the theoretical approaches and of the empirical findings of these and other authors engaged with questions of mothering and its effects on children, however, as is the case with everyday discourse, prohibits a simplifying homogenization.

But Andrews’ tendency to homogenize is not just limited to this specific field of developmental research. What is worse, she actually seems to regard the *whole* of (developmental) psychology as a monolithic, clear-cut, consistent, uncontradictory and mostly mythological and not properly scientific block. This view is manifested, for instance, in a sentence like this: “At the heart of the developmental project is the role of the mother” (p. 9). Well, certainly the mother does play a great role in “the” developmental project as can be seen, for instance, when regarding the work of those authors mentioned above. Nevertheless, the general project of course consists of many ‘subprojects’ among which cognitive development may just be one of them, but one that is rather important. Considering the theories and empirical findings of this branch of development I do not think that the mother is at the heart of it – whatever the reasons and irrespective of whether one likes it or not. At least in Piaget or Vygotsky, one rather seldom finds anything about the *specific* role of the mother.

Besides, current cultural and constructivist approaches relying on these two developmentalists do not support the presumed master narrative.

One additional impressive example (which of course is entangled with the one already discussed) of Andrews' largely unjustified "psychology-blaming" is her view that developmental psychology is governed by "implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumptions [...] regarding the deterministic role of maternal influence throughout the lifespan" (p. 12). Again I do not want to deny that there are and above all *have been* such assumptions, the so-called schizophrenogenic mother is just one example. On the other hand, at least two points have to be mentioned.

First, contemporary developmental psychology is hardly preoccupied with the *deterministic* role of maternal influence. As trivial as this may sound, the statistical design of much developmental work alone does not allow one to speak of deterministic but at best of probabilistic factors.

Second and more important, groundbreaking research on resilience (no matter how critically this research itself may be viewed), retroactive socialization, or the emphasis of the (at least partial) autonomy of "persons as producers of their own development" (Lerner & Busch-Rossnagel 1981; see also Riegel 1975) shed contrasting light on Andrews' notion of determinism in developmental psychology and make it appear rather misleading.

It should be clear by now: My suspicion is that the author makes a straw figure out of developmental psychology which can then be burnt without any difficulty. If we are not willing to follow that example we still need an answer to how we can identify the origins of master narratives. At any rate, a hasty strategy of over-generalizing certain aspects of psychology and then presenting them as the decisive factors in the generation of particular discourses does not seem helpful.

One last important question remains. Does the assumption that Ann, Helen, Joe and Peter in challenging the supposed dominant narrative in such a way that they produce counter-narratives to it result in a better interpretation of their accounts? In other words: Is it a useful methodological 'trick' to operate with this assumption? I am posing the question this way because it might certainly be quite fruitful – despite the two problems outlined – to read biographical interviews against a particular contrastive foil or backdrop, in this case a foil that is given the status of a dominant and constraining narrative. This is possibly even more so since the very concept of personal and interactive narration may be constructed in such a way that it is actually *constituted* by dominant as well as counter-narratives (in a broad sense). Do we not always tell stories which, on the one hand, take up acknowledged common cultural

ends (or at least those that we as narrators regard as acknowledged), and on the other hand challenge these ends? Otherwise our interactive contributions would remain utterly redundant and we as narrators would come across as dull and stupid.

With regard to Ann, Helen, Joe and Peter's accounts of their mothers, I am afraid that the assumption to view them as opposing the supposed dominant narrative does not really significantly add to our understanding of their biographical accounts. All four participants do, of course, speak of their mothers' influence on their political and educational biographies, precisely because this was required by the interview context. However, at least in the excerpts offered to the reader, they do not explicitly nor – as far as I can see – implicitly address themselves in opposition to, or as constrained by, the master narrative of mothering; and for this reason, there is no hermeneutic surplus in assuming that their stories are counter-narratives to the deterministic mother-blaming story. Helen's difficult formative biography, Ann's becoming a feminist, Joe's gut communism and Peter's feelings of love, guilt and admiration are all intertwined to a certain significant degree with their respective accounts of the mother but can be read perfectly well without relying on the supposed master narrative.

One viable way of handling the difficult topic of the relation between master- and counter-narratives is outlined in Talbot, Bibace, Bokhour, and Bamberg (1996) where the authors analyze excerpts in a Bakhtinian fashion in which the subjects retell dialogues they had with others. In these dialogues the subjects position themselves in contrast to the persons they talk to and thus tell counter-narratives.

If the critique outlined above is right: what could/should be done instead? Should we leave questions like the ones the author poses completely aside and turn to other more promising fields of interest? I do not think so. Questions as to how expert knowledge shapes our thinking, feeling, wanting and acting are of utmost psychological importance, not least in modern societies. Also, a normative stance, which is critical of the impact of expert knowledge on the logos of the practical world, is certainly legitimate. Questions as to how we tell our biographies with respect to the role of the mothers are of equal importance since, of course, the significance of mothers is regarded as crucial in our culture. So I would not argue in favor of leaving this field of research but merely in favor of approaching it differently. Such an alternative approach originates in part from my criticisms. The following notes can thus also be read (in part) as a summary of what I have been trying to argue for:

1. Explicit criteria would have to be set up which should help to decide whether and for whom a presumed dominant cultural narrative is indeed dominant. These should include terminological and theoretical explications of terms like master- or counter-narratives.
2. But apart from specific theoretical criteria the empirical realm would have to be given extraordinary status. This should happen in two ways. On the one hand, cultural artifacts such as books, newspaper articles, films etc. should be examined as to which narrative/discourse they transport. For this endeavor statistical analyses could be of value, too. On the other hand, the first person perspective should play a major role. Which narratives do the subjects themselves regard (explicitly or implicitly) as the dominant cultural narratives? And equally important: how can we validly detect them?
3. Expert knowledge can certainly be assigned an important role in the constitution of (among other genres of speech) biographical narratives and the actions, thoughts, feelings and motives connected with them. A simplifying homogenization of this expert knowledge – be it developmental psychology, other sub-disciplines of psychology or any other scientific discourse – should in any case be avoided. It contains the danger of leveling out scientific as well as everyday discourse and then falsely identifying a certain artificially created scientific discourse as the main generator of the latter. Such a strategy tends to impede rather than enhance insights into the complex, scientifically related discursive construction of self and world.

References

- Burman, E. (1994). *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Lerner, R. M., & Busch-Rossnagel, N. A. (1981). *Individuals as producers of their own development: A life-span perspective*. New York: Academic Press.
- Morss, J. (1996). *Growing critical: Alternatives to developmental psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Phoenix, A., & Woollett, A. (1991). Motherhood: Social construction, politics and psychology. In A. Phoenix, A. Woollett, & E. Lloyd (Eds.), *Motherhood: Meanings, practices, and ideologies* (pp. 13–27). London: Sage.
- Riegel, K. F. (1975). A dialectic interpretation of development. In N. Datan & L. H. Ginsberg (Eds.), *Life-span developmental psychology: Normative life crises* (pp. 99–128). New York: Academic Press.
- Talbot, J., Bibace, R., Bokhour, B., & Bamberg, M. (1996). Affirmation and resistance of dominant discourses. The rhetorical construction of pregnancy. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 6, 225–251.

Accidental cases: Extending the concept of positioning in narrative studies

Catherine Kohler Riessman

Dept. of Sociology, Boston College and School of Social Work,
Boston University

I locate Molly Andrews' article in a long tradition of feminist scholarship on the institution of motherhood. Ruling relations of "expert" narratives inevitably penetrate personal narratives of being mothered, but narrators can resist and complicate the master narrative as they locate memories of childhood in historical and political contexts. Narrative research would benefit from greater attention to historicity, the social location of narrator and investigator that influence the research relationship, and the shifting positioning of the interpreter when she returns to "accidental cases" from previous research. (*Motherhood, Positioning, Historicity, Ruling Relations, Re-interpretation*)

Master narratives of a social institution (e.g., motherhood) are inevitably woven into our personal stories of lived experience with the institution (e.g., mothering and/or being mothered). Despite the power of cultural plots, we do not simply follow them in re-storying our lives over time. We interpret past experiences in composing lives in the present that adapt to, resist, and sometimes reach beyond the master narratives of dominant cultural institutions. The ruling relations that penetrate the everyday world of experience through "expert" knowledge is a fruitful way of positioning Molly Andrews' article. She argues that the (Western) textual narrative of motherhood in psychology is contested in the personal narratives of adult offspring. The article can be situated in a theoretical tradition with a long feminist history (DeVault & McCoy 2002; Rich 1976; Smith 1974, 1999).

In four case studies of aging socialists, which Andrews selects from her previous corpus to reanalyze, she examines life histories that expand, complicate, and subvert the dominant (idealized) narrative of biological motherhood. Just as she looks back on previous work, participants look back on their lives to re-interpret memories of "deficient" mothering; difficult early experiences are re-interpreted as motives for political identities later on. Narrators struggle to come to terms with early lives – experiencing injustice when they were children. Andrews argues that the quest for personal freedom from an abusive parent, for example, led to the quest for freedom and equality for all. Radical-

ism was also rooted in childhood witnessing: seeing education denied to a girl, or watching physical abuse directed against another member of the family. The participants' memories, like their lives, became politicized.

The counter-narratives challenge the ruling relations that permeate texts on the institution of motherhood, they are acts of "everyday resistance" (Collins 1997; Scott 1985). They contest the developmental frameworks of dynamic psychology, psychiatry, and other "expert" knowledges that have powerfully constrained white Western women: (biological) motherhood is seen as the central axis of adult identity; mothers are the single most important influence on children's psychological development and future well-being; "inadequate" mothering has lethal effects. The power of this gendered and racialized master narrative (and associated mother-blaming) enters into the everyday worlds of mothers today, palpable in the complex emotions white middle-class Western women feel when they are not "totally there" for their children, when their actions cause harm, or when women choose to construct lives outside of motherhood. Black women have not experienced motherhood as white women have (Collins 1991), nor have they attempted to live out the idealized and homogenized master narrative of the "good mother", and their mothering has been pathologized in developmental thought. Black women confront different gender restrictions, including racist beliefs (when they are poor) about the "choice" of motherhood itself. In a word, the master narrative of motherhood in psychological theory is bleached of class, race, sexuality, nationality, and historical/cultural context. Personal narratives reveal how the plot can be written differently.

Molly Andrews' article raises several issues for contemporary narrative studies. The historicity of personal narrative is a neglected area of research (but see Bell 1999; Plummer 1995; Skultans 1999), although it remains a major focus of scholarship on the master narratives of theory. Andrews relates the rise of industrial capitalism to an emerging discourse on (white) women's domesticity, which guided gender relations into the 20th century (in Western societies – the discourse did not penetrate South Asia in pure form, and counter-pressures continue to this day: families, not individual mothers, are responsible for the care and rearing of children). Andrews' participants historically situate their childhood stories in the harsh capitalist world of early 20th England for the working class: high rates of infectious disease (notably TB); early death of parents and siblings; poverty, hunger and insecure housing in cities; child labor in mills; a vast colonial world that (middle class) mothers could turn to for help with children. Arriving at a critical perspective on gender and class inequalities

of the historical period enabled narrators to position their past experiences in present socialist identities.

The social location of the narrator, which Andrews identifies and uses analytically, warrants closer attention in narrative studies generally. She avoids the pitfall of “over personalizing” personal experience, and connects the personal and the political, as do her informants. A current trend, especially among psychologically minded investigators, is to reduce the political to the personal (Langellier 2001a). All four narrators position themselves in class (but not race) contexts in their stories about growing up poor in the first decades of the 20th century. Choosing to locate themselves in this way speaks to the huge significance of class politics in Britain. Narrators in the U.S. would likely position themselves differently.

I wondered about the significance of aging for the narrators as they constructed their historicized accounts of childhood – they were 75 to 90 at the time of interviewing. The issue is not “retrospective bias” in reporting childhood “facts”, as positivists would argue, but rather how subsequent events have transformed the meaning and import of difficult childhood experiences. Aging, for all of us, entails composing *life stories* that, of course, contain bounded narratives of specific moments in the life course. But with aging the quest for coherence (to borrow a hotly debated term in narrative studies) prompts us to stitch together fragments of memory, to relate past events to present actions, to re-imagine what “really” happened in childhood that may have steered us towards current identities and values. Mishler (1998) puts it well: “ends beget beginnings.” We compose and recompose our pasts, “shifting the relative significance of different events for whom we have become, discovering connections we had previously been unaware of, repositioning ourselves and others in our networks of relationships (Mishler 1999b, p. 5).

Personal narratives are (among other things) meaning-making units of discourse. They are useful for research precisely because narrators interpret the past in stories rather than reproduce it as it was. The “truths” of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future (Riessman 2002a, 2002b). The women and men Andrews interviewed were uniquely positioning in the life course to do this identity work. The compassionate understandings they display in the present of their mothers’ situations in the past, which Andrews so sensitively documents, may work to repair wounds that only narrative can heal. It is also possible that their social location as aging women and men influenced their accounts of childhood in another crucial way. They could offer counter-narratives to the master cultural narrative because they had expe-

rienced the difficult job of parenting themselves – a corrective to the idealized narrative of motherhood if there ever was one.

Speaking of parenting, Andrews says in passing that she collected the data before she was a mother: “ten years and two children later,” she returned to the transcripts with new interests and theories in mind. It is rare in narrative research for investigators to return to texts they have analyzed in the past, and bring to bear newly current theoretical perspectives and autobiographical insights. I wanted Andrews to push her positioning argument further to include her changing “self” in relation to the material, that is, issues of reflexivity and the research relationship. Writing need not be confessional, and can reveal how the positioning of the investigator influences what she “sees” in the data – a critical component in the social construction of knowledge.

Work is now building on positioning in personal narrative – how characters are positioned in reported events (e.g., as victims or as agents of change), how tellers position themselves in relation to their audiences (e.g., as sharing cultural understandings or as instructors), and how tellers position themselves to themselves (Bamberg 2002). The positioning of the investigator in the field of study offers an additional angle of vision. Beginning in the 1970s, some anthropologists explicitly interrogated themselves in their work (Briggs 1970; Myerhoff 1978, 1992), and scholars since have extended the move. Andrews does locate herself as a speaker/questioner in conversations with research participants, although her participation remains unanalyzed: how did her questions and comments shape the emerging narratives? Her focus is primarily on “the told”, not “the telling” (Mishler 1995). As readers we can only imagine how the investigator’s positioning as a mother entered into her analysis. How did she select interview transcripts and “hear” them differently given her shifting theoretical interests and changing family context? Who are the “ghostly audiences” (Langellier 2001b) to whom the aging narrators, and the author herself, may be speaking? These larger questions point to the contexts of production of personal narrative, including our positioning as authors (and readers) in the interpretive process.

The vivid and moving social portraits Andrews constructs offer important insights about identity construction over the life course, the role of memory in re-storying lives, and the master narratives of culture that are reworked and resisted in personal stories. Participants were “accidental cases” – they surfaced during a larger project on lifetime socialist commitments. Looking back on previously collected data – so common it is called secondary analysis in quantitative studies – offers narrative researchers unique possibilities. Historicity can come into view in all its guises – taken-for-granted social arrangements

and ruling relations at the time of interviewing; assumptions about gender, class and race in the theories of our disciplines; and, finally, our own autobiographical histories that shape the kinds of narratives we develop from our research materials. Re-positioning ourselves in analysis of previously collected data brings contingency into view – the situatedness of knowledge.

References

- Bell, S. E. (1999). Narratives and lives: Women's health politics and the diagnosis of cancer for DES daughters. *Narrative Inquiry*, 9 (2), 1–43.
- Bamberg, M. (2002). 'We are young, responsible, and male': Form and functions of 'slut-bashing' in the identity constructions of 15-year-old males.
<http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/virtual/bamberg1.html>
- Briggs, J. (1970). *Never in Anger*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Collins, P. H. (1991). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and empowerment*. Boston: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (1997). How much difference is too much? Black feminist thought and the politics of postmodern social theory. *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, 17, 3–37.
- DeVault, M. L., & McCoy, L. (2002). Institutional ethnography: Using interviews to investigate ruling relations. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 751–776). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Langellier, K. M. (2001a). Personal narrative. In M. Jolly (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of life Writing. Autobiographical and biographical forms*, Vol. 2 (pp. 699–701). London: Fitzroy Dearborn.
- Langellier, K. M. (2001b). 'You're marked': Breast cancer, tattoo and the narrative performance of identity. In J. Brockmeier & D. Carbaugh (Eds.), *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self, and culture* (pp. 145–184). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5 (2), 87–123.
- Mishler, E. G. (1998, November). *Narrative and the paradox of temporal ordering: How ends beget beginnings*. Paper presented at conference on Discourse and Identity, Clark University, Worcester, MA.
- Mishler, E. G. (1999a). *Storylines: Craftartists' narratives of identity*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Mishler, E. G. (1999b, November). *Time's double arrow: Re-presenting the past in life history studies*. Paper presented at conference on "Lives in context: The study of human development," Radcliffe Murray Center, Cambridge, MA.
- Myerhoff, B. (1978). *Number our days*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Myerhoff, B., with Metzger, D., Ruby, J., & Tufte, V. (1992). *Remembered lives*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories: Power, change and social worlds*. New York: Routledge.

- Rich, A. (1976). *Of woman born*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Riessman, C. K. (2002a). Positioning gender identity in narratives of infertility: South Indian women's lives in context. In M. C. Inhorn & F. van Balen (Eds.), *Infertility around the globe: New thinking on childlessness, gender, and reproductive technologies* (pp. 152–170). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Riessman, C. K. (2002b). Analysis of personal narratives. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 695–710). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Skultans, V. (1999). Narratives of the body and history: Illness in judgement on the Soviet past. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 21, 310–328.
- Smith, D. E. (1974). Women's perspective as a radical critique of sociology. *Sociological Inquiry*, 44 (1), 7–13.
- Smith, D. E. (1999). *Writing the social: Critique, theory, and investigations*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press.

Politicising mothers: Counter-narratives of mothering experience

Leigh Coombes and Mandy Morgan

Independent Scholar / Massey University, New Zealand

This commentary considers Andrews' "Memories of mother" as a challenge to the master narrative of deterministic mother blame. Positioning ourselves, theoretically and personally, in relation to this master narrative, we raise questions about the community in which such questions are legitimated and the politics of enunciation. The commentary discusses Andrews' project as a political intervention into psychological knowledge in the production of resistant storylines contesting the unifying and naturalising of mothering experiences. (*Mothering, Politics of enunciation, Master narratives*)

Since we share with Andrews (2002) an interest in the work of theories of subjectivity which privilege discourse and narrative in the constitution of personhood, we begin this commentary with an explicit statement of our reading of Andrews' text in relation to our own interests and projects.

We are multiply positioned in relation to the master narrative of the constitution of motherhood and the determining effect of mothering. We are both mothers of (newly) adult children, we are both adult children of mothers, we are both, differently familiar with feminist and poststructuralist theory challenging the master narrative with counter narratives of experience and the

complexities of social relations involved in mothering. In the course of a writing project, one of us encountered the master narrative of the determinist effect of mothering in the form of a psychohistory of child assault. In this work, which is among the few texts specifically mentioning filicide, maternal hate is positioned as the origin of child abuse, child murder and monstrous children (Coombes 2000). The master narrative's construction of the monstrous child includes adult children who fight back, are guilty, bitter, fearful, or violent themselves. Their childhoods are tragic. In the course of teaching, one of us encounters the personal narratives of students' relationships with motherhood and mothering. Like Andrews' participants' stories, many of these narratives are marked by resistance to notions of maternal determination and mother blame, yet they speak of painful childhoods and difficult maternal relationships. Both of us, then, are already positioned personally and intellectually in relation to master narratives of motherhood and mothering. Elsewhere we have attempted to draw the personal and intellectual together in theorising experience (Morgan & Coombes 2001).

From our reading, particularly of feminist writing, and our personal experience we understand motherhood as problematic. Like Andrews' we recognise the cultural and historical specificity of the master narrative, which presumes universality. We also recognise the cultural and historical specificity of feminist responses to universal motherhood stories. We have experienced the ways in which the master narrative may constrain some women between 'love' and 'fear', 'patience' and 'anger', 'selflessness' and 'selfishness', 'hope' and 'despair' – as mothers and as daughters.

From these positions, we read Andrews' study as challenging the master narrative of maternal determination through giving voice to interpretations which speak to counter narratives: to notions of the delimited, powerful and evocative experiences of mothering. Burman (1992) identifies "four areas where feminist and poststructuralist concerns meet" (p. 47). Of these four, we read similarity between our own projects and Andrews' project in attention to difference (and specificity), in questioning the claims of psychological expertise to universal truths, and in documenting resistances in relation to dominant discourses and master narratives.

Andrews writes of the symbiotic relationship between scientific knowledge and common sense and the way in which the 'long tentacles' of developmental psychology reach into applied areas. We understand the relationship between common sense and scientific knowledge somewhat differently. We assume that the notion of common sense may be transformed through poststructuralist theory into something like 'sense making resources held in common'. From

Foucault, we take the notion that 'sense making resources' may be construed as discourses, intimately related to knowledge and to power relations. Some discourses are more legitimate than others, to the extent that it is possible to identify 'subjugated knowledges'. Our 'common sense making', then, becomes social processes of contested meaning making within which certain voices, and fields, have more legitimacy than others. When 'common sense' becomes legitimated as scientific knowledge, it carries authority and legitimacy which has the social power to silence or exclude certain voices. The findings of science are political interventions into the social processes of sense making. We construe Andrews' study, theoretically, as an intervention into the social processes of knowledge production: an intervention which posits the authority of narrativised experience to counter the authorial voices of psychological expertise. Andrews evokes the notion of legitimating subjugated knowledges in her discussion of the exclusion of mothers' and children's voices in the master narratives of psychological development and in her practice of interpreting the stories of life long activists.

Reading Andrews' article reminds us of the importance of hearing and legitimating the stories of older activists among those of us committed to work which contests "the power of psychologists to define who we are or may be" (Parker 2001, p. 126). We have older friends who have shared with us their stories of struggles against oppression often long before we were born. Andrews' study honours their contribution to our sense of commonality and cohesion within a community of activism which temporally exceeds our personal lives. Such memories have also led us to lengthy discussions concerning this commentary – what kind of community we are speaking into when we 'comment' on someone else's work, when we share interests and yet read differently? and how we can continue to make the voices of activism heard in our work?

These questions concern the politics of enunciation (Jardine 1985) at least in as much as they attend to who is speaking, to whom we are speaking and to how our speaking may work towards dialogue among activists. Here, we decided not to engage with empirical questions that might be asked of Andrews' interpretive work, though we recognise that they might be a legitimate issue of commentary among some communities of research psychologists. Rather we offer a reading of Andrews' analysis as challenging the determinist master narrative and opening a space for further questions through legitimating narrativised experience.

As we read through Andrews' analysis we discussed the stories and the analysis of their implications for us: we remembered stories of our own, those of others we had heard, people we had met. We talked to each other about An-

draws' larger project – on lifetime socialist commitment – and how this might matter to the stories and their analysis. Then, it seemed to us that Andrews' work analyses political process through narrative theory and research.

Through speaking narratively of painful childhood in relation to pained mothers, and both in relation to lifelong political commitment, Andrews' article provides us with storylines challenging the master narrative. In resisting the master narrative, these storylines tell of mothers as women who also live painful lives through historically specific political relations.

Andrews pays attention to specific political relations, including commitment to activism, without which it might be possible to read resistant storylines as 'excusing mothers'. Where the 'woman's painful life' mitigates against blame the position of 'good mother' is paradoxically supported, as if 'she would have been a good mother except for ...' or 'she was a good mother except for ...'. This paradoxical support emerges in psychological literature where maternal abuse, deprivation or disorder determines the lifespan trajectory of girl children who become abusive mothers. The underlying assumption of the psychological storyline is that girl children are potential 'good mothers' until they are damaged in their own childhood.

The unifying and naturalising of 'maternity' that is assumed in the psychological master narrative, even in mitigation of 'bad mothering', is contested by insisting on the specificity of the social power relations in which mothering is embedded.

Andrews' article has enabled a space in which we have read challenges to the determinist master narrative through stories of activists' experiences of mothering. We are reminded of the many social processes which may still need telling into our academic community to sustain a commitment to contesting psychology's power to define personhood.

References

- Burman, E. (1992). Feminism and discourse in developmental psychology: Power, subjectivity and interpretation. *Feminism and Psychology*, 2 (1), 45–59.
- Coombes, L. (2000). Tracing monsters: The textual constitution of woman-mother-childkiller or A reading of the non-origin of the monstrous feminine in the specific instance of a case of child murder. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, Aotearoa/New Zealand.
- Jardine, A. (1985). *Gynesis*. Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press.

- Morgan, M., & Coombes, L. (2001). Subjectivities and silences, mother and woman: Theorising an experience of silence as a speaking subject. *Feminism and Psychology*, 11 (3), 361–375.
- Parker, I. (2001). Critical psychology: Excitement and danger. *The International Journal of Critical Psychology, Launch Issue*, 125–127.

Socially organised use of memories of mother in narrative re-construction of problematic pasts

Kyoko Murakami

Department of Education, Brunel University, U.K.

Molly Andrews' study on the discourse of mothering highlights the diversity and complexity of narratives that were produced in the interview for the life history project. This presents us with the analytic and intellectual challenge as to how narrative accounts are analysed and how they are made sense of for our understanding of and theorising about human development. The commentary considers the distinction between the dominant cultural narrative and counter-narrative, in particular, by addressing the way in which such a distinction guides and resources the analysis of the narratives and the handling of variability. Drawing on the concept of positioning, I shall suggest that further analysis of the narrative accounts can be considered as participants' work of accountability and discursive accomplishment of situated identity. The research interview analysed as such would make a stronger case that narrative accounts are social and cultural products (Squire 2000) and interactional resources for performing social actions of blaming, justifying and maintaining neutrality as they re-interpret problematic aspects of mothering practices and produce their significance to present and future lives. (*Interdependency, Discourse analysis, Positioning, Social remembering*)

Molly Andrews' article on memories of mother and counter-narratives of early maternal influence features a diversity and complexity of narratives on mothering and being mothered. The article addresses the way in which her analysis draws on, and is resourced by, the distinction between the dominant cultural narrative and counter-narrative produced for the life history project. In this commentary, I shall suggest some ways in which the narrative accounts can be analysed to reveal the socially constituted nature of identity and moral accountability. Such analysis would help us understand how the distinction between dominant and counter-narratives is made relevant by the participants (includ-

ing the interviewer) in the form of interview. In other words, further analysis would focus on the ways in which the research participants mobilise “the dominant cultural narrative,” establish its relevance to the present interactional setting, and produce significance to their present and future lives. Drawing on the concept of positioning, I shall suggest that the narrated past is socially constructed in interdependencies of memories that are collectively and personally significant (Middleton 1997b, 2002). I shall argue that a discursive analysis exemplified in the line of work of discourse analysis (e.g., Edwards & Potter 1992; Potter & Wetherell 1987) would attend not only to what is said but also to how it was said and under what circumstances, that is, the participants’ sequentially and socially organised discursive moves.

The analysis would make visible the ways in which the participants perform social actions and situated identities, in this case, blaming mothers for what went wrong in the past, displaying conciliatory views, and offering re-interpretations of the troubling nature of the past identified in the respondents’ narrative accounts. Research on social memory and remembering (e.g., Middleton & Edwards 1990) elaborates this point. For instance, discursive analytic studies by Middleton (1997a, 1997b) are concerned with the social organisation of talk, examining the interdependent relationship between personal and collective memories of the past in a socio-cultural setting. Andrews’ article addresses these concerns, discussing the role of culture in identity development and the formation of social memory, i.e., the way in which remembering is achieved socially. They are studied extensively by cultural psychologists (e.g., see the special issue on Narrative and Cultural Memory in *Culture & Psychology*, 8, 2002). In these academic endeavours, studies of narrative in cultural psychology make a contribution to our academic concerns about the role of culture within psychology and the social sciences.

A discursive analysis with a focus on the sequential organisation of interview speech, could make a stronger case for Squire’s criticism of the traditional treatment of culture in psychology (2000). She argues that cultural (and cross-cultural) psychology should depart from stating characteristics of different cultures and from reiterating pre-existing and familiar conceptual frames. A radical approach is to look at social change movements, in which people demonstrate resistance to dominant cultural ideals and a shared belief system. The narrative accounts are viable resources for examining the participants’ understanding of the normative sense as a member of a culture and their positioning and orientation to the collective dominant cultural narrative. A discourse analysis would show the naturally occurring here-and-now sense of what it is to be part of culture by way of resistance or survival. Participants’ sense of culture

is not treated as a mere variable for operationalising differences, but becomes a discursive resource in the way they make sense of change and consistency in their lives against the backdrop of the collective, dominant narratives.

As a starting point, Andrew's article discusses the practice of building knowledge in developmental psychology and its impact on the use in, and application to, society. "... developmental psychology has had a particularly legitimating role to play in reproducing the mythology of motherhood" (Andrews 2002, p. 10). Indeed it has contributed to constructing and feeding the dominant cultural narrative of mothering (and being mothered). It mirrors and endorses a socially desirable and idealised view of mothering. This observation points out a lack of reflexive examination of the discipline; that is, developmental psychology has slipped away from the scrutiny of how the discipline and its research outcomes have become one of the grand narratives. It still remains open to question, however, how lay persons (as opposed to expert developmental psychologists and the like) form a theory-like explanation of human development with regard to change and continuity in the life course. Andrews' study of the narratives contributes to the line of work that explores the way in which people make sense of change and continuity and broader issues relating to the construction of identity and theories of human development. This commentary includes my view on these concerns as to how the grand narrative of developmental psychological explanations gets used by the participants to evaluate maternal influences and explain their ideological positions toward mothering and being mothered.

Positioning

In exploring the relationship between the dominant cultural narrative of mothering and counter-narrative, Andrews is particularly concerned with the way in which maternal influence is mediated to the respondent's interpretation of his/her earlier experience. She seems to consider the dominant cultural narratives and counter-narratives in terms of a tension to be resolved, but it could be suggested that this relationship can be viewed as interdependent and often dilemmatic. The narratives embrace multiple perspectives and interpretations of the story-tellers and narrated characters. Variability of narrative accounts and diversity of the speakers' positions seem to show that the speakers hold a dilemmatic view on problematic mothering practices as the participants do not seek a clear-cut resolution when it comes to these. For this, the concept of positioning (Bamberg 1997, 2002; Davies & Harré 1990; Harré & van Langenhove

1991; van Langenhove & Harré 1993) is useful as it attends to the fluid ways in which the respondents position themselves in accounting their childhood experiences and the relationship with their mothers. It also illustrates the ways in which counter-narratives of resistance are made relevant. Positioning conveys a more dynamic, flexible notion than the terms such as “role” or “position” because it provides an action orientation that the speakers are performing social actions in the telling.

Social organisation of memories

Memories of mother can be told in numerous ways depending on who is telling, to whom they are told, and in what setting. Based on the examples taken from the in-depth interviews, the study captures the diversity of memories of mother in exploring the relationship between the culturally shared dominant image of mothering and the individual lived experience. Andrews calls it “... the symbiotic relationship between personal biography and the master narratives available for people to draw upon in relation to gathering experiences for themselves and others” (p. 11). Narratives attend to both the collectivity and idiosyncrasy of human experiences. The interview-narratives are viable for analysing the discursively constructive nature of identities without being snared into the problem of standardisation (Mishler 1986). Indeed, the narratives of the memories of mother are socially produced and historically located, noting that the details of past actions and events provide a context of the narratives in terms of accountability of the past – what happened and how it happened (Buttney 1993). They were related to a particular audience (in this case the interviewer-researcher) and established a moral legitimacy of telling stories in accordance with the goals of the research project and the interviewer’s research question. The narratives are not neutral representations of truth out there, but are socially organised for the occasion and for the people present as well as non-present others that are implicated in the narratives (Murakami 2001). In other words, these narratives are occasioned in the present interview activity, and the story telling renders the speaker’s interpretation and re-interpretation of problematic aspects of the past – their mothers’ child-rearing practices.

Pursuing this issue of interdependencies and social organisation of remembering in the narratives of mothering, the following questions can be considered: 1) how does the speaker’s troubling past experience with his/her mother become relevant to the present social activity of the research interview? 2) how

do the four narratives share common discursive features as well as differing from one another? 3) how do narratives become part of the activity of interpreting the past? These questions inform the issues of positioning, revealing individual differences and common orientations to the collective cultural narrative. In remembering the past with others, the participants make sense of the troubling issues of that past. This means that narratives need not be treated as something that is a truthful representation of the past at issue, and therefore accuracy is not our primary concern. The narratives are used as a cultural tool to establish the relevance of a particular version of the past (Wertsch 1997). In the telling, the participants perform identity work as they address some critical and problematic issues relating to past events and experiences. Furthermore, the narratives are discursive resources as they are used to establish some moral order of the past. Studies of reminiscence practices examine closely how conversational action would be resourced while the significance of the past is re-configured and a moral order of the past is established (Buchanan & Middleton 1995). Thus, the problematic past (e.g., abuse and neglect by the participants' mothers) is rhetorically organised to establish a moral sensibility of the past for the present interactional setting. The markedly common feature is the use of the mother's death as a reference point, which becomes a discursive resource to display the speaker's multiple positioning.

Performing social acts: Reconfiguring the past

In looking at the examples of discourse, a question arises as to why the participants are telling stories of their mothers, featuring some problematic aspects of their mothers (e.g., abuse and neglect, lack of love and caring, etc.). The interview is a social activity where both positive and negative maternal influences on the participant's life are discussed with others. For example, Ann, a participant, marks the significance of the interview as she comments, "It was good for me looking at my mother [presumably photographs]; you've done me a good turn already..." This utterance shows that the respondent acknowledges some implications of the interview occasion for her. The interview in which she was asked to describe her childhood in terms of her mother's role modelling was a way of revisiting her past. The past does not remain chronologically in time passed, but it becomes a matter of concern in the present.

By way of telling stories, the participants explain maternal influence and demonstrate the way they develop their motto or guiding principles of life – radical thinking, feminism, or Marxist perspective, etc. They demonstrate the

relevance of taking principles into their lives as they display their understanding of their lives so far. In the interview, the participants formulate their notions of human development as they account for problematic pasts and re-interpret the significance of their experiences to their present and future lives. Again using Ann's example, her tales of childhood featuring her mother's constant frustration, the relatively distant relationship with her mother, and her aunt's acting as surrogate mother are offered as explanations of the mother's tyrannical treatment. This further explains her radicalism, which is formulated in her sharply contrasting account of the two different life styles led by Ann's mother and Ann's aunts and her friends. In accounting for her regularly suffered beatings, Ann explains her radicalism in terms of how that turned out to be a feminist issue, which she lives by presently. Andrews points out the speaker's work on identity as the person-now, in contrast to the person-before, that is in Andrews' terms, "Ann's positioning of herself in relation to this story is as a strong feminist, who regards the curtailment of opportunity in her mother's life as the critical influence in the way in which she herself was treated at the time, as well as the person she subsequently became" (p. 17).

This is not to say that this formulation of maternal influence is a once-and-for-all claim for a change. These accounts, presented with interactional features of how the narrative was produced, would enhance the argument for narratives being viable in examining situated identities at work and participants' analytical undertaking or theorising their own development. The narratives are a discursive resource for the participants' reinterpretation of the past and projection to present and future lives. Another example can be taken from Peter's case. A dramatic change in his life that clouded his otherwise good youth became available with a juxtaposition of the contrasting tales of his memories of mother. Rather than using these instances as a way of blaming his mother, the storied events account for his commitment to feminism that is central to his belief system as a lived (and working) ideology. In both cases, the narratives are analytical resources to examine the participants' way of sense-making, constructing identities, formulating and reformulating the significance of their experiences.

Mother-blaming

I wish to comment on the sensitive issue of mother-blaming, which Andrews raises in the discussion of Peter's case. Peter's accounts notably come with an absence of discourse of mother-blaming. Perhaps, this may have to do with the

circumstances and setting in which the interview was conducted. Clinical settings such as therapy and counselling might be acknowledged as more culturally appropriate places for the discourse of mother-blaming. Mother-blaming is a discourse practice contrary to the cultural and socially desired view of mothering (and being mothered). In examining mother-blaming as discourse, our analytic concerns would be with what is told, how it is told and to whom it is told. The participants in the interview for the life history project produce narratives of mothering (and being mothered), and in so doing, they explain their current radical life motto or the feminist belief system they hold in relation to the early maternal influence in their lives. Despite its sensitive nature, they reveal some critical aspects of the mothers' behaviour and child-rearing practices that were considered abusive, tyrannical toward them at the time and detrimental to building a trusting and intimate relationship. At the same time, they also defend and justify the mothers' abusive behaviour and oppressive practices by offering explanations of the social, economic and cultural circumstances of the time. Their narratives are produced as part of the social action of blaming their mothers, rationalising and forgiving them for abuse and neglect. Doing so has a dangerous implication for the way the participants are perceived by the interviewer. Their moral integrity can be questioned for denigrating their own mother in public. The accounts of their problematic experiences with their mothers are formulated in a mitigating fashion, that is, downgrading their critical assessment in the telling of the narrative. Such mitigation can be viewed as a rhetorical achievement.

Helen's account offers an example of the rhetorical work of mitigation. Her detailed descriptions of her mother's physical and emotional abuse were formulated as a routine practice that she endured and fought against. The way she dealt with the mother's routine abuse was produced as part of a causal explanation of who she is now as an adult. The abuse is attributed to "psychological survival" and "quest for freedom," rather than to a delinquent or mistreated individual. The experience of abuse is reconfigured into the life of the fighter striving to be free. Here, in this configuration, the stories of abuse are not offered to blame her mother, but rather as a way of accounting for her identity, her natural characteristic of tenaciousness and strength as consistent throughout her life. This is an example of a participant's implicit theorising on her development regarding change and continuity/consistency in the telling of the sharply contrasting past marked by her mother's death. Helen's narratives resource the identity work. In the telling of the change of her life circumstances, the narratives mark consistency of her identity. The interactional and discursive analysis make this point more visible as the narratives are not orientated to

a set course of a narrative trajectory or story line. The study could take its shape by focusing on turn-taking and the sequential order of conversational moves, and examine how problematic pasts are talked about and how mother-blaming is done sensitively.

Conclusion

Andrews' analysis of narratives of memories of mothers made clear that none of these narratives endorses a fixed idealised notion of mothering (and being mothered) as identified with the culturally dominant narrative. The narratives capture a dynamic nature of positioning moves and identities, as well as marking changes that have occurred in the course of speakers' lives. The view of their mothers at one point differs from that at other times, and therefore multiple versions of mothering are available. The respondents are orienting to a constantly changing nature of identity and life situations and accordingly produce views and accounts that reflect the diversity, and dilemmatic nature, of attitudes toward their own mothers. These contrasting accounts of their experiences with mothers are not to be settled or resolved by mapping onto the distinction between the grand cultural narrative and counter-narrative.

What the study made us understand is the speakers' way of claiming the change of their identities in accordance with their life circumstances and that of re-configuring the significance of their experiences with their own mothers. The interview for the life history project provides a discursive setting in which the participants' theorising of human development is displayed and social actions are performed in remembering childhood and practices of mothering (and being mothered). Treating the diverse and contrasting accounts as discursive resources allows us to see that the story-tellers and the interviewer are performing the social act of remembering (Middleton & Edwards 1990) and re-interpreting how things were in the past and establishing the significance of the experiences. A discursive and interactional analysis of narratives would give rise to their socially constructed and constitutive nature and help us understand further ways of being a person in a cultural-historical setting.

References

- Bamberg, M. G. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7 (1–4), 335–342.

- Bamberg, M. (2002). "We are young, responsible, and male": The form and functions of 'slut-bashing' in the identity constructions in 15-year-old males. Available at: <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/virtual/bamberg1.html>
- Buchanan, K., & Middleton, D. (1995). Voices of experience: Talk, identity and membership in reminiscence groups. *Aging and Society*, 15, 457–491.
- Buttny, R. (1993). *Social accountability in communication*. London: Sage.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 20, 43–63.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. London: Sage.
- Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (1991). Varieties of positioning. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 21 (4), 393–407.
- Middleton, D. (1997a). Conversational remembering and uncertainty: Interdependencies of experience as individual and collective concerns in teamwork. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16 (4), 389–410.
- Middleton, D. (1997b). The social organization of conversational remembering: Experience as individual and collective concerns. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 4 (2), 71–85.
- Middleton, D. (2002). Succession and change in the socio-cultural use of memory: Building-in the past in communicative action. *Culture & Psychology*, 8 (1), 79–95.
- Middleton, D., & Edwards, D. (Eds.). (1990). *Collective remembering*. London: Sage.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). The analysis of interview-narratives. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 233–255). New York: Praeger.
- Murakami, K. (2001). *Revisiting the past: Social organisation of remembering and reconciliation*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Department of Human Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage Publications.
- Squire, C. (Ed.). (2000). *Culture in psychology*. London: Routledge.
- van Langenhove, L., & Harré, R. (1993). Positioning and autobiography: Telling your life. In N. Coupland & J. F. Nussbaum (Eds.), *Discourse and lifespan identity* (pp. 81–99). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1997). Narrative tools of history and identity. *Culture & Psychology*, 3 (1), 5–20.

RESPONSE

to commentaries on “Memories of Mother: Counter-narratives of early maternal influence”

by Molly Andrews

Let me begin with a note of appreciation to the five people who took time to comment on my original article, “Memories of mother: Counter-narratives of early maternal influence”: Carlos Kölbl, Leigh Coombes and Mandy Morgan, Catherine Kohler Riessman, and Kyoko Murakami have all provided me with very stimulating feedback which has caused me to revisit my original argument.

About eighteen months have passed since I wrote the original piece. Two events in particular have occurred which I feel in some way will impact upon what I write today; they are part of the person I am as I now try to make sense of and respond to the commentaries on my article. The first event happened within the past week: I attended and participated in the memorial service for ‘Helen’ who died several months ago at the age of ninety-eight. (Though the data which I drew from was collected some fifteen years ago, in most cases I have had on-going conversations with my once participants, now friends.) The service celebrated a rich life dedicated to improving the material conditions of the lives of others, and although the main hall in the local school had been set up with ample chairs, in the event, there was standing room only. I sat listening to the stories which others told about Helen; one account in particular pricked my interest. A gentleman who had travelled from North America to be there, began with the question, what made Helen the way she was? How could anyone, brought up in the circumstances in which she was, become the kind of person which everyone in the hall knew her to be? I wondered to myself whether the ‘answers’ I had come up with were ‘right’? Is there any meaningful sense in which one can have correct answers to such questions? Or ultimately is the most one can strive for an interpretation which can match the complexity of the experience as it is related by the person who recounts their life story? Would Helen have recognized herself in the account I have provided about her, both in my original contribution to the counter-narratives debate, and

elsewhere? I will return to a related set of questions when I address the question raised by Carlos Kölbl: is my construction of ‘counter-narrative’ merely a “useful methodological trick”?

A second event I would like to relate concerns a talk I delivered on this topic at a British university last year. As it happened, the university is located within a few miles of ‘Ann’s’ home. When I realized that I would be in the vicinity, I informed her of my engagement, and asked her if she would like to meet. Yes, she assured me, not only did she want to see me, but she also wanted to attend the talk. (At eighty-eight, she was not bothered about taking two public transportation buses to the university on her own). Having made these arrangements, I then realized that the paper I had intended to deliver was ‘Memories of Mother’ in which Ann herself featured quite prominently. How would she feel being present while I discussed the circumstances of her early life in public? Should I instead deliver a different paper? I decided to consult Ann herself on this. Her reaction was immediate and clear: if others might benefit from hearing about these experiences and her (and my) interpretations of them, then she was comfortable with me using it. Thus, I delivered the paper as originally planned, in the presence of Ann who sat anonymously amongst the audience. On the bus leaving the university, Ann began to tell me many more early memories relating to her relationship with her mother. The exchange meant a lot to me for two reasons: first, and most important, was the mere fact of its existence. Here we were, fifteen years later, still deeply engaged in conversation with one another. However, our bus-ride conversation also reassured me that Ann did not reject the interpretive framework which I had offered to make sense of the early experiences she had recounted to me years ago. On the contrary, it seemed that it had fit not only what she had originally told me, but indeed had prompted her to elaborate further.

In Catherine Kohler Riessman’s commentary, she highlights the importance of the situatedness of knowledge. What I see in the pieces which have been written as a response to my earlier article is very much influenced by experiences such as the ones described above, interactions which feed into the ongoing evaluations I make about my own interpretive process.

Carlos Kölbl entitles his commentary “Blame it on psychology!?” and it is evident throughout his piece that he feels the argument I have constructed is “largely unjustified psychology-blaming.” Kölbl identifies three interrelated components to his response. First, he asks what I mean by the term ‘master-narrative.’ This is an important question, and one to which I do not have a definitive answer. Indeed, I see my contribution as one of opening up this ques-

tion, and in editing the special issue on this topic, my intention was to collect work which might assist us in thinking through such a definition.

Second, Kölbl feels that I “seem to regard the whole of (developmental) psychology as a monolithic, clear-cut, uncontradictory and mostly mythological and not properly scientific block.” It is worth noting, perhaps, that the criticisms which I outline – which I am not unique in articulating – apply to “much developmental work.” That I do not dedicate the remainder of my article to depicting what I see as the exception rather than the rule is not, I believe, problematic. I do, however, find it somewhat ironic that Kölbl cites the work of Klaus Riegel to illustrate “the groundbreaking work on resilience” which has been done in developmental psychology. I would suggest that Riegel has more commonly been thought of as a pioneer of what is now known as Critical Psychology, the very source of some of the most scathing (and most well-informed) criticisms of developmental psychology.

Third, Kölbl asks if the framework of counter-narratives assists us in producing better interpretations of respondents’ accounts, or whether it is instead a ‘useful methodological trick.’ For me, this question begs another, which lies at the heart of the two accounts with which I began this response: how do we assess the adequacy of the interpretations that we as researchers give to the words of others? What makes one interpretation better than another? Better for whom? For me the task has always been one of trying to create an explanatory framework which can accommodate the complexity and variety of experience of others as they relate it to me. My exchange with Ann in particular tells me that if my framework is not perfect – for I doubt any framework can be – neither is it altogether flawed. For Ann, it appears to be a construction in which she can recognize herself and upon which she can plot other experiences not-yet told to me.

After questioning the usefulness (and, by implication, presumably the applicability) of counter-narratives, Kölbl writes “Do we not always tell stories which, on the one hand, take up acknowledged common cultural ends . . . and on the other hand challenge these ends?” I am intrigued by this comment, for, by use of the term ‘always’ Kölbl seems to be making a stronger case for the existence of counter-narratives than the one I myself put forward. Does he mean to say that speakers so commonly use this device when telling stories that it is hardly (or indeed not at all) worth mentioning? Perhaps. I think this point is not unrelated to the one made by Tore et al. (2001) and cited in my original article, namely that “critical stories are always (and at once) in tension with dominant stories, neither fully oppositional nor untouched” (p. 151)

Kölbl comments that the four participants “do, of course, speak of their mother’s influence on their political and educational biographies, precisely because this was required by the interview context.” Murakami makes a similar point when he states that interviews were settings in which respondents were asked to describe their childhoods “in terms of their mother’s role modelling.” It is important for me to emphasize here that I did not in fact ask respondents about their parents; rather the opening question of the interview was a much more general one, asking for a biographical account of their lives. Almost without exception, respondents chose to respond to this question in terms of their parents. So deeply ingrained is the narrative regarding the centrality of the role of parents in socialization that respondents call upon it even when it is not explicitly asked for by the situation. When Kölbl says that such an account (i.e., one which examines the mother’s influence on political and educational biographies) was ‘required by the interview context’ as opposed to, for instance, required by the question posed by the interviewer, perhaps he is acknowledging this tendency to include certain ‘expected’ ingredients when offering biographical accounts of ourselves.

In Kölbl’s summary of his argument, he offers one of his most compelling points: we need, he argues, explicit criteria to help decide whether and for whom a presumed dominant cultural narrative is indeed dominant. For this,

the empirical realm would have to be given extraordinary status... the first person perspective should play a major role. Which narratives do the subjects themselves regard (explicitly or implicitly) as the dominant cultural narratives? And equally important: how can we validly detect them?

This is a very important issue, and one which I hope will attract more researchers in the future. Rebecca Jones’s contribution to the special issue on counter-narratives is, I believe, a very good starting point for such a discussion.

Kyoko Murakami approaches the article from the perspective of a discourse analyst, emphasizing the importance of “not only what is said, but also . . . how it was said and under what circumstances.” Such a perspective highlights a pivotal dimension of the work, a corollary of Riessman’s ‘situatedness of knowledge.’ Murakami emphasizes that narratives are “socially organised for the occasion and for the people at present as well as non-present others that are implicated in the narratives.” This is, I believe, not only true in terms of what respondents say, but also in terms of what interviewers hear, the “ghostly audiences” which Riessman addresses. While it is true that interview data must be viewed contextually, taking account when, where and between whom the exchange took place, this can equally be said of talk which is documented in

any setting. Yes, “narratives are occasioned in the present interview activity” but their relevance is not necessarily limited to this setting. The seamless continuation of my conversation with Ann about her early childhood fifteen years after our first discussion of this topic is, amongst other things, testament to the continuity of the narrative self.

When reading Murakami’s commentary, I am most struck by the dramatic difference of our interpretations. His piece is peppered with phrases such as “abuse and neglect” “lack of love and caring” “[respondents] blaming mothers for what went wrong in the past”. I understand the stories which I was told, and which I presented in my earlier paper, in a very different way. For instance, in the case of Helen (who, of the four, suffered physically the most), I specifically state “Helen never passes judgment on her mother. . . the way in which she makes sense of her early experiences, and her mother’s treatment of her in particular, is in terms of the socio-economic conditions in which she lived.” The language of abuse was never, to my recollection, used by any of my respondents at any time to describe their own experiences. Murakami writes “Despite its sensitive nature, they [the respondents] reveal some critical aspects of the mothers’ behaviour and child-rearing practices that were considered abusive, tyrannical toward them at the time.” By whom? Certainly not by the narrators, and probably not even by the communities in which they lived as children. Ann does describe her mother as tyrannical, but never abusive. Indeed, the word Ann most commonly uses to describe her mother is “frustrated” a term which I think is highly indicative of the interpretive framework she employs to make sense of the harsh realities of her childhood. I have not encountered any evidence which suggests that any of the four respondents regarded their mothers as abusive either when they were children or subsequently. Murakami suggests that “Their moral integrity can be questioned for denigrating their own mother in public.” But they do not denigrate their mothers; indeed, they express real understanding towards them. The compassion they show is, I believe, far more than a “rhetorical achievement.” Murakami’s insistence on interpreting the data exclusively from the perspective of the present time strips the stories of the contextual framework from which they derive their meaning, at least from the point of view of the narrators.

Murakami describes mother-blaming as “a discourse practice contrary to the cultural and socially desired view of mothering and being mothered.” What I and others have argued elsewhere is that there are different and seemingly contradictory discourses of motherhood which lie at the heart of many of our master narratives. What Suzanna Walters (1992) describes as the “Mommy did it to me” genre of film and books – the grotesque accounts of motherhood-

gone-awry as depicted by the daughters of famous women – is also evident, in perhaps less dramatic forms, throughout our society, not least in many of the narratives underlying theories of developmental psychology.

Murakami states that respondents' views of their mothers differ over time, and that one can see in the narratives "multiple versions of mothering." While I do think that there are multiple versions of mothering in the narratives (both between and within respondents), it is important to note that I only collected data at one point in time. I do not know what speakers made of their early experiences with their mothers at the time that they were living through them. I do however think it is possible, indeed probable, that their interpretations have changed over the course of their lives. This is a point I will return to when discussing the significance of aging for the narrators.

Leigh Coombes and Mandy Morgan describe themselves as:

multiply positioned in relation to the master narrative of the constitution of motherhood and the determining effect of mothering. We are both mothers of (newly) adult children, we are both adult children of mothers, we are both, differently familiar with feminist and poststructuralist theory challenging the master narrative with counter narratives of experiences and the complexities of social relations involved in mothering. . . Both of us, then, are already positioned personally and intellectually in relation to master narratives of motherhood and mothering.

Of the four commentaries which I received, all mentioned the importance of positioning theory to the set(s) of issues which my paper explored, but only Coombes and Morgan actually position themselves in relation to these issues. Their 'personal and intellectual positioning' is apparent throughout their commentary, and it enhances my ability to engage with their overall argument.

The authors allude to 'the politics of enunciation': which attends to "who is speaking, to whom we are speaking, and to how our speaking may work towards dialogue among activists." The four narrators whose stories I represent in my article do not merely find some way, any way, of mediating the difficult circumstances of their early lives. Rather, their political understanding, which forms the cornerstone of their identity, also provides for them a way of making sense of these experiences. Political commitment and activism lie at the heart of stories I was told, and I hear these stories, and communicate these stories, not only as a researcher but as someone who has much sympathy and admiration for the lives I am documenting. Coombes and Morgan ask "how can we continue to make heard the voices of activism in our work?" My own political sympathies, no doubt, strongly influenced not only what I was told but how

I heard it, and in turn what I fed back into the interview itself. Riessman, in her commentary, asks how my questions and comments helped to shape the emerging narratives; clearly the positioning of the interviewer is an important component to consider not only in the analysis of the data, but indeed, in what narrators are willing to communicate in the first place.

As the narrators recount their early years, they do not justify or explain away what happened to them; they simply understand it in the wider context in which it occurred, and, as a consequence, all dedicate themselves to addressing such circumstances in the lives of others. Coombes and Morgan rightly suggest that without the narrators' commitment to activism "it might be possible to read resistant storylines as 'excusing mothers.'" This dimension of their identity is more than an interesting angle into interpreting the data; without it, how can one understand the paths they took in their lives? Indeed, their retrospective narration of their relationship with their mothers might well seem like a "rhetorical achievement" if it is stripped of the framework which lends it genuine meaning.

Coombes and Morgan comment on "the importance of hearing and legitimating the stories of older activists." Riessman, too, addresses "the significance of aging for the narrators" and questions

how subsequent events have transformed the meaning and import of difficult childhood experiences. . . They could offer counter-narratives to the master cultural narrative because they had experienced the difficult job of parenting themselves – a corrective to the idealized narrative of motherhood if there ever was one.

The age of the narrators is not incidental to the stories they tell. As Riessman suggests, the perspectives which they offer are a result of the seventy odd years which separate them from the experiences they relate. Interestingly, too, age plays an important factor in the relationship which I developed with each of them. I was clearly a daughter, though not yet a mother. Although I was considerably younger than any of their children, it was evident in many of the interviews that they saw their participation in my project as a contribution to future generations, of which I was in some sense a representative. Ann even told me one day as she held the complete set of transcripts in her hand "These are the answers to the questions my daughter never asked me." I heard this, of course, not only as a researcher, but also as a daughter, and wondered if I would ever sit with my own mother recording in such intimate detail her life's story. Several respondents wanted me to become friends with their children, and would

devise all sorts of ways for us to ‘spend time alone together’; not surprisingly, this was greeted with a range of reactions from their adult children.

Riessman wanted me to “push [my] positioning argument further to include [my] changing ‘self’ in relation to the material.” It is not a coincidence that the first time I returned to this set of data after more than a decade was to explore how respondents recalled their early childhood. My two small children have enriched my life – and challenged me – in many ways, but it was an unexpected gift that my relationship with them would afford me a new perspective into conversations I had had long before they were born. What I saw, and perhaps wanted to see, in the four cases I presented in my paper, gives me personally, as a mother, hope for my children; despite how imperfect we may parent, they – and we, as adult children – still have within them the ability to overcome whatever blows we may deal them, however inadvertently. The accounts of the narrators serve as an antidote to the stories of those adults who continue to see their parents as the ultimate arbitrators of the individuals they have become. We can shape our lives, but not in circumstances of our own choosing.

Riessman observes that “all four narrators position themselves in class (but not race) contexts in their stories about growing up poor.” Only two of the four narrators, Joe and Helen, come from lower working class families. Ann and Peter, in contrast, come from upper middle class families. Nonetheless, it is correct to say that for all of the four, class is an important component of their identity. Riessman comments that “narrators in the U.S. would likely position themselves differently.” To some extent, this is true: class and race are differently weighted as salient social categories in Britain and the United States. However, it is also important to remember that Ann, Helen, Joe and Peter were all lifetime Marxists – a category which itself might be more widespread in Britain – and all had belonged to the Communist Party for varying lengths of time in their lives. However, I believe that Marxists from the United States would also have described themselves in terms of their class membership. Similarly, race might be a more integral factor in the narrations of many people in Britain than it was in the four cases which I presented. This brings us back to the multiple positionings which we all occupy: the categories which we spontaneously draw upon in our self-identities are influenced not only by our nationality, but by the complex interplay between all of our various group memberships, including not only those which we are born into, but also, and perhaps more powerfully, those which we choose.

Coombes and Morgan ponder “what kind of community [are] we speaking into when we ‘comment’ on someone else’s work.” This is precisely the question I have been grappling with in the process of writing this piece. My own situa-

tion is made somewhat more complicated, perhaps, by the fact that the 'other work' was written in response to an article of mine. The audience for whom I now write is not only the authors of the rich commentaries I received, but also, of course, the readership of *Narrative Inquiry*. Do these exchanges help us, as scholars and as engaged human beings, to think more carefully about the 'data' which we help to generate and which ultimately we represent to the outside world? How can we develop an increased sensitivity towards the influence of our own positioning, while avoiding a stance which is overly confessional and self-absorbed? If the framework of counter-narratives is to be anything more than a 'useful methodological trick' then we must continue to ask of ourselves and of others the kinds of questions posed in these ongoing exchanges. We will not emerge with absolute answers, and the questions themselves will change over time; however, it is in the dynamic process of the inquiry itself that we can locate the meanings of the narratives, and the counter-narratives, which we document.

References

- Tore, M. E., Fine, M., Boudin, K., Bowen, I., Clark, J., Hylton, D., et al. (2001). A space for co-constructing counter stories under surveillance. *Critical Psychology*, 4, 149–166.
- Walters, S. (1992). *Lives together/Worlds apart: Mothers and daughters in popular culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Negotiating “normality” when IVF fails

Karen Throsby

Gender Institute, London School of Economics

This article argues that the dominant social and cultural representations of IVF as successful, and of reproduction as the natural and inevitable life course, particularly for women, offer those for whom treatment fails a limited set of discursive resources through which to make sense of that experience. The article explores the ways in which those resources are both deployed and resisted by those who have experienced treatment failure, and who have since stopped treatment, in order to establish themselves as “normal”. It is argued that through the construction of themselves as meeting rather than transgressing the normative social and cultural reproductive standards, the participants can be seen to discretely subvert and redefine the dominant discourses of both technology and reproduction, even while appearing to shore them up.

Over 80% of all cycles of *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) which are started end in failure (HFEA 2000). Consequently, a large majority of those undergoing IVF end treatment without a biological child (or the desired number of children), either as the result of an active decision not to undergo further IVF cycles, or through an imposed ending to treatment as a result of the reluctance of a partner to participate further, or because of financial or medical constraints. Those who have had IVF unsuccessfully and who have since stopped treatment find themselves occupying an ambiguous liminal space between social conformity and transgression: they have tried to conceive but have been unable to; they desire children, but are no longer actively pursuing that desire; they have brought technology into the “natural” process of reproduction, but without the counterbalancing “natural” outcome of a baby. This ambiguity is experienced in the context of the dominant social and cultural representations of IVF as successful, and of reproduction as the natural and inevitable life course, particularly for women. Based on a series of interviews with women and couples who had IVF unsuccessfully and who have since ended treatment without a biological

child (or the desired number of children), this article explores the discursive management of this ambiguity by the participants in order to establish themselves as “normal”. The issue of the management of infertility, masculinity and IVF has been addressed elsewhere (Throsby & Gill forthcoming), and this article will focus primarily on the claiming of normative femininity, specifically among those living without children. I will argue that in claiming “normality”, the participants are offering resistance to the categories within which they wish to locate themselves, discretely subverting and redefining the dominant cultural discourses of both technology and reproduction, even whilst appearing to shore them up. However, it will be argued that transgression is not necessarily transformative, and both the transgression *and* the conformity of these acts of resistance are not without risk.

The following section of the article will outline the dominant storylines of IVF and will highlight some of the problems that these pose for those whose IVF failed and who have stopped treatment. I will then present a brief overview of the PhD research project upon which this article draws. This will be followed by the main body of the article, which will set out some of the ways in which the participants resisted the dominant narratives in their accounts. This section will be divided into two parts. The first will focus on the ways in which the participants managed the discourses of technology, and the second will consider the strategies employed in the interviews to redefine reproductive normality in order to accommodate their own circumstances. The article will end with a brief discussion and conclusion.

The IVF storylines

Franklin (1990) argues that there are two conventional narrative categories for IVF stories: the happy and the hopeless (pp. 212–214). The happy stories are those of success, encapsulated in the iconic image of the “miracle” baby in the arms of its grateful parents – what one of the participants in this study described as “Good Morning TV [...], the nice little fluffy story on a pink sofa” (Graham). The image is one of the natural order restored, and rests heavily on the assumption of the naturalness of reproduction, particularly for women, and the understanding of science as progressive and capable of comprehending and controlling human reproduction. Technology within this discourse functions as a “helping hand” to unruly nature. IVF is not the only reproductive technology to rely on the “helping hand” concept for its social meaning. In fact, “good” motherhood is increasingly represented as *dependent* on technological

assistance in order to achieve the best possible outcome, including ante-natal scanning, pre- and ante-natal genetic testing and the medical management of birth (Lupton 1994). Nature, within this discourse, is unpredictable and in need of control by medical science. Franklin suggests that this conventional discourse renders nature and technology "not only commensurate, but substitutable", in that "[just] as IVF clinicians 'learn' from nature how to improve their techniques, so 'nature' can be improved by scientific and technological assistance" (Franklin 1997, p. 209). This construction of science and technology as constantly learning facilitates the representation of scientific progress as linear, effectively obscuring the experimental process and its failures (Dally 1991; Oudshoorn 1994). The history of IVF, for example, conventionally begins from the birth of the first IVF baby in 1978, even though this was preceded by an ectopic pregnancy, a miscarriage, an embryo transfer which did not lead to pregnancy and a failed egg collection – precedents which Challoner describes as "false starts" (Challoner 1999, p. 37).

However, the happy stories are clearly problematic for those for whom treatment fails, and the seductive tidiness of the iconic image of IVF success obscures the reality of the experience of IVF, which is predominantly of treatment failure. The disavowal of failure in the dominant discourse creates what Layne (2000), writing in the context of pregnancy loss, describes as a "realness" problem, obstructing the grieving process. Furthermore, where IVF is constructed as successful, IVF failure becomes the failure of the woman to be helped, rather than technological failure.

Challoner notes that the two pregnancies which followed the first successful IVF cycle ended in failure: one "was rejected by the patient's body" due to a chromosomal abnormality, and the other ended in a miscarriage "while the mother was out fell-walking in Yorkshire" (Challoner 1999, p. 47). The implication of female culpability is clear, allowing him to claim the birth of the second IVF baby in January 1979 as confirmation that the first success "was not a fluke" (Challoner 1999, p. 47).

The promise of success, combined with the responsibility that failure places onto women, makes it impossible to know where the end of treatment lies (Braverman 1996, 1997; Franklin 1997). In this context, the decision to stop treatment can only be understood as a decision to "give up", shifting the blame onto the woman herself for her lack of perseverance (Woollet 1996). The absence of a positive discourse through which to articulate the end of treatment is a central problem for the participants in this study, and their seeking out of new ways to talk about stopping IVF constitutes a significant challenge to these happy stories.

The hopeless stories speak of treatment failure – an outcome represented in the dominant discourse by the tragic figure of the “desperate infertile woman”, isolated in her tragedy, engaging in excessive cycles of treatment, and risking relationship ruin, financial devastation and emotional collapse. The happy and the hopeless stories are mutually defining, both positing motherhood as the only possible outcome. The desperate infertile woman, therefore, functions as a cautionary tale.

The difficulty in locating a positive term to describe those living without children is a testimony to the extent to which motherhood continues to be the normative standard for women (Campbell 1999). The lack implied by terms such as *childless*, living *without* children, or *non*-mothering reflects the normality of parenting. The term *childfree* constitutes one attempt to circumvent this negativity (Carter & Carter 1998, p. 10), but this is equally problematic for both voluntary and involuntary childless people because it implies the absence of something that is undesirable, as in a smoke-free environment, or fat-free food (Morell 1994, p. 10), leaving no space for the grief of infertility alongside the imaging of a positive future without children. Those living without children are widely held to be selfish and hostile to them (Campbell 1999; Faux 1984; Morell 1994, 2000; Tyler May 1995) – both normatively unfeminine characteristics – and the “failure” to become a mother, either voluntarily or involuntarily, is constructed as fundamentally unnatural and abnormal.

Biomedical representations of the female body confirm the “natural” inevitability of reproduction for women: text book diagrams show the uterus as an empty space to be filled (Birke 1999; Shildrick 1997); menstruation is explained through metaphors of failed production (Martin 1989). The popular representations of IVF and of infertility are strongly implicated in this, and Winston – a leading IVF specialist and media figure – states his case for the necessity of reproduction unequivocally, suggesting that not only are those who are infertile “barred from contributing to the continuity of human existence”, but that they may only “watch in envy” at the immortality that others have achieved through their children (Winston 1999, p. viii).

Even where a woman has not chosen to live without children, she is still held responsible for her own childlessness, and women find themselves blamed for not being relaxed enough, eating the wrong foods, resisting conception subconsciously, or simply for selfishly pursuing a career and leaving it too late (Landsman 2000; Tyler May 1998). The assumption that women are able to influence pregnancy outcomes has a long history (Fraser 1999; Stonehouse 1994) and this is compounded by contemporary pressures for people to accept individual responsibility for the achievement of positive health through moni-

toring, self-awareness and self-discipline (Coward 1989; Lupton 1994; Sontag 1978; Stacey 1997). The biomedical discourse weighs in with a catalogue of female bodily flaws which imply deviant resistance to motherhood, such as "hostile mucus", which acts as a barrier to sperm, or an "incompetent cervix", which can lead to miscarriage. My own research revealed the extent to which women are repeatedly told that *they* did not produce enough eggs whilst on hormonal drug therapies. Where motherhood is constructed as innate to the female body, this discourse of hostility and incompetence as an explanation for infertility marks the women out not only as objects of medical intervention, but also as unnatural and unfeminine. This sets up a cyclical logic which insists not only that a woman is unnatural because she does not have children, but that she does not have children because she is unnatural.

There is a third category of narrative that draws on both the happy and hopeless stories highlighted by Franklin – that of the "designer baby". This narrative reflects the fears within popular culture that technological intervention into the reproductive process will result in slippage from "giving nature a helping hand" to "meddling with nature" – a course of action which is constructed as *a priori* beset with dangers.

In a series of interviews conducted with people who had no direct personal experience of reproductive technology, Hirsch identified in his interviewees strong concerns over the commodification of life and fears that the technologies will lead to attempts to create a dystopic master race (Hirsch 1993). These fears find expression, for example, in repeated media references to the misnomer, "test-tube babies", provocatively suggestive of the ecto-genetic reproductive production lines imagined by Huxley (1932), or, more recently, in the agitated media responses to the development of new genetic engineering and cloning technologies. A recent headline in a UK tabloid newspaper, the Daily Express, puts this unambiguously: "Human Clones Will Mean The Birth Of Evil."¹ In fact, the pioneers of IVF were so afraid of public perceptions of the procedure if the first baby was "abnormal" that the couples undergoing the first experimental cycles had to agree to an abortion if the developing foetus was discovered to be malformed (Challoner 1999, p. 41). Therefore, while the dominant discourse posits the benefits of technology for reproduction, it is also possible to have *too much* technology – a careful balance which those who do not end treatment with a reassuringly "normal" baby have to construct discursively in their accounts.

In this section, I have outlined the three main storylines of IVF which have to be negotiated discursively by those for whom treatment fails in order to establish themselves as "normal". One of the most important points to note here

is that reproductive “normality” is normatively determined. In this respect, what the interview participants can be seen to be doing is managing reproductive normativity – a task which is performed by means of moving strategically between the available discursive resources in order to make sense of experiences which are currently excluded from the conventional narratives of IVF.

The interviews

This article is drawn from my PhD research project, which aims to explore the experiences of those for whom IVF had failed, and who had stopped treatment at least two years previously. The goal of the project was to explore the factors contributing to the end of treatment; to consider the ways in which the participants related to the technology in the light of its failure in their own cases; and to examine the ways in which the experience of infertility is marked by the unsuccessful engagement with IVF. The participants were recruited through the dormant patient records of a large UK teaching hospital, with careful attention to the legal and ethical implications, and in co-operation with the hospital ethics committee and the entire team working in the unit. A total of 13 couples and 15 women whose partners chose not to participate were interviewed twice, 6–8 months apart, and the interviews were transcribed and analysed using discourse analysis (Gill 1996, 2000; Potter & Wetherell 1987; Wood & Kroger 2000). Where couples participated, they were always interviewed together. Of the 28 women or couples (totalling 41 people) interviewed, 15 had a child living in the household. 7 of these children were born prior to the final unsuccessful cycle of IVF, either prior to the fertility problem (2), in an earlier relationship (3) or as a result of earlier fertility treatment (2). The remaining 8 children were conceived spontaneously (3), following other fertility treatments (3), through surrogacy (1) or were adopted internationally (1). Although the experience of secondary infertility is not addressed directly in this article, it should not be regarded as any less problematic for the participants in terms of managing the normative ideals of “the family”, and is an area which warrants further analysis. Apart from one participant who was separated from her husband, and another who left her partner between the two interviews, all the participants were in stable heterosexual relationships. The participants were predominantly, although not exclusively, middle class, white and educated to degree or professional level, reflecting the exclusivity of IVF, particularly in relation to cost. This is an outcome which is common to the experience of other researchers in this field (Daniluk 1996; Franklin 1997; Sandelowski 1993).

The confidentiality of the participants is paramount in research of this kind, and all identifying information has been removed or changed, and pseudonyms are used throughout.

Analysis

Negotiating technology

As has already been described, the dominant discourses surrounding the use of technology for reproduction are problematic for the participants in this study, both in terms of assumptions of success and in the context of fears of deviating from “natural” reproduction. Consequently, one of the most striking features of the interviews is the extent to which the specifically technological aspects of the treatment are played down in the narratives, with technology being absorbed into “nature”, which emerges as the primary legitimising domain for the engagement with IVF. This section will begin by describing the ways in which the participants redrew the boundaries of the natural in order to accommodate the technological intervention. I will then explore the function performed by the strategic claiming of technology following IVF failure, the discursive role of the “desperate Other” in marking out the moderation in their own engagement with the technology, and finally, the demonstration of knowing scepticism in relation to the technology and its delivery as a means of illustrating control over the process.

Normalising and naturalising technology

The participants resisted the unease about the use of technology for reproduction using two normalising strategies: firstly, by constructing IVF as just another medical technology; and secondly, by subsuming technology within the natural domain.

The participants were able to construct IVF as just another technology in a society where technology, and particularly medical technology, is omnipresent:

Paula: For years, people have been doing all sorts of things to help conception, or hinder conception, or whatever. I’ve had lots of operations . . . just . . . nothing nasty . . . things like ligament reconstructions of the ankle, and wisdom teeth. I’ve just had 7 moles removed from my body under local anaesthetic.

Tracy: If my computer goes down, I can’t work. You . . . I mean, it’s inevitable that you are going to get things. I mean, people are going to live a hundred years. The turn of the century, people’s average age was 60, and now it’s 90.

You'll always get that, and I don't think that you can stop progress. And, you know, why would you?

Both Paula and Tracy see IVF as part of a progressive scientific continuum. By positioning IVF alongside other commonplace, and even trivial, medical technologies, the particularity of IVF and the concerns that surround it are diffused on the grounds that it is simply part of the unstoppable part of the benign march of progress. Tracy's rhetorical question – "why would you?" – establishes the decision to pursue IVF as self-evident and unproblematic, resisting the drawing of a distinction between IVF and other less controversial medical technologies.

IVF is also constructed in the accounts as performing fundamentally natural processes:

Tim: We considered the IVF that we were having was just helping us to do something that was natural ... really still a natural act, but just taken out ... the natural act was being done outside the body and being put back. It was us ... it was still all of our bits that were being involved in it. All we were having was technology helping us. We weren't altering with technology.

Robert: It was natural ... it was just the mechanics of it that were assisted. It wasn't like cloning a sheep, or growing ears on the backs of mice, or things like that.

A distinction between *helping* nature and *tampering* with nature is crucial to the construction of IVF as fundamentally natural, with IVF functioning within this discourse as low rather than high tech; mechanical rather than technological. The construction of IVF as performing fundamentally natural functions conforms closely the dominant "helping hand" discourse, which Franklin argues renders nature and technology substitutable (Franklin 1997, p. 209). However, the awareness demonstrated by the participants of the dangers of *too much* technology – growing ears on the backs of mice, for example – reveals the limitations to this substitutability. It is "nature" that provides the discursive benchmark for the acceptability of particular levels of engagement with reproductive technology, with technology strategically subsumed within that constructed domain.

The failure of treatment is also deployed in the accounts as proof of the naturalness of the technological intervention:

Paula: But ... I don't know. While there's not perfection, I guess it in some kind of way still feels natural. It's not a perfect process, even without anybody getting involved. When it's just the man and the woman, it's still not a perfect

process. All sorts of things can go wrong, and this was just an extension of that, I guess.

Nature cannot be overruled by technology and the process remains "imperfect", effectively diminishing the technological effects of the process. However, while this is a useful strategy in coping with IVF failure and the stigmatisation of technological intervention into reproduction, this is also a strategy that is employed by the providers of treatment to refute the accusation that IVF is a failed technology because of its low success rates. If failure is natural, then even IVF failure becomes a marker of its success. Challoner, in his pro-technology history of IVF, asserts that "... a woman's body naturally rejects most embryos that reach this stage [cell differentiation]" (Challoner 1999, p. 32) and even for those embryos that do progress but fail to implant, "... failure to implant is common in those produced naturally, so this negative result [does] not necessarily indicate that the IVF procedure was to blame" (Challoner 1999, p. 38). The equation of the natural failure to conceive and the failure to conceive through IVF fails to acknowledge the fundamental differences between the two process and the differential physical, emotional and financial costs of those failure. Over 80% of all IVF cycles in the UK are privately funded (Challoner 1999, p. 58), with a single cycle costing £2-3000, and each cycle of treatment involves the injection of hormonal drugs for several weeks, culminating in a painful egg collection procedure, and two anxious weeks of waiting to find out whether the treatment has been successful. Furthermore, as Challoner's explanation above demonstrates, where the technology is let off the hook, the woman easily becomes responsible for negative outcomes.

Another consequence of the diminishing of the technological aspects of IVF in the accounts is the resulting lack of discussion of potential long-term risk in relation to the extensive intervention into the female body. The jury is still out on the long-term risks of the hormonal drug regimens, although leading practitioners deny the possibility in categorical terms (Winston 1999). However, feminists have highlighted other therapies that were presumed safe but which proved catastrophic for large numbers of women, including thalidomide, DES (Direcks 1987) and contraceptives such as the Dalkon Shield (Raymond 1993; Rowland 1992). Only a few of the women in this study had been advised to undergo regular screening for ovarian cancer, and my questions about their concerns about possible future health risks caused such alarm in the interviews that I was forced to abandon that line of questioning. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that while the strategy of diminishing the technological aspects of treatment and subsuming them within the natural domain is

effective in diffusing tension around the use of technology for reproduction, it also obscures some of the material realities of the intervention, and the extent to which that intervention is focused almost exclusively on the female body.

Claiming technology

In the accounts, the concept of technology as distinct from the natural domain is retained and strategically deployed, primarily as evidence of the commitment to parenthood, and as a demonstration of a readiness to pursue every possible avenue in order to achieve that goal:

Melissa: I mean, personally, I felt that going to [hospital], having the IVF and the ICSI,² we had actually done the best we could try.

The hospital where Melissa had her treatment is a major teaching hospital with an excellent reputation for its research. Furthermore, the consultant who heads the unit is a recognised expert in his field, with a high media profile, often appearing on television and radio debates. When she underwent ICSI, it was a very new procedure, and certainly the most sophisticated treatment on the market at that time. This meant that for her, the treatment was as complete as it could possibly have been. In this context, IVF can be seen to perform a confessional function through which the socially stigmatised life without children receives sanction. The state-of-the-art reputation of IVF, therefore, serves as a useful shorthand for trying everything.

The desperate other

Although the participants stressed the importance of “doing everything possible” to get pregnant before stopping, one of fundamental problems with IVF is that there is no clearly defined end point to treatment, and the constant promise of future success that is implicit in the technology means that what constitutes “everything” is frustratingly unclear. This problem was managed by the participants by presenting themselves not as having done everything that was *literally* possible, but instead, as having done all that was *reasonably* possible. The figure of the desperate infertile woman looms large over the engagement with IVF, suggestive of a lack of self-control that places her outside of the normative standards of motherhood. This excessive engagement also risks bringing too much technology into the process, upsetting the construction of the engagement with IVF as fundamentally within the natural domain. Therefore, the denial of desperation by invoking a desperate Other against which their own moderate and rational engagement could be judged performs an

important function in establishing a balance between having stopped too soon and having done too much:

Susan: I didn't want to be one of these women that you saw on television, that are sort of in their 50's, that have had sort of like hundreds of it. And it does take over your life. I didn't want to be ... I mean, we did get obsessive, but I didn't want to be one of those completely obsessive people that that's all they live for. And we had to have some sort of ... reality. You know, we had to have some sort of life. Although it did take over, that sort of three [cycles] seemed ... I don't know. Three just seemed a good control number, a good sort of, you know, that's your best shot.

The hyperbolic caricature of the ageing woman doggedly pursuing endless cycles of treatment featured regularly in the accounts, and Susan positions her moderate three cycles in stark contrast. This is reinforced by her use of the language of science – "a good control number" – to support the decision. She recognises in herself the potential for becoming "completely obsessed" and the limit is her means of preventing this and distinguishing herself from others who are less able to retain a sense of perspective. It is important to note, however, that she acknowledges that their engagement with IVF was marked by a degree of obsession, and this emphasises that moderation is not to be confused with apathy. Stopping at three is to be understood as an act of strength rather than weakness, enabling her to keep intact the desire for a child as a marker of her "normal" femininity.

Age and the number of cycles were not the only indicators of desperation, and particular types of technology, such as cloning, or the use of donor gametes were frequently used to demarcate the limits of their engagement with treatment. The use of low-technological or non-technological options such as alternative therapies or counselling was also presented as indicative of a damaging loss of perspective, since these were perceived as "clutching at straws" (Claire) once the high tech option of IVF had failed:

Susan: Don't get me wrong. If suddenly, there's something new and they've still – you know, if you stand on one leg and drink a bottle of mistletoe extract [it will] get you pregnant, then I'd probably do it. But ... most of them, I'm not really ... I don't not believe in them particularly, but I wouldn't ... I'm not like that ...

Researcher: How about support groups, sort of, general support groups or counselling?

Melissa: No, I'm not like that.

The assertion of not being “like that” emerged repeatedly in the interviews as a means of resisting the disempowering identification with the desperate infertile woman. This assertion of control over the process highlights their reluctance to be negatively defined by its failure, thereby allowing for the possibility of achieving some form of discursive closure around the experience of treatment.

Knowing scepticism

The final way in which the participants established themselves as retaining a sense of perspective over the technological aspects of treatment was by presenting themselves as knowingly sceptical regarding the high status of medical science and technology, specifically in the context of IVF treatment delivery:

Rachel: I still find it quite strange that in this day and age, and all the things that we can do and all the sort of technological advances in other areas, there is still this black hole over infertility [...] There's been sort of amazing advances in the field, but even now, you know, doctors, specialists and that, they're still saying, “We don't know.”

While IVF was used by many of the interviewees, including Rachel, as offering the final word on their reproductive capacity – they have tried everything – a certain realism remains about the limited capacity of technology and modern medicine to fully comprehend the mysteries of human reproduction. However, it is not only the limitations to knowledge that the participants were attuned to, but also the possible inflation of success rates by clinics in order to attract patients:

Angela: I'm not a great believer in statistics. I feel, because I used to work in a bank, and I always felt that the statistics men can sort of, you know, tweak them wherever they wanted to [both laughing]. So, I'm not a great ... I don't have a lot of faith in statistics.

Angela draws on her privileged knowledge – “I used to work in a bank” – to assert the malleability of the statistics. This presumed massaging of the figures was a widely held belief among the participants, based on the assumption that the clinics would inevitably make themselves appear more successful than they actually were in order to attract more patients. This allows the participants to present themselves as knowing consumers of IVF who are entering into it with their eyes wide open. However, it is important to note that the presumed unreliability of the statistics also offers a good excuse for not engaging fully with those statistics and what they really mean in terms of the likelihood of success.

This section has explored some of the ways in which the participants in this study negotiated the dominant discourses of the technological aspects of reproductive technology in order to mitigate the aspects of those constructions which they perceive as reflecting badly on themselves from the perspective of having stopped treatment. In the next section, I will explore the ways in which the participants both deploy and subvert the dominant discourses of motherhood and the family in order to establish themselves as “normal” in spite of their own ongoing childlessness.

Managing reproductive normativity

This section will focus on two aspects of the management of reproductive normativity. Firstly, it will consider the ways in which the participants constructed themselves as meeting the normative standards by demonstrating their fitness to mother; and secondly, it will explore the strategies which the participants used to account positively for their lives without children.

Meeting the motherhood criteria

As has already been described, normative femininity requires women to be mothers, although this obscures the extent to which this is not simply a matter of biological reproduction. In short, not all biological mothers are “proper” mothers, and bad mothers abound in popular representations (Ladd-Taylor & Umansky 1998). Motherhood, then, is more than biological reproduction, and this creates an opening for those for whom IVF fails and who stop treatment to establish themselves as meeting the motherhood criteria, even without a child. This is achieved by means of the demonstration of three key attributes: (1) benevolent self-sacrifice; (2) relating to children; and (3) being creative and nurturing.

1. *Benevolence*

The accusation of selfishness – a markedly unmaternal attribute, according to conventional discourse – sticks easily to those living without children. This is particularly true when the couple is sufficiently affluent to be able to enjoy the freedom and increased mobility and flexibility that living without children can bring, or the female partner invests time and energy heavily into her career. Therefore, the construction of the end of treatment as an act of benevolent

self-sacrifice affirms them as conforming to a key criteria for motherhood, even while being unable to reproduce.

In the UK, the provision across the country of health authority funded IVF is very erratic, and in the context of limited resources, this provision is constantly under threat. This stands in contrast to the US, for example, where there is no public provision of treatment, which is either privately funded, or in some cases, funded through health insurance policies. For many of the participants who had received health authority funded IVF, the cash-strapped reputation of the National Health Service and the issues of inequitable access to funded treatment left them feeling uncomfortable at having received treatment, particularly when that treatment had been unsuccessful. However, it also offered a means of translating the decision to end treatment into an act of benevolence to others who were also competing for those scarce resources. For Liz, the end of treatment was imposed by repeated poor results from the hormonal drugs which are intended to stimulate the growth of egg follicles. Having discovered “poor performer” written across the top of her medical records, she felt labelled and believed that treatment had been subsequently refused because she would not be able to make a positive contribution to the clinic’s success rates:

Liz: [...] I felt very much like I am not going to make your figures look good at the end of the day, and another part of me thought, well, yeah ... stand aside and let someone else have a go who would have a chance. [...] You do sometimes see women who, you know, had ten goes [...] so I thought that was a bit unfair. Someone else could have a go.

By interpreting the end of treatment as an act of benevolence rather than something imposed by the doctors, Liz firstly reasserts her control over the process in contrast to the excessive number of cycles she ascribes to others; but secondly, she also marks the end of treatment as a positive and generous act on her part, identifying herself as one of many people experiencing fertility problems. This stands in stark contrast with the commercial motivations which she suspects to be behind the clinic’s decision to refuse her further treatment, or the selfish indulgence of those women who have “ten goes”.

2. Relating to children

Contemporary social and cultural values dictate that for women, the unwillingness to be around children, for whatever reason, is dysfunctional. Indeed, one of the most difficult situations many of the women faced during treatment was the pressure to admire and coo over other people’s new babies, particularly in the workplace, where colleagues tended to be less aware of the treatment. Iron-

ically, however, it is at this point when they were most determinedly pursuing parenthood that the participants were least able to conform to this normative assumption that women will (or at least, should) always love being around children. Consequently, one strategy for resisting the child-hating stereotype was to highlight the rewarding non-parental relationships they had established with the children in their lives. Many of the participants described their roles as god-parents, baby-sitters and playmates, and several had provided for these children in their wills.

However, a more generalised concern for child welfare also emerged in the course of the interviews. This manifested itself primarily over small issues such as concern about friends or acquaintances not reading to their children, not disciplining them properly, or smoking during pregnancy or around young children, but also over more serious child welfare issues:

Susan: [...] it's like the sort of paedophile business on the television. You know, I mean, that incenses me, you know, that if somebody was like anywhere near my godchildren, or our nephews, I'd be out there banging on the door, and yet, no, because I've got no children, therefore I should believe that everyone should live in harmony with everybody else. But I don't – I still have that I mean, I would kill somebody if they went anywhere near any of the children we knew. [...] And we don't know what it's like [to be a parent], but that doesn't mean to say that we don't have that same anger or nurturing or wanting to protect those children, even when they're not ours.

Susan was interviewed at a time when paedophilia was in the news following a tabloid newspaper campaign which was publicly identifying sex offenders in response to the murder of a young girl, Sarah Payne. The subsequent protests and campaigns for a public register of known offenders was led by a group of *mothers*, and Susan resented the implication that only those who have children can care about children, asserting instead her own fiercely protective instincts towards the children in her life. This protective discourse also appeared in the context of "unworthy Other" stories, which drew on stock images of violent fathers and hyper-fertile teenage welfare mothers. These "Others" function as a foil to their own ability to offer emotional and material stability to a child, although this strategy can be seen as something of a pyrrhic victory, since it preserves intact the normative standards of deserving and undeserving motherhood that are so problematic for women for whom treatment is unsuccessful.

3. *Creativity and nurturing*

Another way in which the meeting of parenting criteria is demonstrated is through the assertion of creativity and nurturing in other areas of life not involving children:

Sarah: [...] I thought, I've got all this maternal energy that I've been saving up, because I wanted, I mean, I've ... I'm not sure it's a broody thing, it's just that I've learned so much – and I want to pass it on to someone [...] And I kind of wanted that, and I'm quite good at teaching – I find myself in training situations quite a lot so this ... I feel that I wanted to ... I've learnt so many things since, you know, the age of 30 that I wish I'd known when I was 16, you know.

Karen: Yeah! [both laughing]

Sarah: So I just thought, this energy, I want to put it somewhere, but I'm not going to have kids. That's when I decided, I mean, it wasn't an overnight decision, but for a while I thought, "Well, you know, I've got all this energy. I'm going to start a business."

The energy Sarah describes herself as drawing on is explicitly maternal, which she applied to her business, and particularly to the teaching/training aspects of her work as a management consultant. The energy that she feels would have made her a good mother is now directed towards her business, but by focussing on the giving aspects of her job, she is affirming her suitability to mother and rejecting the selfish stereotype of women living without children. When we met 6 months later, Sarah described this energy as creative rather than maternal and had just won a major jewellery-making competition and her work was being displayed in a nationally renowned museum. This separation of the capacity to conceive from the core qualities and skills that define the social institution of motherhood facilitates the creation of a positive future which is not defined by lack or absence whilst still demonstrating the essential conformity to the socially and culturally determined standards of womanhood in all but actually becoming a mother.

Claiming the childfree life

A few of the participants demonstrated a more active resistance to the dominant construction of parenthood as the only satisfactory outcome, claiming the benefits of the life without children. This is a strategy of resistance that has to be used with care because of the pejorative association of a childfree life with selfishness. The discourse of having done everything possible, as described in

the previous section, is central to the resolution of the dilemma of being perceived as selfishly childless by others, justifying not only the decision to stop treatment, but effectively licensing the pursuit of a lifestyle that would otherwise be deemed selfish. The benefits of living without children are constructed, then, not as the first choice, but as making the best of a bad job – "Plan B", as Melissa described it:

Melissa: [...] I just thought, "Sod it!", you know. Life's what you make it. I haven't got what I wanted, so I'm going to find something I do want then go for that.

Melissa initially returned to education to study horticulture with the goal of setting up a nursery – "plants, not children!" – with her husband, although this plan had been shelved at the time of the second interview because they were still enjoying the freedom and financial benefits of not having treatment. Other participants set up businesses, retrained, or carried on with their lives much as before, simply enjoying not having IVF, and being able to spend money on their house or on holidays. For some, this represented an opportunity to restock depleted savings or pay off debts accumulated in the course of treatment.

Age also emerged as a means of claiming the benefits of living without children whilst still conforming to normative reproductive standards. Firstly, for women (but not men) reproduction in the late thirties and early forties is considered risky both because of the increased risk of chromosomal disorders and because of the possibility of either not living to see the child into adulthood, or not having the energy to provide proper care for the child. Therefore, citing age as a reason for stopping proved a very effective strategy in demonstrating conformity in terms of concern for child welfare over self interest. However, age also enabled the participants to "pass" as parents, preventing their conformity ever coming into question with those who were unaware of their history of infertility:

Matthew: [...] it's the case now, at our age, that people ... some of whom assume where I'm working, assume that the kids have gone off to university, you know, away from home.

Approaching 40, both Matthew and Susan found that the constant questioning that they had experienced in their late twenties and early thirties had now dwindled to nothing, since nobody any longer expected her to become pregnant. This is not to say that they were inventing children they did not have, but rather, that this assumption enabled them to enjoy a decreased interest in their reproductive history as their life paths rejoin those of their peers. This redefines

involuntary childlessness not as interminable lack, but as constantly changing in its resonance and implications.

It is also important to note, however, that the prospect of ageing was a cause of fear and sadness for several of the participants, and the prospect of a lonely old age without grandchildren was dreadful for some. For Alice, her imagined long-term childless future was appalling:

Alice: And I think to myself, right, this is it. You know, this is it forever, until we get taken into a home and we die. That's what life is. It'll just be work and more work.

With an imagined future of only work, institutionalisation and death to look forward to, the prospect of finally ending treatment was understandably fearful for Alice, and she continued to seek treatment.

Susan and Matthew's confidence in their life without children enabled them to develop a new conception of "the family" which enabled them to take pride and pleasure in their family unit of two. This emerged in the interviews in the context of work, where particularly Susan found herself constantly providing cover for others because she had no children and was therefore assumed to be constantly available:

Susan: It was "Oh, we've got children. We need the time off at Christmas. You haven't got children." – "But I've got a family" – "Oh, but it's not the same. You don't understand." And I thought, "Why should I not have time off at Christmas to be with my family, just because I haven't got children? Why is my family less important than your family? Why is Matthew and my elderly parents of less value to me than your children are to you?"

It is important to note that the celebration of a life without children and grief at never having been parents are not mutually exclusive. Instead, this claiming of equal status of their family of two represents one of the most overt statements of resistance in the interviews to the suggestion that their lives are somehow of less value simply because they have no children. Claire articulated this clearly: "[...] being a whole person, being a good person, [having] a meaningful life, does not mean being a parent. You know, there's lots of ways that you can have a perfectly valid existence."

However, it is important not to overstate the extent to which these more direct counter-narratives emerged in the interviews, and there were several of the participants whose lives remained strongly defined by their lack of children. In a heart-breaking addition to one of her interview transcripts, Alice wrote that "even a miscarriage would be something", and Beth told me how she would catch herself in quiet moments rocking from side to side, as if she were trying

to soothe an imaginary baby. Consequently, it can be seen that there is nothing inevitable about the resistance expressed by Claire and by Matthew and Susan to the conventional understandings of childlessness. Similarly, neither Alice nor Beth should be seen as passive or unresisting. Indeed, Alice's determined seeking out of new treatments at the age of 47 can be understood as extremely resistant to the dominant narratives of reproduction and maternal age.

Conclusion

This article has explored some of the ways in which the participants in this study negotiated the dominant storylines of IVF. These dominant narratives exclude the experiences of the participants in this study, and yet, these narratives constitute the discursive resources available to the participants in order to make sense of their experiences, both to themselves and others. Consequently, this analysis has shown the ways in which the participants developed subtle (and in some cases, less subtle) counter-narratives to these dominant stories in order to make sense of those experiences within, rather than outside of, the dominant social and cultural context.

The rhetorical organisation of the interviews points to the ways in which narratives are oriented towards *doing*, rather than simply describing an external reality. In this article, I have attempted to show how the discursive work in the participants' narratives is oriented towards seeking ways to live with the desire for a child without being negatively defined by it in a social and cultural context that prescribes parenthood as a facet of "normality". This discursive agency exposes the constructed nature of the apparently static categories which constitute reproductive normativity, whilst both reproducing and reworking those categories. In laying claim to explicitly maternal feminine attributes, for example, the participants produced a separation of actual motherhood from femininity. Ironically, then, a strategy of conformity functions as resistance to normative standards. Similar reworkings are evident in the analysis of the categories of "the family", and ultimately, of IVF itself, which is transformed from an "end of the line" attempt to become pregnant to a validating structure upon which to construct a positive future without children. Occupying a space "in the gaps between the stories" (Balsamo 1999, p. 114), those for whom treatment fails are uniquely and ambivalently located in relation to discourses of reproduction and technology, creating the circumstance for this discrete reconfiguration of the categories. In this context, this study can be seen as part of other feminist writings about the "faultlines" of mother-

hood (Ragone & Twine 2000, p. 1), where discursive spaces are created through which the categories of reproduction are both produced and (potentially, at least) transformed (Ladd-Taylor & Umansky 1998; Layne 1999).

However, it is important not to overstate the transformative potential of the experience of IVF failure, which can be experienced as devastating and isolating. The discursive agency that is identified by the participants is a closely constrained one, and the accommodations that are reached require constant maintenance through repetition. Furthermore, not everybody has access to the wide range of personal, educational, material and social resources which enable these acts of even the most gentle resistance. More fundamentally, what the analysis makes visible is the centrality to the accounts of the task of managing normativity in order to locate themselves within the domain of “normality” when treatment fails. From a feminist perspective, the necessity of this discursive labour points to a depressing lack of change in the narrow construction of femininity through reproduction, in spite of decades of feminism. Therefore, while I would celebrate the gentle defiance and resistance that emerges in the interviews, the fact that this extensive discursive labour is necessary at all remains a sobering finding.

Notes

1. 21 June, 2001.
2. Intra cytoplasmic sperm injection – a micro-manipulation procedure where a single sperm is injected into the egg.
3. Childfree is used here to describe a life that is no longer negatively defined by the lack of a child (Carter & Carter 1998; Campbell 1999).

References

- Balsamo, A. (1999). *Technologies of the gendered body: Reading cyborg women*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Birke, L. (1999). *Feminism and the biological body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Braverman, A. M. (1996). Issues involved in the decision to end fertility treatment: When enough is enough. In *Therapy: Psychology in Practice*, 2 (2), 85–96.
- Braverman, A. M. (1997). When is enough, enough? Abandoning medical treatment for infertility. In S. R. Leiblum (Ed.) *Infertility: Psychological issues and counselling strategies* (pp. 209–229). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

- Campbell, A. (1999). *Childfree and sterilised: Women's decisions and medical responses*. London: Cassell.
- Carter, J. W., & Carter, M. (1998). *Sweet grapes: How to stop being infertile and start living again (revised)*. Indianapolis: Perspectives Press.
- Challoner, J. (1999). *The baby makers: The history of artificial conception*. London: Channel 4 Books.
- Coward, R. (1989). *The whole truth: The myth of alternative health*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Dally, A. (1991). *Women under the knife: A history of surgery*. London: Hutchinson Radius.
- Daniluk, J. C. (1996). When treatment fails: The transition to biological childlessness for infertile women. *Women in Therapy*, 19 (2), 81–98.
- Direcks, A. (1987). Has the lesson been learned?: The DES story and IVF. In P. Spallone & D. L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Made to order: The myth of reproductive and genetic progress* (pp. 161–165). Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Faux, M. (1984). *Childless by choice: Choosing childlessness in the eighties*. New York: Anchor Press.
- Franklin, S. (1990). Deconstructing "desperateness": The social construction of infertility in popular representations of new reproductive technologies. In M. McNeil, I. Varcoe, & S. Yearley (Eds.), *The new reproductive technologies* (pp. 200–229). Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Franklin, S. (1997). *Embodied progress: A cultural account of assisted conception*. London: Routledge.
- Fraser, A. (1999). *The weaker vessel: Woman's lot in seventeenth-century England*. London: Arrow Books.
- Gill, R. (1996). Discourse analysis: Practical implementation. In J. T. E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences* (pp. 141–158). Leicester: BPS Books.
- Gill, R. (2000). Discourse analysis. In M. W. Bauer & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound: A practical handbook* (pp. 172–190). London: Sage.
- HFEA Press Release (2000, December). *Over 50,000 babies born following IVF treatment in the UK since first success in 1978*. Retrieved February 2, 2002 from <http://www.hfea.gov.uk>
- Hirsch, E. (1993). Negotiated limits: Interviews in south-east England. In J. Edwards, S. Franklin, E. Hirsch, F. Price, & M. Strathern (Eds.), *Technologies of procreation: Kinship in the age of assisted conception* (pp. 91–126). London: Routledge.
- Huxley, A. (1932). *Brave new world*. London: Flamingo.
- Ladd-Taylor, M., & Umansky, L. (Eds.). (1998). *"Bad" mothers: The politics of blame in twentieth century America*. New York: New York University Press.
- Landsman, G. (2000). "Real motherhood," class and children with disabilities. In H. Ragone & F. W. Twine (Eds.), *Ideologies and technologies of motherhood: Race, class, sexuality, nationalism* (pp. 169–187). London: Routledge.
- Layne, L. L. (Ed.). (1999). *Transformative motherhood: On giving and getting in consumer culture*. New York: New York University Press.

- Layne, L. L. (2000). Baby things as fetishes? Memorial goods, simulacra, and the "realness" problem of pregnancy loss. In H. Ragone & F. W. Twine (Eds.), *Ideologies and technologies of motherhood: Race, class, sexuality, nationalism* (pp. 111–138). London: Routledge.
- Lupton, D. (1994). *Medicine as culture: Illness, disease and the body in western societies*. London: Sage.
- Martin, E. (1989). *The woman in the body: A cultural analysis of reproduction*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Morell, C. (2000). Saying no: Women's experiences with reproductive refusal. *Feminism and Psychology*, 10 (3), 313–322.
- Morell, M. M. (1994). *Unwomanly conduct: The challenges of intentional childlessness*. London: Routledge.
- Oudshoorn, N. (1994). *Beyond the natural body: An archaeology of sex hormones*. London: Routledge.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Ragone, H., & Twine F. W. (Eds.). (2000). *Ideologies and technologies of motherhood: Race, class, sexuality, nationalism*. London: Routledge.
- Raymond, J. G. (1993). *Women as wombs: Reproductive technologies and the battle over women's freedom*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.
- Rowland, R. (1992). *Living laboratories: Women and reproductive technology*. London: Lime Tree.
- Sandelowski, M. (1993). *With child in mind: Studies of the personal encounter with infertility*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Shildrick, M. (1997). *Leaky bodies and boundaries: Feminism, postmodernism and (bio) ethics*. London: Routledge.
- Sontag, S. (1978). *Illness as metaphor*. London: Allen Lane.
- Stacey, J. (1997). *Teratologies: A cultural study of cancer*. London: Routledge.
- Stonehouse, J. (1994). *Idols to incubators: Reproduction theory through the ages*. London: Scarlet Press.
- Throsby, K. & Gill, R. (forthcoming). "It's different for men": Masculinity and IVF. *Men and Masculinities*.
- Tyler May, E. (1995). *Barren in the promised land: Childless Americans and the pursuit of happiness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tyler May, E. (1998). Nonmothers as bad mothers: Infertility and the "maternal instinct." In M. Ladd-Taylor & L. Umansky (Eds.), *"Bad" mothers: The politics of blame in twentieth-century America* (pp. 198–219). New York: New York University Press.
- Winston, R. (1999). *The IVF revolution: The definitive guide to assisted reproductive techniques*. London: Vermilion.
- Wood, L. A., & Kroger, R. O. (2000). *Doing discourse analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and texts*. London: Sage.
- Woollet, A. (1996). Infertility: From "inside/out" to "outside/in." *Feminism and Psychology*, 6 (1), 474–478.

COMMENTARIES

IVF failure: Reproductive normativity and dealing with disappointment

Keith Tuffin

School of Psychology, Massey University, New Zealand

This paper provides a commentary on Karen Throsby's paper *Negotiating "normality" when IVF fails*. There are three sections to this work. Firstly, I outline some theoretical aspects of discursive work which argue for attempting to provide counter readings. Such alternatives are celebrated by this special issue and the notion of re-analysis and re-reading are clearly consistent with the aims of the journal. Secondly, a re-analysis of data from the 'negotiating technology' section, extends the original analysis by suggesting that downplaying of technology by participants works to ensure that their own unique contribution to the process remains of prime importance. Secondly, re-analysis of data from 'reproductive normativity' challenges the imperative that participants must make sense of IVF failure through a limited number of discourses. The suggestion is made that participants operate a progressive narrative by showing that they had faced disappointment and were now moving forward positively. The paper concludes with some comments on the importance of entertaining alternative explanations and counter discourses.

Discourse analysis and alternative readings

The discourse analytic tradition which Throsby bases her work on, has been aligned with postmodern initiatives which have impacted on research practices throughout the social sciences (Rosenau 1992). A wide range of scholars including ethnomethodologists, critical social psychologists, conversation analysts and discursive psychologists have adopted methods which privilege the social and the linguistic over what has previously been regarded as the psychological (Wetherell 1995). Indeed, the turn to language has spawned a renewed interest in the accounts which participants offer, and the multiple ways in which this data may be interpreted. Discursive work has been closely aligned

with postmodern approaches (Lyon 1994) which seek to displace the search for singular objective universal truths with a study of narrative plurality. This revisioning of the aims of social science has involved counter-narrative at the level of ontology and epistemology (Curt 1994). The perceptual hegemony of vision, picture and image as providing the sole epistemic base has been challenged by the postmodern suggestion that language, story and word provide alternative bases for knowledge (Jay 1993).

One fundamental feature of this research orientation is accepting that not only are there many available narratives, but there are also many ways of reading, interpreting and understanding these accounts. In contrast to positivistic methodology, discursive work celebrates and the diversity, plurality and variability which is an inescapable feature of participants accounts (Tuffin & Howard 2001). Indeed, discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell 1987; Edwards & Potter 1992; Wood & Kroger 2000) both accepts and invites notions of interpretive plurality and transparency. The action orientation of text suggests that significant social achievements happen through text. This orientation further assumes a relativistic epistemological stance, thereby highlighting the shifting and reflexive nature of the very meaning making practices which are the subject of analysis. Such relativism should not be misunderstood to mean that “anything goes”, but rather be taken to mean that “nothing goes” without interrogation and negotiation (Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers 1997). While such reanalysis is always theoretically possible and welcome, it remains uncommon in the discursive literature. One recent example may be found in Widdicombe’s (1995) reworking of Gavey’s (1989) data of women’s accounts of sexual coercion in heterosexual relationships. This commentary and reanalysis has similar aims and should be regarded by readers as providing an alternative, yet complementary interpretation of some of the data provided in Throsby’s article.

Counter narratives

Broadly, the challenge of this special issue is to examine the ways in which dominant discourses are deployed by those for whom common narratives are at odds with their experience, or only tell part of the story. Indeed, Throsby’s paper deals with those women (and their male partners) who sought conception but had difficulty in achieving this. Labelling such lives as ‘infertile,’ would be a brutal rhetorical move, which would parallel the lack of positive terms available for those living without children. Such a blunt categorisation would also

be grossly misleading, as more than half the 28 women who were interviewed in Throsby's study did have children. This highlights the unpredictability and uncertainty of human fertility: a matter which is evident in participants' talk. Yet, for these participants there was clearly a time when they must have felt less fertile than they would have liked. This position would have been most acute when they had decided to stop IVF: not only had their own biological reproductivity failed, but this failure was compounded by the failure of (and decision to end) a technological intervention which promised assisted fertility.

Throsby examines how participants made sense of this situation, by conducting her analysis within the framework provided by Franklin (1997) and arguing that participants for whom IVF has failed must establish normality through the availability of conventional narratives of IVF. The narratives of the happy, the hopeless, and the fears and dangers of 'too much' technology, are regarded by Throsby as the core resources which must be negotiated in order to make sense of the experience of unsuccessful IVF. Indeed, participants in the study are characterised as falling into an ambiguous space which lies between the narratives of happiness and hopelessness. In providing alternative readings of this data, I challenge what appears to have been cast as an imperative in the original. Specifically, I will argue that the quest for normality may also be interpreted discursively as attempting to deal positively with the disappointment of IVF failure and subsequent termination of treatment. The basis for this reading is the simple suggestion that IVF failure may be seen in the broad context of the psychology of disappointment where there are available other narratives which may be drawn on to make sense of IVF failure.

At the point of stopping IVF the goal of conception would have appeared beyond the reach of participants. They had been unsuccessful, even with the assistance of IVF. This situation must have inevitably led to disappointment. The question arises as to what discourses are available to make sense of this? Throsby suggests that conventional narratives must be negotiated in order for this to make sense. I will provide a counter reading of the data to argue that there are other positive discourses available.

Negotiating technology

The author claims that technological aspects of IVF are downplayed and that 'nature' is sufficiently flexible to be able to accommodate the intervention of fertility technology. My reading agrees with the original, but goes further in making the alternative suggestion that for participants, talk about technology

is difficult to uncouple from talk about their own contributions. This interpretation conflicts with Franklin's (1997) suggestion that nature and technology are somehow 'substitutable', but remains consistent with Throsby's reading of technology as being 'normalised' and 'naturalised'.

The combining of technology and biology highlights a dilemma for participants, namely that IVF conception relies on their contribution *and* also technological intervention. At a fundamental psychological level it would not seem unreasonable for participants to give priority to their own contributions. After all, offspring resulting from successful IVF would still carry their genes and would be unquestioningly referred to by the parents as *their* child. Primary biological responsibility rests ultimately with the parents, and this may account for the minimalisation of the technological contribution to the process. This explanation is supported in the data of at least two participants, Tim and Paula.

Tim: We considered the IVF that we were having was just helping us to do something that was natural ... really still a natural act, but just taken out ... the natural act was being done outside the body and being put back. It was us ... it was still all of our bits that were being involved in it.

Clearly, the involvement of technological intervention is downplayed, but, significantly, remains a feature of Tim's characterisation of IVF as 'just helping us'. This recognises the involvement of the technology, but the level of assistance is qualified and constrained by the use of 'just'. Technological intervention is limited to simply providing 'help', which is constructed as being analogous to changing locations for a process which remains 'natural'. The fundamental components involved in the process of IVF are constructed through the delightfully untechnical characterisation "all of our bits". In short, the process is explained as relying on, and being part of, Tim and his partner.

In Paula's extract technological intervention is downplayed through being constructed as unexceptionally and routinely something which humans have been doing for a very long time. Paula claims there exists a considerable history of fertility manipulation with conception being both helped and hindered as desired.

Paula: For years, people have been doing all sorts of things to help conception, or hinder conception, or whatever. I've had lots of operations ...

The exact history remains unspecified but reference to human efforts to control these matters as spanning 'years' alludes to a substantial tradition, perhaps stretching across millennia. Importantly, this particular construction of assisted fertility is positioned seamlessly alongside the more common practice

of contraception. This linking is consistent with the suggestion that the use of IVF technology is normalised in the talk of participants. Such normalisation is further evident in the text when IVF is positioned among a range of common medical and dental operations such as the removal of moles and wisdom teeth. Such positioning works to bolster the view that there is nothing out of the ordinary involved by the deployment of IVF technology.

Managing reproductive normativity

The second part of Throsby's analysis includes the suggestion that participants wish to show their fitness to "mother" and also to provide positive accounts of their lives without children. The following take on this data offers the additional suggestion that in participants talk there is some evidence that they have dealt with the disappointment of unsuccessful IVF treatment, and have now put this disappointment behind them and moved on. To borrow Gergen's (1988) term, participants deploy a 'progressive storyline'. In short, disappointment is acknowledged, and resolved through accounts of moving forward positively.

The extract from Liz is contextualised by the revelation that she was labelled a "poor performer" and IVF treatment was ended by medical staff following repeatedly poor results after receiving hormonal drugs. Throsby suggests Liz's account can be read as indicating an act of benevolence, which is presented as an endorsement of one of the criteria for motherhood.

*Liz: [...] I felt very much like I am not going to make your figures look good at the end of the day, and another part of me thought, well, yeah, ... **stand aside and let someone else have a go who would have a chance.** [...] You do sometimes see women who, you know, had ten goes [...] so I thought that was a bit unfair. Someone else could have a go.*

In this extract Liz reveals two reactions. The first locates her failure to conceive within the wider aims of the clinic. This is presented as a summary statement, marked by the finality of an evaluation which occurs 'at the end of the day'. In acknowledging that she is not going to make the figures look good, Liz (arguably) accepts that her attempts at IVF conception have ended as a result of performance which will reflect badly on the clinic involved. This does the work of placing the aims of the IVF clinic in potential conflict with Liz's personal aims of conception. However, any such conflict of interest, or indeed, admission of disappointment is quickly abated with the disclosure of her sec-

ond reaction. This appears in the second segment of the extract (with emphasis added), and builds on the earlier admission of her limited chance of conception. Liz is prepared to withdraw from further cycles in order to permit another woman who has a greater chance of conceiving have this opportunity. This may be read as benevolence, however it may also be read as benevolence tempered by an awareness, and acceptance, that her own chances of conception were not strong. In this regard Liz has accepted the decision to have her treatment ended and frames this in such a way as to indicate that some other may be more likely to conceive. In the interests of “fairness” she is willing to step aside. It is of further interest that Liz frames this as a matter of personal agency. Rather than being dropped from the program, she is making a sacrifice to allow another an opportunity.

The next extract is read by Throsby as affirming Sarah’s maternal suitability and undermining associations with selfishness. Readers are reminded that the following is only a segment of the original which gave rise to these interpretations. I suggest that the following provides a progressive story, with Sarah acknowledging her infertility and alternative goals.

Sarah: So I just thought, this energy, I want to put it somewhere, but I’m not going to have kids. That’s when I decided, I mean, it wasn’t an overnight decision, but for a while I thought, “Well, you know, I’ve got all this energy. I’m going to start a business.

Sarah employs the notion of maternal energy (so labelled earlier in the extract) and talks about her desire to put this to good use. The “I want to put it somewhere, but I’m not going to have kids” is crucial to this and achieves much. In particular, the notion of maternal energy is characterised as being portable, that is, it seems possible to move this from its original purpose and shift it elsewhere. In this case the alternative for Sarah is to put her energy into a business. However, this alternative appears after the declaration that she is not going to have children. “I want to put it somewhere. . .” followed immediately by the rather blunt and definitive “but I’m not going to have kids” suggests that the original object for maternal energy was, indeed, to invest it in children, however in Sarah’s case this is simply not going to happen. This reading is consistent with the general notion of participants progressing from disappointment through to another project. In so doing participants show themselves to have resolved the grief of childlessness, dealt with the disappointment of failed IVF and moved forward in a positive manner. This characterisation is further evident in the next extract.

Melissa: [...] *I just thought, "Sod it!," you know. Life's what you make it. I haven't got what I wanted, so I'm going to find something I do want then go for that.*

Melissa expresses her disappointment, but seems determined to retain control of her own fate. She acknowledges the disappointment of IVF failure, and moves quickly to claim that she will find something she wants and make that her goal. The strong implication here is that 'plan B' would be a goal which was achievable, since conception had proved unachievable. While Throsby reads this as part of the process of 'claiming the childfree life,' I would suggest that it is also possible to see this as someone who is dealing with disappointment. Most notably, Melissa does not elect to remain in the situation of attempting something which has proved beyond her grasp. Rather, she presents as someone who has faced the disappointment and moved on. This reading is further supported by another extract from the interview with Melissa.

Melissa: [...] *I didn't want to be one of those completely obsessive people that that's all they live for. And we had to have some sort of... reality. You know we had to have some sort of life.*

Arguably, the disappointment of IVF failure was easier to manage due to the balance which Melissa injects into her account about decisions regarding the extent to which they were prepared to persevere with IVF. For Melissa three cycles was the number settled on, and this is contrasted with a rejection of the possibility of obsession. In turn, such a state is contrasted with her need for 'reality' and 'life'. I read these to be calls for, firstly, a balanced approach to the number of cycles, and, secondly, the acknowledgement that a childfree life is increasingly likely. The claimed imperative that they 'had to have some sort of life' could well indicate that a life without children should be prepared for and planned for. The progressive storyline is evident in this account, with the momentum of life positioning Melissa as having dealt with this particular disappointment and having now moved on.

In acknowledging and dealing with disappointment, participants present themselves as psychologically mature members who are able to face the harsh reality of IVF failure. Further, they are able to show that disappointment has not prevented them from getting on with other aspects of their lives. In a simple, but important sense, these participants show in their accounts that while fertility has been a major concern, they are not 'hung up' on this, and are now prepared to move forward with other versions of life. These versions, are themselves counter narratives to the usual stories of reproduction and for this reason alone, warrant further investigation.

Conclusion

I have yet to have the luxury of being involved in a simple or easy analysis. When engaged in the business of making sense of the sense making practices of others one takes on an interpretive burden which demands an intense engagement with data. Interpretive analysis also requires openness to readings of meaning which might seem, initially at least, unlikely, perverse or even bizarre. However, it is always the case that any analysis is strengthened by exposing the data to a range of analytic sweeps. Indeed, working solo with respect to analysis is fraught with difficulties, not the least of these being the inevitability of taking up some meanings while remaining blind or unsympathetic to others.

Plurality of meaning becomes more likely when a team of analysts work together, perhaps reaching similar conclusions, or, perhaps, arriving at conclusions which are provocative, challenging and alternative. As a process, analysis becomes more robust and more broadly grounded when scrutinised by a group of analysts. The increasing use of 'data sessions' at conferences and in graduate training serve as testimony to this claim (Hopper 1999). In my own work, it has overwhelmingly been the case that group projects have benefited from such sessions. All of this speaks to the importance of challenging our analytic conclusions, and where possible subjecting these to the close scrutiny of others. In some small way, I hope this paper has provided further analytic insight, robustness and grounding to Throsby's work in the area of IVF failure.

References

- Curt, B. C. (1994). *Textuality and techtonics: Troubling social and psychological science*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. London: Sage.
- Franklin, S. (1997). *Embodied progress. A cultural account of assisted conception*. London: Routledge.
- Gavey, N. (1989). Feminist poststructuralism and discourse analysis: Contributions to feminist psychology. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 13, 459–475.
- Gergen, M. M. (1988). Narrative structures in social explanation. In C. Antaki (Ed.), *Analysing everyday explanation: A casebook of methods* (pp. 94–112). London: Sage.
- Hopper, R. (1999). Going public about social interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 32(1&2), 77–84.
- Jay, M. (1993). *Downcast eyes*. London: University of California Press.
- Lyon, D. (1994). *Postmodernity*. Bristol: Open University Press.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.

- Rosenau, P. M. (1992). *Postmodernism and the social sciences: Insights, inroads and intrusions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Stainton-Rogers W., & Stainton-Rogers, R. (1997). Does critical social psychology mean the end of the world? In T. Ibanez & L. Iniguez (Eds.), *Critical social psychology* (pp. 67–82). London: Sage.
- Tuffin, K., & Howard, C. (2001). Demystifying discourse analysis: Theory, method and practice. In A. McHoul & M. Rapley (Eds.), *How to analyse talk in institutional settings: A casebook of methods* (pp. 199–208). London: Continuum International.
- Wetherell, M. (1995). Romantic discourse and feminist analysis: Interrogating investment, power and desire. In S. Wilkinson & C. Kitzinger (Eds.), *Feminism and discourse* (pp. 128–144). London: Sage.
- Widdicombe, S. (1995). Identity, politics and talk: A case for the mundane and the everyday. In S. Wilkinson & C. Kitzinger (Eds.), *Feminism and Discourse* (pp. 106–127). London: Sage.
- Wood, L., & Kroger, R. (2000). *Doing discourse analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and text*. London: Sage.

When IVF fails – the success of science and medicine

Michele Crossley

Turner Dental School, Manchester University, U.K.

This article presents a commentary on Throsby's *Negotiating normality when IVF fails*. Throsby looks at how women who have undergone failed IVF treatment attempt to adapt and make sense of their experiences through the use of a variety of discursive resources. One of the main problems is the way in which 'failed' IVF attempts conflict with what Throsby characterises as 'the dominant social and cultural representations of IVF as successful, and of reproduction as the natural and inevitable life course, particularly for women' (p. 61). This creates a kind of 'realness' problem, in which peoples' ability to deal with grief and loss is obscured. In this commentary, I argue that this 'realness' problem goes beyond failed IVF treatment, and lies at the very heart of the dominant representation of the success of science and medicine. In relation to this point, I also argue that although the identification of discursive strategies by which people adapt and 'resist' hegemonic medical representations is useful, something more critical needs to be said. In particular, we have reached a point where our willingness as a society to afford medicine and technology too great a role in controlling our understanding of, and response to human life and death, needs to be brought under radical scrutiny.

In this article, Throsby presents an extremely interesting study of how women who have undergone failed IVF treatment, attempt to adapt and make sense of their experiences through the use of a variety of discursive resources. One of the main problems for women in this situation seems to be the way in which their 'failed' IVF attempt conflicts with what Throsby characterises as 'the dominant social and cultural representation of IVF as successful, and of reproduction as the natural and inevitable life course, particularly for women'. Coming to terms with failed IVF treatment, means negotiating the gap between these dominant representations, and the reality of a woman's life post-treatment. Throsby skillfully shows how the women she interviewed attempted to do this.

The article highlights two conventional narrative categories for IVF stories – 'the happy and the hopeless' – and argues that the 'seductive tidiness of the iconic image of IVF success obscures the reality of the experience of IVF which is predominantly of treatment failure' (p. 63). And what an obscuration! I was prepared to hear that the success of IVF was not as resounding as the media hype would have us believe – but 80% failure rate? Maybe it's just my ignorance but if I had been asked to guess before reading this article I would probably have said something like 80% *success* rate. As Throsby points out, drawing on the work of Layne (2000) on pregnancy loss, such misperception – fuelled by the disavowal of failure in the dominant representation, creates a kind of 'realness' problem, in which peoples' ability to deal with grief and loss is obscured. It is, I think, this 'realness' problem that lies at the heart of the dominant representation of the success of science and medicine. In such a context, what does a person do, how do they come to terms with it, when *their* treatment fails? Throsby explores this specifically in relation to IVF treatment, but it extends beyond, into all realms of medical treatment, or perhaps more accurately, treatment failure. For me, Throsby's article was of interest not just in terms of the way it addressed the issue of IVF treatment, but also because it had powerful resonance with work I have previously done with regard to medical treatment for chronically ill and dying patients. On the face of things, this may seem like a curious analogy (babies and death?), but as I read Throsby's analysis, the similarities kept on hitting me. In the discussion that follows, I want to draw out some of these analogies.

Throsby highlights that when medical treatment such as IVF is constructed as predominantly successful, if it fails, it tends to become the 'failure of the woman to be helped' rather than an example of technological failure (p. 63). Biomedical discourse, she argues, 'weighs in with a catalogue of female bodily flaws which imply deviant resistance to motherhood' – terms such as 'hostile mucus', 'incompetent cervix' – 'a discourse of hostility and incompetence'

which marks women out as not only as objects of medical intervention but as 'unnatural and unfeminine' (p. 65). As Throsby points out, the assumption that women are able to influence pregnancy outcomes has a long history (p. 65). Women find themselves blamed for 'not being relaxed enough, eating the wrong foods, resisting conception subconsciously, or simply for selfishly pursuing a career and leaving it too late ...' (p. 64). All of which is compounded by 'contemporary pressures for people to accept individual responsibility for the achievement of positive health through monitoring, self-awareness and self-discipline ...' (pp. 64f.). This all results in a very practical (yet heavily emotionally laden question). The promise of success, combined with the responsibility that failure places on women, 'makes it impossible to know where the end of treatment lies' (p. 63). Hence, in this context, the decision to end treatment is often interpreted as the woman's decision to 'give up' – shifting the 'blame' onto her due to her lack of perseverance. Throsby suggests that the discursive strategies she articulates on the basis of her interviewees' responses, offer 'gentle resistance' to the 'absence of a positive discourse through which to articulate the end of treatment', and new ways of coming to terms with their experiences.

In *Rethinking health psychology* (Crossley 2000), I illustrated a similar point in relation to peoples' adaptation to chronic illnesses such as cancer. In particular, I argued that mainstream psychology's incorporation into the dominant biomedical model had had the effect of inculcating a sense of personal control and responsibility on the individual in terms of their illness progression. For instance, in medical studies of cancer progression and the evaluation of intervention studies, it is now routine to find 'measures' of personality types, such as the 'Type C' personality or other 'cancer-prone' personalities who are typically characterised as 'passive', 'helpless', 'repressive', 'unexpressive of emotion' and 'self-sacrificing'. In the light of possible connections between such personality factors and illness progression, psychological interventions are increasingly being offered as a means of enhancing peoples' sense of 'personal control', of training them to become more 'hardy' personalities (Sarafino 1994, p. 148) and engaging in cognitive therapy to facilitate them becoming less passive, helpless, unexpressive of emotion, self-sacrificing and repressive. These processes are similar to what Throsby describes in relation to the woman who is 'hostile' and 'resistant' to IVF treatment. In the same way as the 'helpless' character facilitates cancer progression, the 'hostile' woman prevents conception. How long will it be until a measure of the 'IVF resistant personality' is developed (go on, surprise me, it already exists?).

Exposure to people living with chronic illnesses in contemporary society reveals a widespread concern with, and orientation to, the role played by 'psychological processes' in illness (of course, this also accounts in large part for the increasing interest in alternative/complementary therapies, see Crossley, 2000, Chapter 7). This relates to the increasing influence and application of mainstream health psychology's ideas which have led people to believe they can exercise some degree of control over their own health. Not only this, however, the concern to exercise control over psychological processes also relates to issues of morality and responsibility. As I have argued in previous work, the state of health has increasingly come to be seen as a 'key symbol' for the 'good, moral, responsible self' to the extent that 'the pursuit of health' has actually become the 'pursuit of moral personhood'. When people become ill, they do not become immune to such ideas. Instead, they continue to feel a sense of 'moral obligation' (perhaps even an enhanced sense of such obligation), to pursue health and recovery by whatever means possible.

This was shown, for instance, in Pollock's study of MS sufferers (1993), where he found that the majority accepted the desirability of adopting a positive attitude of mind towards their illness as an 'ideal' to which they approximated as best they could. In my own study of people 'surviving' with a long-term HIV positive diagnosis (Crossley 1997), I found the same sort of attitude. Similarly, autobiographical accounts of people living with various illnesses, suggest not only that they are bombarded with advice on all kinds of alternative therapies, but also that they feel morally obliged to pursue as many such remedies as is reasonably possible. For instance, Dennison (1996, p. 16), writing of her cancer, comments on the many books, all of 'the most daunting kind' which exist on the theme 'I cured myself of cancer'. Only the methods vary: 'rejecting orthodox medicine, meditating three times a day, eating nothing but beansprouts or wheatgrass ...' 'Still', Dennison writes in a telling statement, 'if they did it maybe I *should* try ...' (Dennison 1996, p. 16). It is clear here that what people are doing is attempting to retain a vision of self congruent with contemporary conceptions of the 'good self' – i.e. one displaying self-determination, will and moral fortitude. Throsby shows exactly the same thing in relation to women undergoing IVF treatment. They don't want to 'give up' trying because if they do, it is as if they are in some way lacking in the will and moral fortitude to succeed in their 'reproductive health'.

But as Throsby shows amongst women undergoing IVF, people living with chronic illnesses also 'gently resist'. One of the central strategies Throsby highlights is that of 'Otherisation', when women make a point of separating themselves out from 'other women' who become desperate and lose sight of when to

stop treatment. In relation to the use of various psychological influenced techniques in attempting to slow disease progression, I found this discursive strategy used repeatedly in my research with people living with a long-term HIV positive diagnosis (Crossley 1997). Although most people were open to trying various different kinds of 'alternative' techniques, the figure of the 'other' who had taken things too far and gone OTT loomed large. People were concerned to present themselves as more 'moderate' in their interest and use of such ideas. Just like, Throsby's interviewees, in doing so, they were presenting themselves as preserving a sense of control over the treatment process.

Another strategy, which Throsby characterises as more 'actively' resistant, was amongst those women who claimed the benefits of a 'child-free' existence. This is a strategy commonly found in a whole host of accounts of illness experiences. For instance, amongst both HIV and cancer 'survivors' I have shown how 'renewed and enhanced appreciation of life' is often used as a way of adapting to the devastating impact imposed by serious illness. Likewise, in accounts of mental illness, I have shown how one way of 'resisting professional colonisation', related to the 'empowerment agenda' of mental health 'survivors', is to espouse the positive dimensions of life with a mental 'illness'. This often involves challenging the very use of the word 'mental illness', and instead creating new ways of describing the experience such as 'schizophrenic and depressive credit' (Chadwick 1997, see Crossley 2000: Chapter 6). These accounts attempt to re-define illness in a positive way, just as Throsby's interviewee's attempt to 'redefine involuntary childlessness, not as interminable lack, but as constantly changing in its resonance and implications' (p. 78). As Throsby rightly points out, however, it is important not to overstate the existence of these 'direct counter-narratives' (p. 78). Just as many of her interviewees' lives 'remained entirely defined by their lack of children', so too did many of my research participants remain entirely devastated by their illnesses and the grief induced by the unforeseen changes wrought in their lives.

I think something more critical needs to be said beyond the identification of these discursive strategies, however. Throsby points towards this when she points to the feminist imperative of highlighting the way in which the 'necessity of this discursive labour' remains 'sobering', demonstrating a 'depressing lack of change in the narrow construction of femininity through reproduction, in spite of decades of feminism' (p. 80). I couldn't agree more. But from my point of view, there is also something here to be said about our willingness as a society to afford medicine and technology too great a role in controlling human life and death – perhaps more accurately, in controlling our understanding of and response to human life and death. My perspective on this obviously comes

again from my work on chronic illness and palliative care but I think it speaks importantly to the experiences at the 'other end' of the spectrum – namely of birth and conception. The discussion that follows relates primarily to experiences of illness and dying, but I encourage the reader to think about how it relates similarly to experiences of birth and conception.

Medical science has been described as a characteristically 'modernist' enterprise in which there is an 'unacknowledged will to mastery' (Fox 1993, p. 122). The forms of thought and practice manifest in medical science declare out of order all "metaphysical", non-empirical ruminations about *illusory* problems – that is ... things 'one can do nothing about' (Bauman 1998, p. 220). Death (and birth) certainly belong to this category because they resist 'the practical measures which human reason is capable of conceiving' (Bauman, *ibid.* p. 220).

In recent years, increasingly technologised approaches to death and dying have been criticised by both medical professionals and patients alike (Crossley 2000: Chapter 8). An important feature of such criticism relates to the way in which death and dying is 'managed' within medicine. Numerous medics, for instance, are critical of the over-reliance on technology and medical procedures in dealing with the process of death, especially with the terminally ill. One such critic is an American doctor, Campo (1997). In his autobiography, depicting his experiences as a doctor, Campo presents a lucid description of one of his patients, a 28 year old man dying with AIDS. Because of chronic pneumonia this man could no longer breathe. Admitted as an emergency case, it was the medical team's objective, after consulting with the patient as much as possible, to save his life. Accordingly, the patient was intubated, which involves passing a tube through the vocal chords to connect the respirator to the airspaces of the lungs. However, this procedure, by necessity, renders the patient unable to speak. Campo describes how he watched the patient's face change as the tube passed through his vocal chords and forced him to 'lose his language'. A few days later, the patient died. Campo remained haunted by the thought that 'I am still not sure whether what he needed more during those last few days of his life was to speak or to breathe ... He died without his last words' (Campo *ibid.*, p. 168).

Similar reservations abound in autobiographical accounts written by patients and their relatives. Writing of his sister, Beth, dying from cancer, Shapiro suggests that her dependency and helplessness were encouraged by the 'chronic combination of high-tech treatments and hyperspecialised language', from the 'feeling that her body was inescapable from the plastic tubes and monitors without which she couldn't live'. 'Everything about her treatment', he contin-

ues, 'undermined her sense of agency and power' (Shapiro 1997, p. 54). 'Did that last treatment extend her life?', asks Shapiro. 'By how much, a day or two? In doing so, it also ravaged her mouth and throat with sores, so that she paid for those potential extra days with extra suffering' (Shapiro 1997, p. 56). Noll (1989, p. 20) writing about his own imminent death from cancer of the bladder, is similarly skeptical about technical intervention, becoming 'hooked up to tubes' as he puts it. 'The urge to survive must never be allowed to become so absolutely overpowering that one submits to all these indignities. The will to live must oppose it' (Noll 1989, p. 20).

Shapiro also describes a scene in which Beth is in a hospice, in the final stages of cancer. Her oncologist visits, checks out her chart and tubes and says "So". Silence. And more silence. He then said he had to go' (Shapiro 1997, p. 55). There was nothing left to be done, and nothing more to say. This, Frank argues (1991, p. 57) is the main danger of allowing physicians to 'dominate the drama of illness' – 'they leave as soon as the disease is resolved to their satisfaction or when they have done all they can'. It is only then that the ill person and those around him/her are left to deal with the consequences of 'what has not been recognised'. Likewise, if the ill person dies, those who survive must deal with 'all that was not said, the unfinished business of a life closed out in a setting where dying is a problem of management, not a continuity of experience' (Frank 1991, p. 57).

I would suggest that this situation is directly analogous to what is happening in the failed IVF experience. Conception through IVF is a matter of medical management and control. When the technical procedures have been done, and failed, what else is there left to do? The 'failed patient' is left with 'the unfinished business' – a business of dashed hopes and expectations, a business of 'all that was not said'. It is in this context that the woman experiences 'the absence of a positive discourse through which to articulate the end of treatment' (p. 63).

Such treatment of birth, death and dying – as a 'problem of management' – is not, of course, confined to the medical profession. As with so many areas of life in contemporary Western societies, the attempt to scientifically increase control over unpredictable and 'irrational' events and processes has involved the creation of specialised languages, practices and professions to deal with such events. In terms of both birth and death, this has involved increasingly specialised forms of 'professional colonisation' which have had the effect of 'segregating' and 'banishing' such events from the context of everyday life and 'entrusting them to the wardenship of the specialists' (Bauman 1998, p. 224). Bauman (1992) argues that such technologisation of issues of death (and birth) undermines our capacity to deal with basic issues of philosophical and existen-

tial significance such as our irreparable mortality. We are encouraged to believe that these 'problems' have a 'solution', in contrast to the reality that such issues have a 'complex reality' which 'cannot (and must not) be reduced to a simple answer' (Kleinmann 1988, p. 157). Facing up to the often painful realities of birth and death involves a 'moral act, not a technical procedure' (Kleinman, p. 154). This often involves coming to terms with the fact that there may not be a 'solution' to the problem, no matter how much we may wish otherwise. As Dennison writes in her autobiography of her experience of cancer:

'I finally began to accept that maybe there wasn't a lot more medicine could do for me. I'd resisted that knowledge for so long that when I finally faced it had lost its power. I was beginning to abandon my obsession with numbers; survival rates, response rates and percentages ... Eventually I had to accept that there was little else to be done ...' (Dennison 1996, p. 41)

Dennison died soon after having written these simple and poignant words, highlighting further the 'ultimate limitation' of the 'single minded' focus and belief in cure and successful treatment so characteristic of 'modernist' enterprises. As Frank (1995) argues, 'the confrontation with mortality cannot be part of the story'. This is why, in my previous work, I have been so concerned to bring such confrontation back into the equation. Exploring the crises in peoples' lives, such as serious pain, illness and death (in this case, failure to conceive), shows us that these are not always problems that can be solved. Sometimes, we just have to live in their wake. We must learn to accept that 'disease is part of the dust of our bodies'. As Frank argues (1991, p. 111), it is 'our humanity' to contest disease as long as we can, but it is also 'our humanity to die' (and perhaps to fail to conceive)? As Noll (1989, p. 33) dying from cancer wrote:

'Premeditation of death is premeditation of liberty. He who has learned to die has unlearned servitude. There is no longer any evil in life for those who have well understood that the loss of life is no evil; to know that we have to die makes us free of all subjection and constraints'. (Noll 1989, p. 33)

Professor Winston would do well to take heed of these words. Perhaps we could re-phrase his own God-like words?: the infertile no longer 'watch with envy' at the 'immortality others have achieved through their children' (Winston 1999, p. viii), but instead, 'watch with a feeling of light laughter' as they realise the extent to which we humans will go to achieve unachievable immortality.

References

- Bauman, Z. (1992). *Mortality, immortality and other life strategies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (1998). 'Postmodern adventures of life and death'. In G. Scrambler & P. Higgs (Eds.), *Modernity, medicine and health* (pp. 216–233). London: Routledge.
- Campo, R. (1997). *Poetry of healing: A doctor's education in empathy, identity and desire*. USA: W.W. Norton Company.
- Chadwick, P. (1997). *Schizophrenia: The positive perspective. In search of dignity for schizophrenic people*. London: Routledge.
- Crossley, M. L. (1997). 'Survivors' and 'victims': Long-term HIV positive individuals and the ethos of self-empowerment. *Social Science and Medicine*, 45 (12), 1863–1873.
- Crossley, M. (2000). *Rethinking health psychology*. Buckinghamshire: OU Press.
- Dennison, A. (1996). *Uncertain journey: A woman's experience of living with cancer*. Newmill: Patten Press.
- Fox, N. (1993). *Postmodernism, sociology and health*. Buckingham: OU Press.
- Frank, A. (1991). *At the will of the body*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Frank, A. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness and ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kleinman, A. (1988). *The illness narratives: Suffering, healing and the human condition*. New York: Basic Books.
- Layne, L. (2000). Baby things as fetishes? Memorial goods, simulacra and the 'realness' problem of pregnancy loss. In H. Ragone & F. Twine (Eds.), *Ideologies and technologies of motherhood: Race, class, sexuality, nationalism*. London: Routledge.
- Noll, P. (1989). *In the face of death*. Translated by Hans Noll. New York: Viking.
- Pollock, K. (1993). 'Attitude of mind as a means of resisting illness'. In A. Radley (Ed.), *Worlds of illness: Biographical and cultural perspectives on health and disease*. London: Routledge.
- Sarafino, (1994). *Health psychology: Biopsychosocial interactions*. NY: John Wiley.
- Shapiro, A. (1997). *Vigil*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Winston, R. (1999). *The IVF revolution: The definitive guide to assisted reproductive techniques*. London: Vermilion.

On identifying counter-narratives of failed IVF

Susan E. Bell

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Bowdoin College

Karen Throsby's article, "Negotiating 'Normality,'" explores counter-narratives produced by British women (and men) whose quest for motherhood with IVF failed. Two points are made in this commentary. First, Throsby successfully shows how they simultaneously reflect and attempt to slightly reshape cultural narratives about IVF and reproduction. In both instances the women in her study could not live these stories. I argue that they also assume another dominant cultural narrative (the ideology of intensive mothering) accept the qualities of femininity contained in it, and "simply" want to claim those qualities without at the same time becoming mothers. Second, she does not show how they accomplish their gentle counter-narratives or how she participates in this task. I raise questions about the co-production of counter-narratives that emerge from the abbreviated texts in "Negotiating 'Normality.'" (*Counter-narratives, Co-production of Counter-narratives, Ideology of intensive mothering*)

One of the many challenges for narrative researchers is to find ways both to give sustained attention to the details of individual narratives and at the same time to compare multiple narratives. In "Negotiating Normality," Karen Throsby considers how 41 British women and men negotiate dominant narratives of IVF after they give up on IVF. One of her challenges is to interpret material from this relatively large sample but to do so without fragmenting individual narratives. Her solution to the challenge was to reduce the number of people whose experiences are included in this article: Throsby focuses on the storylines of the 26 people living without children, looking at the ways in which they justify their failures and their decisions to stop trying to conceive. She excludes the experiences of the 15 individuals who had children previously or subsequently. She further excludes the issue of normative masculinity in favor of normative femininity. This enables her to highlight the experiences of women instead of men.

Throsby locates her work in two dominant cultural narratives: that reproduction is natural and inevitable, and that IVF is successful. In both instances the women in her study could not live these stories, because they were unable to reproduce. The question I consider in the first part of this commentary is: What constitutes a dominant cultural narrative against which counter-narratives are

told? What clues are there in narratives, and how can social scientists use them? Karen Throsby identifies three storylines about IVF – happy, desperate, and to a lesser extent designer – that women, who have been unsuccessful in their quests for pregnancy and motherhood using IVF, both claim and resist. Yet the three IVF storylines and resistances to them might also be seen as enfolded in other dominant cultural narratives, for example those of heterosexuality, mothering, or biology and race.

The ideology of intensive mothering (Hays 1996) lurks in the background of Throsby's narrative, as well as in the narratives of the women (and men) she interviewed. It can thus add a layer to the already multilayered analysis she provides in her essay: another irony to the story is that even if a woman is successful in her quest for motherhood using IVF, she still is a target of deviancy discourses, and needs to engage in practices of naturalizing and normalizing (see for example, Pollock 1999: Chapter 2). Despite the "real-life" variety of practices and arrangements of mothering, intensive mothering is a normative standard against which mothering practices and arrangements in U.S. society are evaluated (Hays 1996). This ideology "declares that mothering is exclusive, wholly child centered, emotionally involving, and time-consuming. The mother portrayed in this ideology is devoted to the care of others" and self-sacrificing (Arendell 2000, p. 1194). Intensive mothers, in other words, are not subjects with their own needs. They are held and hold themselves accountable both for keeping children fed and housed and "for shaping the kinds of adults these children will become" (Hays 1996, p. 108). Feminist scholars have shown that the persistence and growth in intensity of intensive mothering ideology serves the interests of men, "capitalism, the state, the middle class, and whites" (Hays 1996, p. xiii).

Among other things, the ideology of intensive mothering obscures power and inequality in the practice of mothering. Its depiction of mothers as self-sacrificing, devoted to the care of others, and inspired by love romanticizes the work that mothers do. It obscures the extent to which mothering is "an arena of political struggle" that includes multiple, shifting, and intersecting dimensions of power relations, identified by Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994, p. 17) as "inequality between men and women, between dominant and subordinate racial groups, between colonizer and colonized." Male domination and gender inequality work "in tandem with racial domination and economic exploitation" to shape the mothering experiences of women (Collins 1994, p. 46).

A variety of deviancy discourses derive from this ideological construct of mothering, aimed differentially at mothers who do not conform to this script (Arendell 2000, p. 1195). Targets of these discourses include welfare mothers,

single mothers, lesbian mothers, birth mothers, adoptive mothers, mothers of children with disabilities, mothers who break contractual agreements or assert their autonomy in the process of utilizing reproductive technologies; that is, mothers who do not conform to the narrative of heterosexual marriage followed by the birth of healthy children and full-time devoted motherhood (Arendell 2000; Gailey 2000; Landsman 2000).

Throsby shows that the counter-narratives produced by women she interviewed simultaneously accept what others have called “the ideology of intensive motherhood,” fail to produce a child, and reconfigure the boundaries of “mothering” by separating “femininity” from “motherhood”, to make their experiences normatively “fit”. Notably, they demonstrate their benevolence (ending treatment), concern for child welfare, and nurturance. She also reveals the time-consuming and emotionally involving work of IVF – the women demonstrate their success in “establishing a balance between having stopped too soon and having done too much” (p. 71). All of these qualities are consistent with the ideology of intensive motherhood. Using an intensive motherhood frame gives support to Throsby’s claim that the women in her study want to enlarge the boundaries of categories rather than contest the categories themselves. In their accounts, they assume the ideology of intensive motherhood, accept the qualities of femininity contained in it, and “simply” want to claim those qualities without at the same time becoming mothers. In this respect, their counter-narratives are “gentle” indeed.

In the second part of this commentary, I consider the approach to narrative taken by Throsby. One of the strengths of narrative analysis, as I have argued elsewhere (Bell 1999) is that it considers structure as well as content and thus (among other things) enables readers to see how narratives are produced. The excerpts from the interviews, which Throsby used “discourse analysis” (p. 66) to interpret, are brief and decontextualized. Even though she puts together the fragments from different accounts to demonstrate counter-narratives, it is not clear whether or how single individuals produced counter-narratives. First of all, Throsby does not provide information about how the fragments of talk reproduced in the article are connected to the interviews as wholes. Did any of the participants, for example, engage with all dimensions of the category “mother” and distinguish it from “femininity” in the way Throsby has identified these categories? Do some of the accounts contain more of the dimensions than others? More generally, how did they as individuals produce the counter-narratives she identified? Presenting fragments of text instead of more extended accounts effaces their structure and leaves readers with unanswered questions about the production of these counter-narratives.

Second, even though there are hints of the joint production of the counter-narratives (for example, in Throsby's inclusion of some of her responses, such as "Karen: Yeah! [both laughing]", p. 76), for the most part the excerpts from the interviews are too abbreviated to see how this occurs. There are two points in Throsby's narrative that beg for more attention to co-production. The first occurs in the discussion about negotiating technology, in which Throsby points out that one consequence of "naturalizing" IVF is that it side-steps questions about long-term risks. Throsby writes that her "questions about their concerns about possible future health risks caused such alarm in the interviews that [she] was forced to abandon that line of questioning" (p. 69). It would have been helpful to see an example of how this alarm was expressed, how it subverted or threatened naturalizing strategies, and how it interrupted or contributed to a developing account about IVF technology.

The second instance of co-production appears in an intriguing aside towards the end of the article, where Throsby (p. 78) refers to "a heart-breaking addition to one of [the] interview transcripts." How unusual was this addition? To what extent did participants contribute to the study beyond the two interviews, 6–8 months apart? More generally, what were the relations of power and knowledge in this study? How much authority did the participants have in the production of the counter-narratives, during and after the interviews? Without seeing extended interview excerpts, it is difficult to make sense of the procedures used to interpret the interview material. Taken together, these instances of co-production also raise questions about relationships that developed between Throsby and the people she interviewed for her study.

Finally, Throsby does not report which counter-narratives were produced in interviews in which couples were present and which in interviews in which there was only a woman participant. I wonder whether there were any differences in these interviews concerning the production of the counter-narratives, especially whether the presence of both members of a couple made it any more or less likely that alarm about long term risks was expressed. More generally, did gender matter in the interviews conducted with couples?

To summarize and conclude, Karen Throsby's article about the negotiation of "normality" in the context of unsuccessful experiences with IVF shows that people simultaneously reflect and attempt to reshape – very slightly – cultural narratives about IVF and reproduction. What remains undone here is the task of showing how they accomplish this and how she participates in this task.

References

- Arendell, T. (2000). Conceiving and investigating motherhood: The decade's scholarship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1192–1207.
- Bell, S. E. (1999). Narratives and lives: Women's health politics and the diagnosis of cancer for DES daughters. *Narrative Inquiry*, 9, 347–389.
- Collins, P. H. (1994). Shifting the center: Race, class, and feminist theorizing about motherhood. In E. N. Glenn, G. Chang, & L. R. Forcey (Eds.), *Mothering: Ideology, experience, and agency* (pp. 45–65). New York: Routledge.
- Gailey, C. W. (2000). Ideologies of motherhood and kinship in U.S. adoption. In H. Ragoné & F. W. Twine (Eds.), *Ideologies and technologies of motherhood: Race, class, sexuality, nationalism* (pp. 11–55). New York: Routledge.
- Glenn, E. N. (1994). Social constructions of mothering: A thematic overview. In E. N. Glenn, G. Chang, & L. R. Forcey (Eds.), *Mothering: Ideology, experience, and agency* (pp. 1–29). New York: Routledge.
- Hays, S. (1996). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. New Haven: Yale.
- Landsman, G. (2000). 'Real motherhood,' class, and children with disabilities. In H. Ragoné & F. W. Twine (Eds.), *Ideologies and technologies of motherhood* (pp. 169–187). New York: Routledge.
- Pollock, D. (1999). *Telling bodies, performing birth*. New York: Columbia.

RESPONSE

to commentaries on “Negotiating Normality: When IVF Fails”

by Karen Throsby

It is unusual to have the opportunity for such concentrated feedback on a piece of written work, and it is even more unusual to be able to participate directly, and hopefully productively, in this kind of textual conversation. Inevitably, it is impossible to address here all the interesting points raised by Susan Bell, Keith Tuffin and Michele Crossley in their commentaries, and so I have chosen to focus my response on one key issue from each of the commentaries. The first section addresses the methodological concerns raised by Bell about the de-contextualisation of the interview extracts; the second section explores Tuffin’s reinterpretation of the interview data as exemplifying “progressive storylines”; and the third section considers Crossley’s drawing out of the resonances of my research with her own work on the medical treatment of chronically ill and dying patients. I will conclude by positing the argument that the conventions of academic writing can impose a premature closure on textual analysis, and I will suggest that it is necessary to reconceptualise academic texts in terms of process rather than product.

Texts in context

Bell raises important questions in relation to the complex relations of power and knowledge in the production of research. Her concerns focus on the lack of clarity in the article surrounding my own role in the production of the narratives, and more broadly, on the decontextualisation of the extracts cited. The passages cited, she argues, offer no information about the participants themselves, or their interactions with me, thereby compromising the transparency upon which reflexive discourse or narrative research is qualitatively dependent (Gill 1995), and losing any sense of the individual narratives as wholes.

The possibility of the elimination of power differences between interviewer and interviewee, and of the interviewer as the collector rather than producer

of interview narratives, has been widely denounced (Kvale 1996; Maynard & Purvis 1995; Oakley 1981; Rubin & Rubin 1995; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 1996; Woollet 1996). I have written in more detail about some of the discernable aspects of my role as co-producer of the narratives in my recently completed thesis (Throsby 2002), but it is also the case that it is impossible to perceive the full range of ways in which my own status as a white, middle-class woman in her 30's became embedded in the narratives, and I can only speculate as to the impact of my intentional childlessness – a fact which I shared with the participants when asked about my reproductive status. The interviews, then, are not conceptualised as offering an epistemologically privileged and uncontaminated window to truth or reality, but rather, should be understood as “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1991) which are always “views from somewhere” (p. 195). The challenge, then, for the analyst, is “how to have *simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognising our own ‘semiotic technologies’ for making meanings, *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of the ‘real’ world” (p. 187). In the writing up of research, this produces the very practical dilemma of finding ways to acknowledge and account for contingency without being paralysed by it (see, for example: Benhabib 1995; Butler 1995).

In the case of this research project, the necessity to acknowledge the context of the interviews, particularly in terms of offering a sense of individual narratives as a whole rather than as disembodied excerpts, has worked in tension with my own ethical responsibilities towards the participants. This research is bound by a strong legal and moral imperative to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, leading me to maximise measures to prevent narratives from being contextualised to a point where the participants could be identified by others who know them. Several of the participants, for example, had not shared the fact that they had undergone IVF with their families for fear of censure and exclusion based on strongly held religious views; others confided in me past abortions of which their families or partners were unaware; and one of the participants was taking fertility drugs behind her male partner's back in resistance to his reluctance to continue treatment any further. This illustrates the importance of not presenting the extracts or analysis in a way that would allow particular narratives to be put together by others. The emphasis within academic institutions to disseminate research findings through the media only strengthens the imperative to err on the side of caution where intensely personal information is involved.

One strategy for offering contextualising information is to append minimal personal information after each extract – a strategy which Rayna Rapp

uses to good effect in her impressive study of amniocentesis (Rapp 1999). Each illustrative extract is followed by the pseudonym, age, ethnicity and occupation of the interviewee, tying in well with the analysis, which pays careful attention to issues of race and class in the engagement with the technology. However, beyond issues of confidentiality, this raises a further concern for me in that it risks attributing particular significance to categories whose pertinence the participants may resist. Alice, for example, whose case is referred to briefly in my article, had undergone IVF in her 40's, and felt that critical remarks about her age had dogged her engagement with treatment to the point where it was perceived to have impacted negatively on the treatment she received. Age had been given a salience that Alice had resented deeply, and therefore, to select age out as a key identifier could be considered problematic. This is not to argue that my decision to offer almost no identifying information is the necessarily answer to these dilemmas. Indeed, it is a dilemma about which I retain considerable uncertainty, and the negotiation of the tension between the imperative to contextualise the analysis whilst maintaining a maximally ethical position towards the participants is an area of ongoing concern.

As Bell notes, the decontextualisation of the extracts is not only a product of the lack of information about individual participants, but is, more fundamentally, a result of the thematic organisation of the analysis as a whole. By selecting out the best examples of particular discourses and strategies, individual narratives are inevitably fragmented, producing this decontextualising effect. The strengths of this approach are that it enables the analyst to identify themes, strategies and discourses across the narratives and to explore their contradictions and intersections. However, this also has the effect of losing the richness of individual narratives and is less useful in expressing the contradictions which emerge within individual accounts. As such, a narrative analysis of selected individual accounts would certainly enrich the existing analysis, although it would certainly be necessary to obtain additional consent from the individuals concerned in this case.

Having focused primarily on important issues of methodology up to this point, in the next two sections, I will move on to two of the substantive reinterpretations of the interview data.

The progressive storyline

Tuffin proposes that far from lacking a positive discourse through which to articulate treatment failure, as I have argued, the participants can be seen to de-

ploy a “progressive storyline” which acknowledges disappointment but which then moves forward positively. This helpful re-reading of the texts offers an interesting insight into the way in which the participants demonstrated themselves as taking control and not letting themselves be defined by what had proved to be the unachievable goal of biological parenthood. This is an avenue of analysis which bears further scrutiny, highlighting the benefit of the multiple analytical sweeps which Tuffin advocates in his commentary. I would like to offer a preliminary response to this reading by suggesting that while the discourse of “moving on” constitutes a positive resource for those participants who are able to mobilise it, it is also a discourse which has normative force which can produce troubling effects.

One of the concerning aspects of the deployment of this discourse is that while some of the participants are able to deploy it to positive and strategic effect, it is also easily co-opted by treatment providers in order to minimise the potentially devastating effect of treatment failure and to locate the burden of recovery firmly in the domain of the individual. Robert Winston, for example, argues that IVF can be an “enriching experience” (Winston 1999). He goes on to warn that “infertile people, if they are not careful, can allow their treatment to destroy their well-being”, adding that it is “unwise to let this happen to you” (p. 223). The distribution of responsibility in the management of treatment failure is clear here, as is the normative status of moving on and getting over it.

The normative force of the progressive storyline ignores the difficulties which individuals may face in setting and attaining achievable goals outside of the reproductive endeavour as a result of the erosion of self-esteem which is common in the experience of IVF failure and infertility. Having made the difficult decision to “move on” from IVF and develop her career, Susan interviewed for a more senior administrative position in the hospital where she worked, but was unsuccessful. Her self-confidence collapsed at this rebuff, and she convinced herself that “nobody will want me. I can’t do that. I can’t be employed anywhere.” Fortunately, Susan was able to recover from this further blow to her confidence and she secured a new and challenging job, but this marks the extent to which the decision to move on from IVF and do something new is one of considerable risk for women. This is particularly true where women choose to invest their energies in their careers, since they have to be able to dissociate themselves from the negative stereotype of the selfish, childless career woman. From this perspective, it can be seen that the progressive storyline never operates outside of reproductive normativity. On the contrary, it is precisely the fact that they are “moving on” from IVF – illustrating their intention to reproduce – which authorises that decision.

It is also important to note that it is not only self-belief that inhibits women from “moving on”. Many women undergoing fertility treatment stay in unchallenging and unsatisfying careers for many years in the expectation of either leaving to have a baby, or of returning part-time. Furthermore, many stay in order to qualify for enhanced maternity and other benefits from which they would be excluded if they were to become pregnant shortly after a change of jobs. Consequently, many women for whom IVF fails can find themselves without the qualifications, experience and confidence to take on a more challenging job, and lacking the material resources to undertake retraining. As such, not all those for whom treatment fails have access to the progressive storyline, and it would be interesting to explore further the role of class, for example, in this context.

There is far more to be said on this issue, not least in terms of the progressive linearity upon which this discourse is based, and which risks the construction of grief and “moving on” as mutually exclusive. However, in the context of thinking about narrative analysis, this brief consideration illustrates two key points. Firstly, it highlights the value of the input of others as a means of resisting premature interpretative closure. However, secondly, while Tuffin argues convincingly for the advantages of working in an analytical team, I would want to be cautious about overstating the claims of group research against that conducted by individuals, since a group research dynamic is equally likely to produce the exclusions and blind spots that are inherent to the interpretative analysis process but which may be equally difficult to identify by the analysts themselves. Instead, I would argue that what group analysis does is to make explicit the importance of opening analysis up to the scrutiny of others, and this serves as a useful reminder to those working individually (for example, as PhD students, or those constrained by strict confidentiality requirements) to maintain a reflexive stance in relation to their own analysis and to resist interpretative closure at every stage in the life cycle of a narrative analysis.

Looking at the big picture

The final point which I would like to address here comes from Michele Crossley’s commentary, and her intriguing drawing out of the resonances between my own research and her work on the medical treatment for chronically ill and dying patients. She argues that the analogies between these two very different situations point to an overarching set of concerns about the role and authority of medical technology in the control of human life and death. I could not agree

more with this, and the construction of the attainment of maximum health as an individual, moral imperative produces a potent compulsion to engage with medical technology which extends across a range of issues including not only infertility, but also the management of serious illnesses such as cancer or HIV/AIDS (Frank 1995; Stacey 1997; Crossley 2000), and more recently, cosmetic surgery, where the possibility of a “cure” for particular perceived bodily “flaws” has produced a significant pressure to seek surgery (Davis 1995; Gilman 1999; Jacobson 2000). As Crossley suggests, the pressure to engage with medical technology and not to “give up” obscures other strategies for managing difficult situations such as terminal illness, or infertility (although I hesitate to draw a direct comparison between the two conditions).

However, while there are clearly important parallels to be drawn across medical technologies, I would argue that it is also essential not to lose sight of the particularities of specific technologies and their effects. One of the most notable, but easily ignored, aspects of IVF, for example, is that in the case of male factor infertility, it becomes a form of treatment by proxy, where a healthy woman undergoes substantial medical intervention to address a disorder in her male partner. More recently, IVF has also become the route by which “spare” embryos are procured for research purposes, and the Medical Research Council has recently announced plans to set up a stem cell research bank which will supply researchers working on treatments for diseases such as Parkinson’s and Alzheimers. Once again, the female body, through IVF, is being utilised for the treatment of others, and while this is clearly a far more complex issue than I am able to do justice to here, I would caution that it is essential not to lose sight of these particular, and often pernicious, aspects of specific medical technologies in the process of the important project of drawing links between technologies.

However, from the specific perspective of the study of counter-narratives, a study of discursive strategies of resistance across different medical technologies would offer valuable insights into both contexts, both in terms of the points of overlap and of diversion. This revisiting of particular pieces of analysis from a new perspective invites precisely the kind of multiple analytical sweeps, which were discussed in the previous section, but in addition, a study of this kind would in itself constitute a challenging counter-narrative to the discursive boundaries within which particular technologies come to be defined.

Conclusion

My initial reading of the three commentaries was a disconcerting experience. This is not to suggest that I experienced them as anything other than engaged and productive, but rather, that I was taken aback by the unanticipated production of myself, through academic convention, as the authoritative authorial voice of “Throsby”. This was the first opportunity I have had to see myself referred to in an academic text, but aside from the simple novelty of the moment, the transformation of myself into the unfamiliar identity of “Throsby” brought home the power relations of academic writing more emphatically than any of my careful reading or thinking on these issues. The authorial voice which the rhetorical move of “Throsby” produces bestows on the original article an authority which belies the necessary tentativeness of all interpretation, or indeed, my own uncertainties, and this is exacerbated by the way in which a published piece of written work becomes a fixed and final product – an effect which mediates against a methodological commitment which resists closure. A textual conversation of the kind that has been engaged in here constitutes an interesting attempt to divert the conventional and linear passage of academic research from process to final product, and as such, constitutes an act of gentle resistance in its own right – an appropriate point upon which to end this response, but hopefully without ending the conversation.

References

- Benhabib, S. (1995). Feminism and postmodernism. In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, & N. Fraser (Eds.), *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange* (pp. 17–34). New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1995). Contingent foundations. In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, & N. Fraser (Eds.), *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange* (pp. 35–58). New York: Routledge.
- Crossley, M. (2000). *Rethinking health psychology*. Buckinghamshire, England: Open University Press.
- Davis, K. (1995). *Reshaping the female body: The dilemma of cosmetic surgery*. New York: Routledge.
- Frank, A. W. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness and ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gill, R. (1995). Relativism, reflexivity and politics: Interrogating discourse analysis from a feminist perspective. In S. Wilkinson & C. Kitzinger (Eds.), *Feminism and discourse* (pp. 165–186). London: Sage.

- Gilman, S. L. (1999). *Making the body beautiful: A cultural history of aesthetic surgery*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs and women. The reinvention of nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Jacobson, N. (2000). *Cleavage: Technology, controversy and the ironies of the man-made breast*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews. An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage.
- Maynard, M., & Purvis, J. (Eds.). (1995). *Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms. In H. Roberts (Ed.), *Doing feminist research* (pp. 30–61). London: Routledge.
- Rapp, R. (1999). *Testing women, testing the foetus: The social impact of amniocentesis in America*. New York: Routledge.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. London: Sage.
- Stacey, J. (1997). *Teratologies: A cultural study of cancer*. London: Routledge.
- Throsby, K. (2002). *"Calling it A day": The decision to end IVF treatment*. Unpublished thesis. Gender Institute, London School of Economics, University of London.
- Wilkinson, S., & Kitzinger, C. (Eds.). (1996). *Representing the other: A feminism and psychology reader*. London: Sage.
- Winston, R. (1999). *The IVF revolution: The definitive guide to assisted reproductive techniques*. London: Vermilion.
- Woollet, A. (1996). Infertility: From "inside/out" to "outside/in". *Feminism and Psychology*, 6 (1), 474–478.

Photographic visions and narrative inquiry

Barbara Harrison

School of Social Sciences, University of East London

This article examines the ways in which photographic images can be used in narrative inquiry. After introducing the renewed interest in visual methodology the first section examines the ways in which researchers have utilised the camera or photographic images in research studies that are broadly similar to forms of narrative inquiry such as auto/biography, photographic journals, video diaries and photo-voice. It then draws on the published literature in relation to the author's own empirical research into *everyday* photography. Here the extent to which the practices which are part of everyday photography can be seen as forms of *story-telling* and provide access to both narratives and counter-narratives, are explored. Ideas about memory and identity construction are considered. A critical area of argument centres on the relationship of images to other texts, and asks whether it is possible for photographs to narrate independent of written or oral word. It concludes with some remarks about how photographs can be used in research and as a resource for narrative inquiry. This necessitates a understanding of what it is people do with photographs in everyday life.

Until the turn of the new century any trawl through textbooks of research methodology, especially qualitative or ethnographic texts, revealed either an absence or minimal discussion of what might be called visual methodology. As Prosser (1998b) has noted, even where the existence of such approaches is acknowledged there has been a tendency to emphasise its problematic and complex nature rather than to stress any positive contribution to research. Other writers have drawn attention to the tradition within the social sciences of privileging the written word, neglecting the possibilities of the visual record or failing to acknowledge the importance of visual skills to research practice (Chaplin 1994; Harper 1996, 1998a). Visual methodologies can be used to describe any research design that uses any kind of visual evidence, whether produced by researchers or not. In some cases the visual data is simply an adjunct to other

more traditional methods of data collection such as the interview or ethnographic field work, in others it is the means by which we access data about other phenomena. In only a few instances is the visual the data in its own right. The use of cameras and photographic images, while the most widely used, constitute only some of the available visual methods or data, but it is on this that this paper concentrates. Despite the relative neglect of visual methodology in the past, there are now numerous texts focusing on the analysis of the visual (such as Evans & Hall 1999; Hall 1997; Rose 2001) and on visual methodology (for example, Banks 2001; Emmison & Smith 2000; Pink 2001; Prosser 1998a). However, few of these specifically address the area of narrative inquiry and so this paper aims to contribute further to these general evaluations by considering how the visual can be used in forms of narrative research.

The paper consists of three main sections: first, some general considerations about visual methodology; second, it moves onto an examination of the way researchers have used visual sources and methods in forms of autobiographical or narrative inquiry. In the next main section, using published literature of relevance to everyday photography alongside data from my own recent field work on everyday photography and photographs in people's lives, I will reflect upon the issues that arise for ideas of story-telling, narrative, memory and experience. In doing so it will briefly address the possibility of counter-narratives. A conclusion brings these three strands together.

Preliminary considerations for visual approaches to narrative inquiry

It is possible to argue that most research studies to date where either visual images and/or visual technologies have been deployed in some capacity, a transposition into words has been a necessary element in distinguishing the topic of study from the forms of analysis of it (Chaplin 1994). This has been mainly because cameras or images have been used as a resource for, rather than the topic of, study. This distinction has its origins in ethnomethodological studies of language, where the idea of resource is the means by which we access data about our topic of interest. In this sense forms of narrative inquiry are a resource for analysing a wide range of phenomena, as this volume of the journal exemplifies. In such cases language will be the principal means of interpretation and analysis as well as reporting. In ethnomethodology the idea of topic referred to taking language as a topic of study in its own right. Much of the subsequent critical evaluation of language-based methods in the social sciences rested on some of the issues such an approach to language raised (for example Cicourel

1954; Silverman 1997). Equally, narrative researchers have subject their use of narratives to scrutiny in terms of the nature of narrative interviews; forms of story telling and the relationship of the told to the lived life to give some examples (see also Josselson & Liebich 1993; Wengraf 2001). It can be the narrative itself that is the topic of investigation. This distinction informs the material and argument presented here. We can show how camera technologies and visual evidence can be used as a resource for narrative enquiry, but equally to evaluate such a resource an analysis of photography, in this case in terms of its everyday production and uses is necessary. If we wish to use the visual within narrative inquiry we must examine if, and to what extent, the visual can be used to construct narratives, the relationship to or dependence on written or verbal narration, and the ways in which visual narratives can provide us with data on experience. These questions are addressed in the latter part this paper.

In considering methodological uses of the visual, Banks (1995, p. 1) makes a three-fold distinction between visual records produced by the investigator, those produced by the researched, and the study of “representations whether pre-existing or produced”, although he rightly points out “such distinctions have begun to collapse”. This is particularly so where investigators are developing collaborative projects, which subvert distinctions between producers and consumers of images (see e.g., Cohen 1990). Also, any evaluation of images solely in terms of production will miss important uses for pre-existing images. Visual images, especially the photograph, can be used in narrative research within all of the above frameworks. The key question to be addressed later in this paper is whether photographs as a form of representation are capable of narration in their own right, or whether the narration can only be elicited through the image as some form of *trigger*.

Whether or not we are using the visual as topic or resource within narrative inquiry, the researcher must consider the appropriateness of the visual to the theoretical assumptions and the research questions they set themselves at the outset. What then would the justification be for considering some privileging of visual production and visual evidence? This is quite different to some early uses of photography in the social sciences such as those within early sociology where photographs were used to document or illustrate ‘social problems’ (Prosser 1998b; Stasz 1979) or as in anthropology as ‘visual specimens’ enabling detailed anthropometric measurement and classifications of human types (Green 1984). It might be necessary to ask, for example, can the phenomena I am interested in be photographed or can photographs provide data about particular experiences or socio/cultural phenomena? In this context, questions of narrative picturing or picturing the narrative need resolution. In addition

to the relationship of the visual data to the oral or written text, there is the question of the extent to which the visual is a different cultural form of narration, and what does it narrate? Do visual images possess the same structural elements we associate with traditional oral and written forms of storytelling and/or does it have genres of its own? These are both theoretical and empirical questions which require reflection if not resolution.

A second consideration is the importance of understanding how the visual “works”. Within cultural and sociological analyses of the visual, such an understanding has thus far concentrated on readings of varieties of visual representations or discourses. Such textual analyses are also important to an understanding of what visual texts might be doing; but these can be different from what people in their everyday lives do with images; how they interpret, give meaning to or use them. Let me illustrate this point briefly by reference to everyday snapshot photography here. We might consider that family albums, or researcher-generated visual diaries offer valuable data about personal lives and experiences, forms of subjective understanding and identity construction. As Bourdieu (1990) has pointed out, everyday photography is a socially designated and highly regulated practice. This includes both the production of imagery and its consumption (Harrison 1999). Uses we might want to make of such imagery in research will require an understanding of such contexts and practices. Thus, Schwartz (1989, pp. 120–121) has argued:

... viewing photographic imagery is a patterned social activity shaped by social contexts, cultural conventions and group norms. In order to present photographs to informants for the purposes of photo-elicitation, some fore-knowledge of the respondent group’s use of photographs is required.

The conventionality of photographic practice will mean that both existing and elicited photographic records will encompass only some social occasions, particular people and places and they will be framed or composed drawing on some aesthetic principles. If we wish to ask respondents to produce a visual diary or journal we need to be aware that some phenomena fall outside what is typically a subject for everyday photography. However, it may also be the case that what the photograph is about, does not necessarily restrict what can be talked about. For example, one researcher (Winckler 2002) has used a variety of techniques within a study of immigrant women’s experience and identity in Toronto, Ontario. One technique involved asking respondents to choose ten photographs to explain their life. She found photographs triggered stories, mapping and looking around and remembering streets and signs of their new home. Often stories would take off from the original photograph, ending

up somewhere completely different from the starting point. Different aspects of an image did the triggering; it might be people, it might be the setting, or remembering a feeling or emotion. In another study she found the absence of an image was important for eliciting a story. These examples suggest that the topics with which everyday photography engages may not necessarily place restrictions on their use in eliciting data for narrative inquiry.

Finally, in addition to a theoretical and empirical understanding of the production and use of visual imagery, it is important to consider the role that technologies of visual production might play. Technological developments have been a crucial determinant of the kinds of imagery, the amount of it that has become available at particular times, and the kinds of skills required. In photography these technologies range from the most simple instamatic cameras (aim and shoot models, and throw away – where loading and unloading is not even required) to more complex SLR still cameras and varieties of audio/video and film recording. Such technologies are familiar and commonly used (increasingly so in the case of video). At the turn of the century it has been estimated that over 3 billion photographs are taken by people in the UK in a year.¹ The idea that photography has a cultural currency, as well as the simplicity of camera technology, the assumption “that anyone can do it”, has led researchers to opt for visual methodologies in their work. As Prosser and Schwartz (1998, p. 121) typically illustrate: “Because photography is a popular hobby and photographs pervade western industrial societies, our subjects are likely to be familiar with both making and viewing images”. Important for any researcher using camera technologies is the adage that “it is not cameras but people who take pictures”, even though the idea of a visual record sometimes involves an assumption that it can provide a picture of “reality”. In addition to camera and processing technology, new possibilities for the storage, analysis and presentation of images and text, are available through CD rom technology, forms of multi-media software and digital manipulation. This opens up further questions in relation to access to resources and the development of skills for researchers and possibly participants alike (see Henley 1998). These are questions of access, of how new technologies are used in relation to domestic photography, as well as what we can do with manipulated images. The storage and permanence or otherwise raise questions about the nature of visual archives and their relation to life histories and narratives in the future.

Auto/biographical and narrative uses of visual images

In this section I want to briefly review some examples of studies in the published literature which have used some form of visual methodology. This then provides a backdrop for returning to some broader questions about the role the visual can play in narrative inquiry.

Asking respondents to interpret images of themselves and/or others and of places/spaces or things, elicits processes of making sense: of meanings assigned. It is not necessary for images to be self-generated for visual materials to be read hermeneutically as texts. Our interest in a painting, drawing or photograph is not necessarily with accessing the producer's world of meaning but that of the audience. It is much more about "ways of seeing" to borrow Berger's (1972) phrase. Some authors, such as Barthes (1981) for example, would argue that the symbolic form of photographs (or indeed other imagery) invites the speaking about the experience of others. There have been studies which have sought to ask what people see in pictures as a means of accessing experience and to study personal orientations. Produced images can be used in conjunction with in-depth interviews or ethnographic field work as eliciting techniques, what is referred to in some texts as photo-elicitation. It is the reflexivity between image and verbalisation that produces the data for the investigator. As Winckler's (2002) research described above indicated, what emerges from such reflexivity can be diverse. In some respects the use of the visual is purely a technical means to an end, that is the generation of verbal data for analysis. In others it may become part of the data and have a relationship to both verbal data and eventual text, in the same way that labels or captions direct us to read the images in particular ways.

A number of drawing, painting and photographic projects have aimed to use self-generated imagery to symbolise and make visible aspects of the self in social and physical environments. Ziller (1990), a pioneer of this approach in psychology, describes this kind of work as photobiography. Participants are encouraged to use the camera in order to address fundamental questions of identity – who am I? Users of such techniques further argue that photographs "facilitate a discussion of unfamiliar and unknown aspects of human experience" (Hagedorn 1994, p. 44). In what she describes as a hermeneutic photographic study, Hagedorn (1994) asked eight families to take photographs of their experience of caring for a child with chronic illness. These, she argues, provided symbols of experience that represented the meaning of that experience, and prompted "spontaneous story telling" (p. 48). However, the photographs did not stand alone as the story but were used in relation to interviews where fur-

ther reflection and interpretation of the images occurred. As with other uses of photo-elicitation the images provided a further opportunity for participants to reveal meaning about an experience. This approach may be the most practical one for researchers, but it can raise issues about the presumed integrity of the generated images, and the relation of personal and researcher interpretations to them. It suggests that the story may not lie in the image *per se*. On the other hand, if images work in this way then this is not just a practical means to an end but is theoretically justified.

The involvement of research participants in producing their own imagery as a form of data collection has had a longer history within anthropological or ethnographic field work, and this idea of an indigenous media continues to be used in a number of contexts. Rich and Chalfen (1998) utilised this method in what they call "Video Intervention Assessment" (VIA) where children and adolescents who shared the medical condition of asthma were asked to create visual narratives using video cameras. The emphasis was on all aspects of their social worlds and life experiences. The participants were asked to "teach us about your asthma". The study drew on the tradition of personal narratives, the telling of a story, and this was a story in words and pictures, with words also spoken into and in front of the camera. A further aspect of data collection was the use of video diaries. There was, however, a considerable degree of direction or researcher control over these visual productions: certain tasks were required to fulfil defined research objectives such as "tours of their homes", conducting interviews with family members and personal monologues. Participants were also interviewed about the research process and the authors argue that life circumstances, never captured before, were revealed by this method, and that for participants, the sense of being more active, of having some control over the research process also gave them greater control over their illness. This is similar to an approach that is called "photo-voice" (Wang, Ling, & Ling 1996). Forms of photo-voice with still cameras have involved research participants in producing and then analysing their images themselves or collaboratively with researchers. Community development projects, research on transitions and identity, have used such an approach. It can also provide for counter-narratives; of allowing for the probability that what people themselves regard as important in their lives and social or cultural worlds maybe different to how others may have viewed them. Thus within the UK disability movement photographers have sought to provide an alternative imagery to that in fundraising or charity posters to communicate a different view of what disability or 'being disabled' means (see for example, Hevey 1992).

A rather different approach to using photography to study personal orientations and personal worlds is one where the visual is not just a means of accessing personal worlds but, it is argued, visuality is itself a method by which social actors are in the social world. Thoutenhoofd's (1998) study uses photographs to explore Deaf² people's worlds, what he terms auto-photography. Here visual modalities and the resultant symbolism including language expression, lie at the core of forms of conduct and strategies utilised for successful participation within Deaf communities. The project used three kinds of photograph: those taken by the researcher, photographs by a group of hearing and non-hearing A-level students and, finally, images used in magazines aimed at the deaf audience. The data was analysed as photo stories as well as by content or textual analysis. The gains are he claims:

If we look sympathetically at the idea that the 'Deaf way' hinges on an ability to literally see its phenomena, we should be willing to bracket (or abandon altogether) verbally-based, or rather, literacy dependent research methods in favour of other forms of inquiry. (Thoutenhoofd 1998, p. 8)

Such an entreaty can be seen as relevant to other kinds of visual experience, including the way in which people relate to environments and to others within them.

The final approach I want to consider in this section is called "narrative picturing". This shares something with the approach to the study of Deaf worlds in that it takes as a starting point that people live in the world visually. A Norwegian researcher Stuhlmiller (1996) has argued that one way we synthesise and understand our world is by forms of mental picturing. Narratives of remembering then will involve elements of imagining and picturing or visualising. She suggests that components of sensory experience are lost when we transform that experience through language – so the aim is to tap into some pre-reflective or pre-language pictorial memory. Her technique involves asking people with their eyes closed to direct their thoughts inwards – to what is in "the mind's eye". This might be snapshot or sequential pictorial data. Sensory information is invoked, she argues, memories are narrated as here and now stories, but they can be painful and traumatic memories as well as pleasant ones so the technique should be used with caution. This approach shares something with a number of theoretical concerns and approaches to considering family and personal imagery where people re-picture or re-imagine the self and the past, including forms of photo-therapy (Hirsch 1997; Martin & Spence 1987).

These examples demonstrate that researchers who have worked within biographical and narrative approaches have considered the still photograph and

film to provide valuable data. In these examples there is a distinct view of the role the visual plays in those data. For many researchers the visual image tells them something. The photograph of the asthmatic girl with the cat which slept on her pillow, provided some evidence of what might be contributing to her asthma (and hence for them the value of the video in clinical terms also). But this use bears little relationship to our sociological interest in the story or narrative as about human experience – and it would seem that it could only do so in a limited way. For others, the image or images whether sequenced or not, are the basis for a dialogue, for the story to be elicited, but the experience is represented through the verbal interview or the video diary/journal – the latter simply providing a technology for the telling, its visibility side-lined. Only in the study of Deaf worlds and in the technique of *narrative picturing* was there a recognition that visual methods could be a means of understanding experiences that are essentially visual. These different uses then raise important questions about what we mean by visual narratives. Are photographs examples of such narratives; what other forms of narrative picturing might there be; and finally, does it matter whether or not visual images are utilised as a means or trigger to the story and cannot be treated as the story in their own right?

Studying ‘everyday’ photography: Photographs in people’s lives

I now turn to an analysis of everyday photography drawing on published literature and my own empirical data to discuss a number of issues of importance for visual narratives. First, I will briefly describe my field work to date, and then move onto a number of dimensions or themes within everyday photography.

Fieldwork

Thus far the fieldwork for this study has involved 44 semi-structured interviews (including four joint interviews) with an “accidental” sample. Respondents were approached in a number of settings: on the seafront of a town in the south of England; as they picked up or delivered film to a store photo-lab in an inner suburb of London; and by “snowballing” through a variety of colleagues and acquaintances. I did not exclude anyone who was willing to participate, and it is acknowledged that this may have led to certain biases within the sample, although the diversity that was obtained suggests this may not be a serious problem for my purposes. In the event I got a range from those who were only marginally interested or involved in taking or using photographs to

those who were enthusiasts, and included some who worked professionally in visual media, although the interview concentrated on personal photography and photographs.

Of the respondents 20 were male and 28 female and ages ranged from 7 to 75 and there are representatives from different ethnic groups as well as a range of incomes and occupations. All respondents were asked to read a letter that explained the project, gave assurances of anonymity and asked again whether they consented to the interview. In some cases I was also shown photographs and some respondents have agreed I may return to look at how they displayed their photographs within the home. The interviews were all transcribed for analysis.

What is *everyday* photography?

I have used the concept of 'everyday' in a similar sense to that of sociologists who talk about "everyday life" as actions, ideas and practices which are ordinary, lay, often taken-for-granted and routinised (see for example, Douglas 1971). Members of a particular culture or group will have some shared knowledge and understanding about these phenomena. Everyday photography can be more complex and diverse than this definition implies. The primary orientation of my data is ordinary people's consumption and production of photographic images in everyday life and throughout the life course; but there are different ways in which people participate in these processes. If we consider production, for example, everyday photography is distinguishable from professional photography where it is a means of livelihood/work, and/or part of art worlds, and will usually have involved some degree of training. In this context everyday photography is a kind of '*amateur*' photography. But 'amateur' is itself not necessarily just everyday either, and may share components of the "professional". Indeed some writers (for example, Slater 1991) argue amateur producers of images do have different levels of photographic skills and amateurs can have very different reasons for engaging in photographic practice at all. This diversity of practice has already emerged in my own field work.

In terms of consumption the concept of everyday photography reveals similar complexities. We might commonly think of photographs that are seen in forms of domestic display and family albums, as forms of personal and even private archives but they may also serve purposes beyond this domain with more public audiences. Certainly the archiving of family photographs, as Holland (1991, p. 1) points out is "an act of faith in the future" and looking back becomes "an act of recognition of the past": thus there is the idea that pho-

tographs will have audiences beyond the present. This form of record keeping or archiving is something many of my respondents saw as a responsibility. There are those who have a role in mediating the circulation of images across a Diaspora, while others ensure that photographs are stored and labeled for a later generation, while some parents had commenced building albums of their children for their children. Amateur and professional image production, in the sense I outlined it above are also important aspects of everyday consumption. In fact, within people's everyday lives a variety of images are consumed, and there is a specific place, normatively defined, for formally constructed and professional productions in a variety of social contexts such as graduations, weddings, school images and yearbooks. These professional images are certainly part of domestic displays and family albums. Some of my sample also kept photographs of celebrities, postcards and particular images from newspapers and magazines.

The data from my research and that of others demonstrates my claim about the importance of understanding the changing aspects of camera technologies. A number of aspects will be emphasised here. First, the early history of photographic practice in knowledge production, and the underlying premise of much documentary photography, has privileged the camera with a form of objective observation, a realism that follows from depiction as a consequence of a mechanical rather than human process. While such an epistemological privileging of camera technology has been questioned (Becker 1979) and clearly rejected in ideas of narration and representation that construct particular realities, there are elements of this idea which continue to feature in social understandings of, and personal orientations to, photographic imagery. A holiday photograph can provide some evidential support to the narrated story of the holiday, to particular qualities and experiences; the "I was here" element of holiday photographs. My data suggest also that it is precisely this element of the instant depiction, the capturing of a "moment" that figures strongly in people's evaluation of the photograph as respondents illustrated. "Sometimes they work because you catch a moment" or they "capture an unexpected expression or movement" and "I think everything is suitable for a photograph you know. It catches the moment doesn't it? It does ... there's some things that a camera just catches and it just stays there". Sontag (1978) has argued that the force of the photograph is that it keeps open to scrutiny instants which the normal flow of time immediately replaces but, unlike my respondents who value these "moments", Sontag (1978, p. 111) views the truths, which humanist theories propose can be derived from such decisive or significant moments as unable to meet the need for understanding. For her such understanding is an illusion.

We cannot look to the photograph to explain. But that, Hirsch (1997) suggests, is precisely what for some is needed, and for many of the respondents it was the “moment” that then required the narrative.

At the same time, a rejection of the idea that camera images reflect certain “truths” has provided a starting point for a perspective which argues that any meaning is derivable from a photographic image. Indeed the potential of the photographic image to produce multiple meanings has become a selling point used in a number of camera advertisements. The idea of the image as inviting a story from the viewer also emerged in the data. For example, one respondent describes one of their favorite photographs as follows:

It is a photo full of mystery. I think one could write a story about the photograph and that's what, that's what I think is a good photograph . . . people are looking out of the frame, they're not looking at each other, they're not relating to each other, they invite the viewer in and they invite the viewer to tell a story.

However, more often it is the idea of the viewer as producer that is linked to the ability of the photographic image to enable the “speaking about”. Another respondent suggested that “there is an emotional response to photographs, it's there because photography is as much about recording our life's emotionality as it is about recording something that happened”, implying a rejection of the simplistic model of reproduction for a different reason. As with Winkler's (2002) respondents, there is also a rejection here of Sontag's idea that photographs promote emotional detachment. Both these elements, relating to what “is in the photograph” suggest that there are possibilities for using visual images in narrative inquiry, but the particular nature of the photograph does require critical reflection.

A further element about the technology of photographic production concerns the extent to which everyday photographic practice rests not on what is reproduced by the camera, but on the ability to be the producer. Those features that make it possible for anyone to do photography, are important to people's experience of it in their everyday lives. In particular as Slater (1991) argues, any sense that one is either “doing photography” or that it has a conventional character is minimised.

Most fundamentally, the simplicity and the reliability achieved by making the photographic process invisible, also makes the practice of taking pictures transparent. If photography requires no thought to carry it out, then it can be taken for granted, unconsciously inserted into everyday social situations.

(Slater 1991, p. 54)

This then becomes an important element in considering the cultural and social aspects of everyday photography, and in using it for research purposes. It is the case that for many of the respondents the taking of photographs was often a taken-for-granted activity. They did not think about or plan the occasions or situations where they would have their cameras, while other respondents always took them everywhere, “never went out without them” or “kept them in their pocket”. This unconsciousness to which Slater refers can be overstated. There is equally evidence that respondents regret not having had their camera, or not recording times or events on camera, and where they are selective in what they think should be taken. If picture-taking was only a conventional and largely unconscious practice then it might be more difficult to use forms of photo-voice (that is researcher directed but self produced imagery) for research, but there is no evidence that this is the case.

I now turn to Bourdieu's (1990) idea of everyday photography as a socially regulated and conventional form of practice. Nearly all writers on forms of everyday photography have noted that in “western” societies most photographs are about the family and tourism. We might ask why is it that everyday photography is mainly about these topics? We should note that these two categories do encompass events and occasions which are predominantly of significance in family contexts, significant others (including pets), and not just tourism but holidays and leisure (the seaside, the garden, the trip to the stately home) and other forms of consumption. For the majority of my respondents, these were indeed the main topics of their photographic images, and thereby the occasions for camera use. Photographs are seen as attesting to important social relations, and in the case of holidays they can be considered symbolic realisations and testimony to people's encounters with the exotic, the other, those things that are in some sense not ordinary. In this sense, Bourdieu (1990, p. 36) talks about holiday photographs as transforming “places and moments into monuments to leisure, as the photograph is there to certify for ever, that one has had leisure and the leisure to photograph it”.

Bourdieu (1990) stresses that photography is only understandable through the regular social ways in which it is organised-in particular through its family function and its reflection of degrees of social integration and collective life. In this sense, then, the photograph solemnises climactic moments which reaffirm group unity, and they may in themselves become objects of regulated social exchange (e.g., the expected participation and purchase of group photographs-and also as my data suggest, photographs seem to be important aspects of a “gift relationship”).³ The core of Bourdieu's (1990, p. 25) argument is that “the need to take photographs can only be understood as a need for photographs”. It

is photographs which create events and occasions or moments. This is similar to the argument that is made about narratives: that narratives also create the events that are described and reflected upon. In this way narratives are said to create experience, although they are not reducible to experience. Photographs work in a similar way but, I suggest, within more socially regulated boundaries. Thus the social functions that allow photographs to exist defines their limits. So while everything is objectively photographable the amateur production of pictures draws on a well-defined, common range of subjects, as well as shared compositional structures or genres. Following Bourdieu's argument, takeable photographs are defined by implicit models of both photographic practice and the product, and such models reflect ontological choices about what is worthy to be captured, stored, communicated, shown and admired.

It is perhaps ironic that an essential characteristic of "everyday" photography, is that in the socially regulatory framework which defines what should be photographed, little is concerned with the everyday. On holiday we may photograph what is for others aspects of their everyday existence (often to their amusement – because they would not think of taking these pictures for themselves) a demonstration of the particularity of the tourist gaze. Rarely, however, do aspects of our own everyday lives become a focus for the camera. An interesting examples of this taken-for-granted aspect of photographs, is Jo Stanley's (1991) account of a community photographic project on women's work. For example, two of her respondents initially exclaimed: "Pictures of me? at work? Well I don't think so dear"; and "Well I have got plenty of me with the girls from work, but when we go out, but nothing in the factory, you know. Well you wouldn't, why bother?" (Stanley 1991, p. 60). The question thus arises as to whether these social boundaries of the image will also bound the possible narratives that they contain or can flow from them. In this sense, we need to consider that what individuals can narrate through their photographs or those of others, as being a culturally particular form that is conventional and contingent. But, as we have seen, what photographs trigger also opens up topics beyond this.

In addition, I would not want to exclude the possibility that there is resistance to ideas of what can or should be photographed in everyday contexts. For example, while many of my respondents identified death and funerals as not suitable occasions for photography, and grief as an emotion to be respected as private, at least two respondents were determined they would have photographic records when their grandparents died, and a further two had taken or possessed photographs of a relative's funeral. In talking about her father one described how:

... one of his friends took photographs of the coffin in the cathedral ... and she very kindly sent me a pair ... I've never spoken to my mother that I have them because she would just go ballistic. In her view that was completely out of order ... in my view I was grateful because it was very beautiful ...

Both the existence of resistant practice, and the possibility of narration beyond the content of the image itself, suggest that the conventionality of everyday photographic practice may place only minimal limits on the value of photographs to narrative inquiry.

Photographs, memory and narratives

Holland (1991, p. 1) argues that family albums reveal “many possible pasts”. Memory is interwoven with private fantasy and public history as viewers “make their own tracks” through an album. On each and every occasion it is viewed, the past itself will be reconstructed, and thus there are many pasts contained within it. This is also a consequence of the shifting position of the self and, as a viewer, new understandings can arise in the interrogation (not necessarily in an active way) of any image or image(s). It is important to emphasise that while the meaning of personal imagery such as that in family albums owes much to a positioning of the self in relation to memories of the past and in the present, such meanings will also be shaped by social meanings and by the public conventions that are part of their production. In this respect, the family album is noticeable for its particular constructions of what a family is and for the silences and absences of both people and topics as many analysts of family albums have pointed out (Hirsch 1997; Langford 2001; Spence 1986; Williamson 1984). Slater (1995, p. 129) argues that we can see family albums as an “existential relation between photographs and memory which folds individual and collective identities into familial narrative time”.

There is, as in discussions about narrative generally, a problematic relationship between memory and identity in storied representations. This is the case for the photograph also. The idea of memory was an important aspect in many of the respondents' idea of the photograph. Indeed, it might be argued, photographs were their memories. One Australian respondent related that she had her photographs in albums ready in case of the bush fire. After a bush fire, she said, “you've lost your home, the family, your pets are safe, but you've lost your photographs; it's very traumatic for people to lose all their memories”. You thus take your family, pets and photographs in that order. Others saw photographs

as some kind of trigger to memory. Such processes of remembering could be pleasant or painful (for some “they could not bear to look”), despite the conventions of photographs mainly representing happy occasions such occasions can later be reconstructed as sad or painful. One respondent who spent a year living in the USA as a young woman describes her rejection of photographs from this time:

But somehow I rejected the whole experience . . . all kinds of personal reasons, and I put them in a bottom drawer and I could never face them again. And two years ago when I felt I had to find something in my past and come to terms with it, I did it (put in album).

Respondents spoke of reminiscing over photographs, or using them to “refresh their memories”. As one said “I always look back on photographs, yeah, even like when I’m at home . . . yes it gives you something to remember”. What might be remembered is indicated in this account from another respondent:

There’s this great photo of me and a friend outside of a cathedral somewhere, we were in France and, you know, we’re kind of small and we’re in the middle of the frame and we’re just surrounded by space and behind it is the cathedral and it’s a fantastic photo. It captures, ‘cos there was this big square at the front of the cathedral and I know I was there, so I can conjure up the memory, but it was kind of mid-afternoon and it was cool in the shadow of the cathedral and I see the photo and the photo takes me back to physicality of the place . . .

The data also reveal the experience of loss in relation to images and this was also often associated with loss of memories even if the person themselves could not have remembered them. Sometimes this was in a literal sense in that having existed they had gone missing, for others it was because they had not thought to record their lives photographically at particular times, and in others the loss was a link between the photographic record to other records. Thus the construction of the record or archive is based on histories which are still important in the present. One respondent provides an illustration:

So there’s this photo, which clearly meant something to my grandmother, four people in it, you know whatever and its gone now. Nobody knows who these people are or where it was taken or why it was taken . . . I was mortified that this treasure of memories, this, you know this way of stapling memories down, of holding them, you know, only worked if you matched up the information to the image and now the source of the information was gone, the images are rendered speechless I guess . . . And that’s why I have started to do all this . . . of getting from my mother all her old photos and sticking them in photo albums and then sitting down with her and saying ‘who’s this,’ ‘who’s that’ and ‘where was it taken why was it taken?’

As with memory, photographs function to anchor our present selves with the past, but they are essentially, as Krauceur (1993) has described it, accumulations of “scraps”. The photograph is a reference to past associations, and they go beyond what is in that representation. It is under or beyond the photograph that the person’s story lies buried. Such fragments though allow for a construction and reconstruction of biographical narratives, a piecing together and re-ordering of “moments”. Berger & Mohr (1982) describe this isolation of momentary appearances as an example of the disembedding or dislocating processes of capitalist modernity. What can rescue the photograph from this, he argues, is utilising narrative, “a way of seeing which requires a re-assembling of the contexts of experience in which the photograph is embedded, the continuity from which it was taken” (Berger & Mohr 1982, p. 107). It is a context, however, that is constructed by words together with other photographs. What is absent must be conjured up. Photographs, are, he suggests meaningless in themselves, it is events outside the frame which gives them meaning – they only provide an outline of the story. In Michael Poliakoff’s drama film *Shooting the Past*, the head of a threatened photographic archive tries to persuade the building’s buyer of the value of photographs it contains. She takes a portfolio of photographs; they are of Lily, a Jewish child in Nazi Germany, and a “story” is woven from an ordered series of images that “tell what happened to her”. But this reminds us of how photographs are but material traces; they do not tell Lily’s story, nor do they tell us “what happened”. The spaces are filled, they invite us to imagine, to construct a narrative and they may hint at relationships and contexts. But they are otherwise silent. In Poliakoff’s more recent *Perfect Strangers* an image of one of the characters in a cavalier suit on a staircase becomes the vehicle for exploring the self and past in a network of familial relationships. It is a photograph he cannot remember being taken, yet the resolution of its origins and context, and why it has been kept and displayed is fundamental to a form of self-understanding, but it is not the image which gives up this history or story.

Individuals will at any particular time occupy a certain kind of relationship to production processes and to any image or set of images. Meanings of photographs will change, and the processes of memory, history making, narration and self-actualisation, are ongoing features of the personal and social relations people have with photographs as Hirsch (1997) demonstrates in her detailed examination of family images. What is also important, as work for example, by Barthes (1981) and Walkerdine (1985) demonstrate is that everyday photography and personal/familial images provide for explorations of relationships to

and with others, sometimes beyond the image, beyond the material trace of the photograph. In recognising this the importance of the narrative as spoken or written once again surfaces. As Hirsch (1997) says of Barthes' finding and reading of the "winter-garden" photograph of his mother in *Camera Lucida*:

If Barthes can recognise his mother's essential being in the winter-garden picture of her, it is only possible through the description and narrative in which he articulates his response to her image. In his book, his mother's picture exists only in the words he uses to describe it and his reaction to it: the image has been transformed and translated into a "prose picture" ... (Hirsch 1997, p. 3)

Thus it would seem that for individuals and for researchers, photographs provide a basis for narrative work; there are stories about photographs, and there are stories that lie behind them and between them. For people in everyday life one use of these visual fragments other than to refreshen or preserve their memories, has been to illustrate their life, to provide a way of communicating who they are and where they have come from. At least two respondents used their photographs in the process of forming new relationships:

I use my photo album to tell and illustrate my life story to B. I've traveled and lived in lots of different places and had different careers, so the photos were really important to me as a way to tell him about myself.

When I met my husband the first time, when we came home, he went through the album and I went to get a couple of beers and something to eat, and he was going through the album, and you know we would just talk about it ... I found that it made it quite comfy, it broke the ice ... He'd opened up so many doorways to my life you know and then he shared a bit about himself.

Photographs and memories reference experiences whose relevance shifts through time. Narration is an important means by which these are rescued from oblivion and from the unconscious. In the everyday and essentially more private production and consumption of the photographic image it is possible to see that its viewing remains tied to social relations and cultural contexts which originally gave rise to it. In this sense, as Berger & Mohr (1982) again noted, private photographs are always of something that one has known. The reconstitution of the continuities from these selected traces anchor biographies in collective experience, a making sense of what happened in people's lives.

Despite the emphasis here on the visual image as a material trace of a larger and even different story or experience, there are still those who will claim that photographs may narrate in themselves without recourse to words. Bell Hooks (1995, p. 64) provides us with an illustration of how photographs can be texts

without words and can be used in recouping memories and exploring who we are:

Drawing from the past, from those walls of images I grew up with, I gather snapshots and lay them out to see what narratives the images tell, what they say without words. Together a black male friend and I lay out the snapshots of his boyhood, to see when he began to lose his openness, to discern at what age he began to shut down to close himself away. With these images he hopes to find a way back to the self he once was. We are awed by what our snapshots reveal, what they enable us to remember.

Whilst this kind of narrative picturing itself occurs through forms of display and storage especially albums; and may be re-used or created anew in other contexts to provide new and possibly counter-narratives rarely is everything given and explained by the image itself or any sequence of images. Photographs may narrate for the individual viewer, but what is remembered, felt or 'told' remains an essentially private and individual process. Photo-therapy illustrates both the idea of counter-narration and the private nature of photographic story. Photographs are taken and used for individuals to arrive at an understanding often by challenging the very conventions of photography in content and contexts for camera use, as, for example, in Jo Spence's (1986) photographs of her cancer 'treatments' and in her collaborative projects with Rosy Martin and Terry Dennett (Spence 1995) involving re-creations of childhood and family relationships quite different to ordinary family photographs. They would also serve quite different purposes for audiences other than themselves.

Finally, ideas of memory and narration need to consider the changing nature of photographic practice. Slater (1995) has suggested there are two significant developments in relation to domestic images in contemporary everyday life. The first is that those images that have a place in everyday life have become less bound up with memory or commemoration, but with forms of practice that are happening now. That is they are "a form of communication rather than a reflective representation". Second, self-presentation rather than self representation is more important in identity formation. A appropriate metaphor in this context, he suggests, is the pin board. Private images are combined with public ones, and perhaps other ephemera, in a shifting collage produced within the present (Slater 1995, pp. 138–139). In this context, there is both more temporal fluidity and less material permanence in domestic consumption of imagery.

There may be new kinds of conventionality such as these that we have to consider, although there are equally indications that the rise of digital media may be slow to replace the still and more permanent image. Only a few of

my respondents either had or were tempted by this medium or video more generally. In some cases there was a differentiated practice, where these were used for special occasions (especially where sound was also valued) or for “fun about the house”. It did not supplant the importance of the still image or the traditional forms of display that were used with them. Similarly, Chalfen (2001) has explored the viewing and use of video-tapes with a sample of American teenagers. Some of his respondents pointed to sound and motion as stopping you from thinking and as with some of my respondents, it was being able to share both a tangible and material object with others, and their importance to story-telling, that led to a rejection of video and digital media. It suggests that while video may be valued for its “how it was at the time” quality; that its ability to provide a vehicle for narration is more limited, particularly as these respondents intimate that you cannot look at it time and time again.

Conclusion

In this article we have seen that the marginal nature of visual methodology is being eroded. There is now a body of work where researchers have made use of cameras and photographic images as forms of data for their work. Within this work, which was not always explicitly within a tradition of narrative inquiry, it is possible to see the potential of these same techniques for narrative inquiry, that is, photo-elicitation, photographic and video diaries and journals and photo-voice. These research studies demonstrated that photographic images mainly functioned as a means to obtaining verbal or written narrative data, even when there was an attempt to make the visual dimension of social life or visual skills as the topic of study as in the research on Deaf worlds. Techniques of narrative picturing, whether by utilising “mental pictures” or by deliberately creating photographic stories of various kinds, still depend on verbal data to realise the meaning or experience that they contain. It is not that pictures cannot tell stories in themselves, or that viewers cannot be invited to “see” images in this way, but rather that for the social scientist we need to know what these stories or readings are. Photographic images may provide any viewer, including the producer of the image, with visual clues. It is for this reason, that the possibility of visual narratives must encompass the idea that other forms of narration are essential to the realisation of its context, its content and meaning. Its narration will provide us with an understanding of how it is such images do their “work” as a material part of people’s everyday lives.

This article had addressed the question of whether or not the conventionality of everyday image production and use, as well as the fragmentary or momentary nature of the still as well as moving photographic image, places limits on the possibility of narration, that is what people's stories will be about and for? It has argued that while that normative content is important in imagery, this does not restrict the possibilities of narration in the same way. It is evident that narration extends well beyond the content of the photographic image or images. It is as a trigger to 'telling' whether that is for oneself, in making sense of and remembering experiences past and present, or for others, including researchers. Even the absence of particular photographs can be the basis for exploring these aspects. In this way photography's potential for narrative inquiry is demonstrated. In the same way that taking photographs is an everyday practice, so too is narration connected with them.

An examination of everyday photography shows that it is this visual form and its relation to narrative that people are most familiar with and which most lends itself to inquiry. A final word from Sontag (1978) indicates that while there are limits to using photographic images they do not necessarily impede the ability of every picture to tell a story an ability that arises from what such material traces represent:

But the force of photographic images comes from their being material realities in their own right, richly informative deposits left in the wake of whatever emitted them, potent means for turning the tables on reality – for turning it into a shadow. Images are more real than anyone could have supposed.

(Sontag 1978, p. 180)

Photographic images have a material and symbolic significance that act as important vehicles of communication: communication that contributes to the fabric of social relations. Equally photographs are an important site for the embodiment of memory, as traces for working through a place for the self in the past and present. They are also a means by which people in everyday life can narrate experience, and in this way we can come to some understanding of what those experiences mean.

Notes

1. Source of this data is National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, Bradford, UK.
2. I have used the capital D here as does the author although he acknowledges the political debates around its use (see pp. 4–5).

3. For example respondents would often develop their films in duplicate and these would be shared around, and when events were shared by kin or friends there was an extent to which exchange of photographs was expected.

References

- Banks, M. (1995). Visual research methods. *Social Research Update* (No. 11). Guildford: University of Surrey.
- Banks, M. (2001). *Visual methods in social research*. London: Sage.
- Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera lucida*. New York: Noonday Press.
- Bauer, M. W., & Gaskell, G. (2000). *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound*. London: Sage.
- Becker, H. S. (1979). Do photographs tell the truth? In T. D. Cook & Reichart (Eds.), *Qualitative and quantitative methods in evaluation research* (pp. 99–117). London: Sage.
- Benjamin, W. (1970). *Illuminations* (H. Zohn, Trans.). London: Fontana.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: BBC/Penguin.
- Berger, J. (1997). Ways of remembering. In J. Evans (Ed.), *The camerawork essays: Context and meaning in photography* (pp. 38–51). London: River Oram Press. (Original work published 1978.)
- Berger, J., & Mohr, J. (1982). *Another way of telling*. London: Writers and Readers.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *Photography: A middle-brow art*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Chalfen, R. (2001). Family photograph appreciation: Dynamics of medium, interpretation and memory. Retrieved October 18th, 2001, from <http://www.temple.edu/~chalfen/Memory.html>
- Chaplin, E. (1994). *Sociology and visual representation*. London: Routledge.
- Cicourel, A. (1954). *Method and measurement in sociology*. New York: Free Press.
- Cohen, P. (1990). *Really useful knowledge: Photography and cultural studies in the transition from school to work*. London: Trentham Books.
- Douglas, J. D. (Ed.) (1971). *Understanding everyday life*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Emmison, M., & Smith, P. (2000). *Researching the visual: Images, objects, contexts and interactions in social and cultural inquiry*. London: Sage.
- Evans, J., & Hall, S. (Eds.) (1999). *Visual culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Green, D. (1984). Classified subjects. *Ten-8*, 14, 3–37.
- Hagedorn, M. (1994). Hermeneutic photography: An innovative aesthetic technique for generating data in nursing research. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 17 (1), 44–50.
- Hall, S. (Ed.) (1997). *Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage.
- Harper, D. (1996). Seeing sociology. *American Sociologist*, 57 (3), 69–78.
- Harper, D. (1998a). On the authority of the image: Visual methods at the cross roads. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative methods* (pp. 403–412). Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Harper, D. (1998b). An argument for visual sociology. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image based research* (pp. 24–41). London: Sage.

- Harrison, B. (1996). 'Every picture tells a story': Uses of the visual in sociological research. In E. S. Lyon & J. Busfield (Eds.), *Methodological imaginations* (pp. 75–95). London: Macmillan.
- Harrison, B. (1999, April). Snap Happy: Toward a sociology of everyday photography. Unpublished paper presented to the annual conference of British Sociological Association, University of Glasgow.
- Henley, P. (1998). Film making and ethnographic research. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image based research* (pp. 42–59). London: Sage.
- Hevey, D. (1992). *Creatures time forgot: Photography and disability imagery*. London: Routledge.
- Hirsch, M. (1997). *Family frames: Photography, narrative and postmemory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Holland, P. (1991). Introduction: History, memory and the family album. In J. Spence & P. Holland (Eds.), *Family snaps: The meaning of domestic photography* (pp. 1–14). London: Virago.
- Hooks, B. (1995). *Art on my mind: Visual politics*. New York: The New Press.
- Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (Eds.) (1993). *The narrative study of lives*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Langford, M. (2001). *Suspended conversations: The afterlife of memory in photograph albums*. Montreal/London: McGill University Press.
- Lister, M. (Ed.) (1995). *The photographic image in digital culture*. London: Routledge.
- Kracauer, S. (1993). Photography. *Critical Inquiry*, 19, 421–436. (Original work published 1927.)
- Martin, R., & Spence, J. (1987). The use of the camera in therapy. In R. Betterton (Ed.), *Looking on: Images of femininity in the visual arts and media* (pp. 267–279). London: Pandora.
- Pink, S. (2001). *Doing visual ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Prosser, J. (Ed.) (1998a). *Image based research*. London: Sage.
- Prosser, J. (1998b). The status of image based research. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image based research* (pp. 97–111). London: Sage.
- Prosser, J., & Schwartz, D. (1998). Photographs within the sociological research process. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image based research* (pp. 115–130). London: Sage.
- Rich, M., & Chalfen, R. (1998). Showing and telling asthma: Children teaching physicians with visual narrative. *Visual Sociology*, 14, 51–71.
- Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to interpreting visual objects*. London: Sage.
- Schwartz, D. (1989). Visual ethnography: Using photography in qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 12 (2), 119–154.
- Silverman, D. (Ed.) (1997). *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice*. London: Sage.
- Slater, D. (1991). Consuming Kodak. In J. Spence & P. Holland (Eds.), *Family snaps: The meaning of domestic photography* (pp. 49–59). London: Virago Press.
- Slater, D. (1995). Domestic photography and digital culture. In M. Lister (Ed.), *The photographic image in digital culture* (pp. 129–146). London: Routledge.
- Sontag, S. (1978). *On photography*. London: Penguin.
- Spence, J. (1986). *Putting myself in the picture*. London: Camden Press.
- Spence, J. (1995). *Cultural sniping*. London: Routledge.

- Stanley, J. (1991). 'Well who'd want an old picture of me at work?' In J. Spence & P. Holland (Eds.), *Family snaps: The meaning of domestic photography* (pp. 60–71). London: Virago Press.
- Stasz, C. (1979). The early history of visual sociology. In J. Wagner (Ed.), *Images of information: Still photography in the social sciences* (pp. 119–136). Beverley Hills: Sage.
- Stuhlmiller, C. M. (1996). Narrative picturing: Ushering experiential recall. *Nursing Inquiry*, 3, 183–184.
- Thoutenhoofd, E. (1998). Method in photographic enquiry of being deaf. *Sociological Research Online*, 3 (2). Retrieved 20th August, 2000, from <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/2/2/html>
- Walkerdine, V. (1985). Dreams from an ordinary childhood. In L. Heron (Ed.), *Truth, dare, or promise: Girls growing up in the fifties* (pp. 63–77). London: Virago.
- Wang, C., Ling, Y. Y., & Ling, F. M. (1996). Photo voice as a tool for participatory evaluation: The community's view of process and impact. *The Journal of Contemporary Health*, 4, 47–49.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing: Semi-structured, biographical and narrative methods*. London: Sage.
- Williamson, J. (1984). Family, education and photography. *Ten-8*, 19–22.
- Winckler, J. (2002). Personal communication.
- Ziller, R. (1990). *Photographing the self: Methods for observing personal orientations*. Newbury Park: Sage.

COMMENTARIES

Photographs and counter-narratives

Alexander Poddiakov

Faculty of Psychology, Moscow State University

The paper comments on Barbara Harrison's article, *Photographic Visions and Narrative Inquiry*, focusing on the analysis of relationships between narratives and counter-narratives. Following Harrison's claim that photographs have three main functions (preserving memories about the past, narrating and organizing everyday experiences, and communicating and building social relations), I discuss situations of social, interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict related to narrative and counter-narrative photographs. These are situations such as disputing possession of valuable narrative photographs and defacing and destroying counter-narrative photographs (as well as expressing hostility against their producers, possessors and users). The paper also describes the use of photographs to construct negative and positive narratives. (*Narrative, Counter-narrative, Conflict, Photographs*)

In the article, *Photographic Visions and Narrative Inquiry*, Barbara Harrison introduces three fundamental functions of photographic images. These functions are: (a) preserving memories about the past; (b) narrating and organizing everyday experiences; (c) communication and building social relations. According to the last function images are instruments for constructing (or, at least, influencing) the future. Analyzing distinctive features of photographs as narrating tools, she discusses multidimensional relations between the material and the symbolic in images. She places everyday actions with stills in the center of her discussion.

This special issue of *Narrative Inquiry* aims at exploring relationships between narratives and counter-narratives. It provides me with an opportunity to make a counterpoint to the picture drawn in Barbara Harrison's article. I will consider the issue of counter-narratives in detail and, in contrast with her article, will analyze *conflicting* situations that arise when people try to achieve these three main aims, i.e., to keep memories, narrate everyday experiences, and influence their future. How do people use photographs to defend their narratives

and counter-narratives? What do they do with photographs in everyday life, being participants not only of peaceful and friendly social interactions, but also of conflicts and counteractions? I will describe some aspects of negative and positive work with stills, both “bad” (i.e., counter-narrative) and “good” (i.e., very valuable for one’s narrative). I will show that when people work in positive and negative ways with stills, they also work with others, who produce, keep, and use narrative or counter-narrative stills. In particular, I will show that competition and struggle between narratives and counter-narratives include, besides producing narrative photographs and stimulating people who use them, also defacing and destroying counter-narrative photographs and controlling their producers, possessors and users.

The article consists of three sections. The first section discusses conflicts provoked by photographs that have clear and indubitable narrative value for participants. The second section describes the work with counter-narrative photographs and their keepers. The third section deals with the use of photographs to construct negative and positive narratives.

Conflicts provoked by valuable photographs

Let me mention some situations in which photographs have to be divided between several people and, after having been a shared possession, become the property of one of them. I mean situations such as family separation, departure of a grown-up child from parental home, or a death of a family member. If an original film is kept and if it is possible to make as many copies as one wishes, there are few reasons for a conflict. But if the film is lost or spoiled, or if a photograph is old and its value is in its age, this can cause conflict. (Even if copying of the image is technically possible, often, for the purpose of preserving memories, the copy is much less valuable. An original old still is a genuine object from the past that, besides carrying visual information about the past event, has a specific material texture and conveys the “spirit” of the past – something that in principle cannot be replicated.)

In many cases, the conflict provoked by the division of stills is related to concepts of self-identity, autobiographies, and the narratives of participants. A friend of mine told me the following story. When she was a very young girl, a professional artist had drawn her portrait. Both she and her mother loved this picture very much. When the daughter had grown up and was going to start an independent life and leave her parents’ house, her mother would not give her the portrait. This caused a conflict, because the portrait was an important

part of the autobiographies of both women. The conflict between them can be described in the words: "This portrait is a part of my autobiography rather than yours. It is important for me rather than for you." Similar situations arise around photographs. Who should keep or own a still that cannot be copied? (I refer here to psychological and, perhaps, moral, not legal grounds for ownership.) If the still is part of the autobiographies of several people, who has the greater need to preserve memories, support self-concepts, or build future relations with others?

Conflicts caused by the division of stills between several people can happen not only in such relatively unusual situations as a departure or a family separation, but also in everyday life. If you are given several stills of your friends and yourself, it can sometimes be difficult to divide the photographs between the persons interested in having them. For example, if two people both love a third person, of whom there is only one still, the conflict can be significant. Then it can become a matter of principle to keep the original photograph as opposed to a copy. To be given a copy by the rival would mean to lose the competition.

Another kind of conflict related to valuable photographs is about selecting stills to represent an important situation. Which photographs of your young daughter are worthy of sending to a magazine, or to an exhibition, or to grandparents? Which micro- and macro-narratives should be confirmed and illustrated by a photograph or photographs? Which stills would represent this narrative in the best way? If the result of the choice is considered of crucial importance for the future and for building relations with others, and if the participants in the choice-making situation defend contradictory narratives, it can cause a significant conflict, even in spite of their good will.

Interestingly, a conflict that might be provoked by dividing stills can be avoided if people's narratives are different. I have a photograph of one my first parties with alcoholic drinks. There was nothing indecent, participants were a bit relaxed, and nothing more. I can show this still to anybody, and looking at it gives me only positive emotions. Yet my mother does not express any wish to get this still for her album with photographs of me. My mother's criterion of approval differs from my own. Here, a lack of conflict is a matter of narratives contradicting each other at least in some aspects.

What can an authoritarian parent do with an awful, counter-narrative still taken by his or her child and with the child itself? For example, s/he can destroy the still and punish the child. This situation makes a transition to the next section of my comments.

Work with counter-narrative photographs and their possessors

Barbara Harrison analyzes production and consumption of photographs but she considers neither the work on destroying stills nor work with their producers and possessors. I believe the topic is worth attention.

One of the most obvious examples of work with stills, carried out on a mass scale, that aims at overthrowing a narrative dominant in the past was the effacing and painting over of photographs of politicians and military leaders in Soviet twentieth-century history textbooks. Several generations of these leaders were successively declared “enemies of the people,” repressed, flung into prisons and killed. After each wave of repression, schoolchildren had to spend hours in class effacing or painting over photographs of these people. It was a collective act of demonstration of devotion to Stalin and to a new generation of leaders, whom Stalin drove into the next wave of promotions and subsequent repression. The cycle of repression operated for at least a decade (to my knowledge, it was no longer the case after World War II), and such material and symbolic work with stills was an almost yearly practice.

In connection with the symbolic act of “editing” photographic images on a mass scale, many people destroyed photographs of their relatives and friends who had turned out to be “enemies of the people.” This had to be done secretly. Keeping these photographs was extremely dangerous because it looked like being loyal to “the enemies.” People also disposed of photographs of themselves if these stills showed that in the past they had belonged to the upper classes (e.g., if a person in the photograph was dressed in the uniform of a Tsarist army officer). Such a still could be sufficient reason for repression, imprisonment and/or the murder of the person. In this historical situation, a photograph as evidence from the past could create a point of bifurcation of the trajectory of a life, to the point of breakdown and death. So innumerable private photographic archives were destroyed by their owners. This mass work with stills did not serve to preserve memories about the past. Rather, it was something that functioned to save the future of these people and their children. There was a tragic contradiction between preserving memories and preserving life. As a result, old autobiographies and narratives were nearly forgotten.

Let me now address more ordinary aspects of the negative work with stills caused by interpersonal and/or inner personal conflicts.

From time to time, defacing and destroying photographs also take place in ordinary life. A person can deface or destroy stills in a demonstrative way in front of another person in order to express negative attitudes to both what

has happened and to the person and in order to end a relationship. (Wedding photographs torn into pieces are a good means to achieve this aim.)

In yet another situation, a person defaces or alters a photograph and deliberately makes the results publicly known, while trying to keep anonymous. From time to time this happens to photographs of junior army officers, teachers, politicians seeking election, and so on. Such facts can influence both the victim's sense of self-identity and his or her autobiographical narrative. It can also provide the offenders with narratives about themselves to tell to others.

It is dramatic if a person defaces or destroys his or her own photographs as a result of an inner conflict or self-rejection. Harrison describes a woman, who put her stills from the previous period of life in a bottom drawer but at the end, after having found in the past something worthwhile, returned them to the album. In other cases the person destroys, not hides, painful stills. An absence of photographs related to one or another period or to oneself or another person is a visible gap or a breakdown in the autobiography, a gap between conflicting narratives the person is trying to construct. Destroying the stills of oneself or another person, or cutting her or him out of the stills, can mean a breakdown described as something like: "You are out of my life now. My story will continue without you."

I have described above cases of destroying painful photographs in emotionally stressful situations. Yet, destruction takes place in ordinary situations as well. If one intends to show stills to one's wife- or husband-to-be and to her or his friends, and, at the end, to one's grandchildren, one hides or simply destroys the stills that are not proper to this aim. Destroying poor stills is an ordinary and inalienable part of work with photographs. It is a way to support and defend one's concept of self, one's autobiographical narrative, and one's current interactions with others.

Constructing negative and positive narratives with the help of photo-images

Barbara Harrison writes about phototherapy, which allows a person to re-picture and re-imagine the self and the past and to construct a new and positive narrative in opposition to the previous negative one. Such therapy can be considered as providing a positive counter-narrative. Elements of it can be found in everyday life, when a person skillful in photography takes photographs of someone whom he or she likes or loves. Even merely friendly and playful stills that show a person from an unexpected point of view can help this person

construct a positive counter-narrative (“You are a bit different from what you think about yourself”). Deliberate construction of negative counter-narratives is also possible. It concerns production and demonstration of photographs that diminish a person’s self-esteem and threaten his or her social contacts.

Both narratives and counter-narratives can be constructed not only by producing appropriate photographs but also by presenting them to spectators. For example, a teenage daughter of my friends has an interesting manner of showing her photographs from a summer camp. She gives somebody a number of her stills to look at, but from time to time she snatches one or two out of the spectator’s hands before he or she is able to see anything, saying: “You don’t need to see it”. The spectator is free to think anything he or she wishes. Such self-presentation can be aimed at provoking curiosity and making the spectator think that the person one is communicating with is intriguing and has more of him or her than meets the eye. (In case a still may reveal what one would like to keep secret, one may not show it at all.)

Conclusion

Photographic images (and related technologies) are most interesting and important artifacts of modern life. I have briefly considered a chain (or, more exactly, a net) that involves creating artifacts, using, keeping, and destroying them (including the shortest version, “creation–immediate destruction”) in situations of conflict between people, each of whom wishes to defend his or her own narrative and is struggling against another person’s counter-narrative and the person him- or herself.

Let me return now to the question that Barbara Harrison’s article raises, and which I repeated at the beginning of my comments. What do people do with photographs – or what do they do under the impact of photographs – in order to preserve memories, narrate everyday experiences, and influence their future? People produce photographs, show them to and hide them from one another and from themselves; they present them as proofs and falsify them, use them to help and to harm; and they deface and destroy them. Looking at stills makes people happy and unhappy, marry and kill, have children, and do many other important things, which become an integral part of their biographies and of the narratives they tell to other people. I entirely agree with Barbara Harrison that this happens because of the unique and marginal status of photographic images, which combine the material and objective with the subjective and symbolic (up to the monumentally symbolic); this happens in

the context of the great variety of people's interpretations of their relationships with each other. Photographic images constitute part of the everyday environment of human life and, at the same time, they are very important instruments of human activities. Perhaps their key significance and meaning is that photographic images are specific and powerful tools with which to construct, one after another, new narratives and new counter-narratives.

Acknowledgement

I am most grateful to Professor Roger Smith and Doctor Irina Sirotkina for their help with the English version of my text.

Hearing what is shown and seeing what is said

Richard Chalfen
Temple University

This commentary questions certain relationships between verbal and visual/pictorial expression, emphasizes that metaphors are hindering better research, and stresses the notion that pictures don't "say" anything – people do the work. Second, some material on picture-generated narrative is presented to illustrate the problematic notion of photographs triggering storytelling. (*Home media, Family photographs, Narrative, Metaphor, Storytelling*)

The following commentary contains two related sections: First, I have tried to supply few comments on Barbara Harrison's insightful article. And second, I have included a brief review of some parallel work on narrative associated with looking at family photograph albums. My sense is that this article finds a meaningful place within current thinking about home media and how images serve as both visual and social communication, a point discussed at the end.

I. I have been quite taken with Harrison's need to study how everyday production of visual materials "can be used as a resource for narrative enquiry." I say this because I, too, have been flirting with such ideas, but have done little publication on the specific topic of narrative. My interests have been in how the visual/pictorial and the verbal/spoken articulate with one another, but specif-

ically within home media, and how, in some cases, they suggest, provoke and possible contradict one another.

But I see a problem with one of Harrison's main questions: "... whether photographs as a form of representation are capable of narration in their own light, or whether the narration can only be elicited through the image as some form of 'trigger.'" Much, of course, depends on one's definition of narrative. But when verbalization is such a key feature, as in Harrison's article and perspective, we may be facing non-questions. Theoretically, pictures cannot verbally narrate anything. So we may be speaking of cognitive processes, not unlike what graphic artists have worked on when developing signage in international contexts, such as airports, Olympic competitions and other venues of mass transportation or in-person multi-cultural participation. But, in general, just as cameras do not take pictures (acknowledged by the author), we know that pictures don't "say" anything. Or, as Berger (1982, in Harrison) suggests: "photographs are meaningless in themselves." The quite correct implication is that people do the work, and they work from a baseline of thinking and experience (read: culture) that humans bring to the text, and their task of encoding and decoding.

Some of the non-question questions (or problems) raised by Harrison are the direct results of 'misplaced concreteness,' built on a false foundation established and maintained by the use of euphonically pleasant metaphoric expression. If someone says: "This is wonderful picture – it speaks to me in such profound ways," one might legitimately ask: "Oh? What does the picture say to you?" But the general response, to maintain a sense of harmony perhaps, is, "Yes, it says so much." Many examples of such playing-out-the-metaphor are heard every day. The problem I feel resides in the metaphoric use of "saying."

The fact also remains that a respondent may be hard pressed "to say what the picture says," that is, in words (or writing) but probably not by making another picture in response or commenting through body expression or even ESP. The metaphor presses speech or narrative into existence. One could respond (but never does): "I didn't hear that photograph – I must go back and listen again." Or, a less frequent and less legitimate reply might be: "Is the picture yelling or whispering?" or "What language is being spoken?" (maybe French for a Lartigue photograph or German for a Sander print or Japanese for a Hashiguchi portrait?) or "What is the tone – sarcastic, insulting, condescending?" As logical as these replies might be, these responses are not generally heard; speakers would be met with ridicule. But, they are not appropriate responses because the metaphor of "pictures speaking" is so well ingrained and uncritically accepted.

It may appear that I am treating narrative in either a too literal or silly manner. Such is not my intent. But by developing these admittedly extreme cases, I want to ask if we have to live by this metaphor? My sense is that Harrison would agree with this tact; I offer it to strengthen the case and to question the vernacular usage of this rhetoric so frequently heard in relation to pictorial communication. Does the vernacular presence of this metaphor throw us off track? Who is responsible for this discourse, channeling us further away from more meaningful enquiry? In short, agency is at issue. According pictures the power to narrate takes people 'out of the picture.' Such examples may, in fact, lie at the heart of the narrative struggle we have when trying to discuss the narrative of visual forms.¹

Second, accountability as attached to agency is also a problem. We feel comfortable thinking that images made in artistic contexts do express feelings, ideas, concepts and the like. This is acceptable. But the same can not be said for when the context is not art but science, social or otherwise. Here, legitimate questions of accountability come under pressure. Generally we do not ask our artists about methods – where they got their ideas or how they produced a particular image. This model of inquiry is, on the other hand, expected when appreciating social science – best known as methodological critiques. Thus we should not accept images generated as social science data for what they "say to us" – we must ask questions about methods and means of origin and production. Instead of asking: What are these visual texts doing/saying?, we should here be asking: What do we bring to these images in conjunction with what we are supposed to do with these visual texts (if anything)?"

A much more fruitful direction is suggested by Harrison, but which might be read as an afterthought since it comes so late in her article. In the last paragraph, we read: "Photographic images have a material and symbolic significance that act as important vehicles of communication; communication that contributes to the fabric of social relations." And Slater is earlier credited with placing domestic images into a communication context (see Chalfen, 1987 for a full-length treatment of this notion).

More to the point of this commentary is the feeling and statement that family photographs "trigger storytelling." Harrison notes: "It is evident that narration extends well beyond the content of the photographic image or images. It is as a 'trigger' to 'telling' whether that is for oneself, in making sense of and remembering experiences past and present, or for others, including researchers. . . . In this way photography's potential for narrative inquiry is demonstrated." Probably this sense of triggering story-telling conjures images of modern versions of oral traditions – from family members sitting around the campfire

learning the legends of the past and gaining wisdom from the elders. Unfortunately this phrase and stereotype may also lull us to sleep preventing a more complete examination of what is meant by one of Harrison's primary points of inquiry.

In reality, this notion of 'pictures triggering stories' begs many questions – but what do we know about the process and results of such "triggering"? "Triggering," though commonly accepted, may be another one of these trouble-causing metaphors. I mention this because clearly some pictures stimulate comments much more than others. Do all such family photographs do the same things to anyone (usually a family member) who takes the time to look? Does triggering always meet with success, as in hitting the appropriate target? Do all stories "take off" ending up somewhere completely different from the starting point? Indeed, various models of photo-elicitation are dependent on this notion, specifically that verbally rendered data will flow from subjects in anticipated and desired directions.

Second, with regard to "storytelling," I am immediately reminded of an advertising campaign used by Eastman Kodak in the mid-80s entitled: "Kodak – America's Storyteller." Aimed at the family photographer, there is a sense that as an American, you should be able to "tell" these stories about family members and family events – a child skiing during a family vacation, a child dressed for Easter, etc. More to the point, we should possess the requisite snapshot photographs to back up such claims. Would not having such pictorial evidence, or having less conforming pictures be one basis for counter-narratives? This might be grounds for questioning the validity of cultural membership and sense of belonging.

We might begin by asking what qualifies as a story when triggering occurs? Any utterance or some elaborated statement? What do these stories sound like? Are there conventionalized patterns or any distinctive characteristics about the narrative that is generated from such instances of photo-stimulation?

II. All of the foregoing points lead to the importance of gaining some first hand data from on-the-ground experience about what ordinary people say when looking at their personal pictures. Harrison suggests: "... the idea that other forms of narration are essential to the realization of its context, its content and meaning. Its narration will provide us with an understanding of how it is that such images do their 'work' as a material part of people's everyday lives." But how does this 'work' work? We may need to start with some less metaphorical understandings and more literal approaches to storytelling, narrative and social relations. It is here that I want to introduce briefly some

unpublished results of a project undertaken by Sam Pack and myself several years ago in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.²

The general context was the generation of verbal data for narrative analysis. We set out to understand better connections between storytelling and family photograph collections by witnessing what people say to each other while looking at album pictures, and, more importantly, how they say it. We wanted to approximate an “exhibition event” that is when two or more family members were looking at a photo album, but in front of participant-observer. The primary interest was neither the structure of the album nor individual photographs. Rather we sought the structure(s) of various modes of verbal response to seeing the images.

Several broad-based questions guided this task. Did any or all pictures generate storytelling? Did we hear “spontaneous storytelling” from a single source or was the narrative developed out of cooperation as in a dialectic pattern of conversations as a series of prompts or questions? What kind of flow was seen and heard? What alternative speech forms were noticed, e.g. joke-telling, story gossip, arguments, and other forms of interjection? In this sense we examined less what was said in favor of how it was said. What is accepted or granted the status of “a story?” What were appropriate reference points and replies as part of expected and accepted patterns of discourse? Was silence an expected, appreciated or inappropriate response? In short, we wanted to discover the simplicity or complexity of pictures-triggering storytelling.

Going one step further, we could ask if viewers’ narrative accompanying such home media manifest any sense of alternative readings? That is, do viewers have choices, to make referential or critical readings of mediated materials? Do viewers adopt the dominant reading – accepting the presumed and common meanings – or entertain oppositional or negotiated readings as suggested by Stuart Hall and other members of the Birmingham School? If so, is the latter the heart of counter narratives?

Pilot Project. As a start, we studied only three photograph-family settings. The quest for natural sources and settings, and the elicitation of on-going narrative remains problematic. But given a long period of observation, the general sense is that people get used to the observation and things happen on their own. Our preliminary findings indicate that, first, other “utterance types” surrounding photographic display fall short of what is satisfactorily understood (or conventionally considered) as a story. Second, the emergence of stories may be much less frequent than other kinds of verbal utterances.

First, we established “*narrative*” to mean any or all kinds of verbal utterance that occur from when photographs are first taken out for viewing to the time

they are put away. However, only some of this total narrative will be directly related to the photographs (eliminating talk about getting food or drink, where people should sit, needs to leave e.g. bathroom, and the like). Narrative related to the pictures can be minimally subdivided and categorized into the following three forms of utterance: identification, anecdote and story.

Identification involves establishing “markers” or information that answers one of more of the following: who (person), what (object), where (place, location), or when (time)? Examples include: “This is Johnny,” or “This is Johnny and his first tricycle,” or “Here is our first car,” or “This was taken during our visit to their house in Florida.”

Anecdote consists of an identification and an allusion to an incomplete situation, some kind or otherwise unresolved situation, often a problem or crisis of some sort. Something is left hanging; missing important information, completion or resolution, sometimes begging new information, possibly as answers in response to additional curiosity. Examples include: “This is Johnny – he was about to go into the hospital for his operation.” Or “This is our first house, just before we moved.”

Story includes an identification, an incomplete situation or explicit problem and a more complete sense of outcome or resolution – roughly comparable to a beginning, middle and an end. One example is: “This is Johnny just before he went to the hospital for his liver transplant. He had to wait a long time to find the right donor, but they finally found one. He’s doing much, much better since his operation.” “Here is Gran’ Dad’s first Model-T; his wife wanted to drive but she was not allowed. When he needed to go into town, she could not take him.”

An additional point is relevant to control of this scheme. Much, of course, depends on two factors: we have the interpersonal politics of symbolic forms, when as here, the person displaying the pictures may exert a sense of narrative control, as in, ‘my story or no story.’ And second, we must account for the informational state of the tellers and the listeners – which takes us to the other key variable, namely the difference between low-context and high-context communication. In most home media, we are observing high context material because all participants may, in fact know each other personally, or certainly know OF each other. In fact, the viewers might be the same people who are in the pictures, and they will know the picture-taker.

From this very preliminary work, we found Identification utterances to be the most frequent form of utterance, followed by Anecdote and Stories coming in a distant third. But one of the most important elements of our schema is

the dynamic nature of this discourse based on an on-going potential for switching from one narrative form to another.

Such transformations were aided by several kinds of “prods” that served as a catalyst to move the discourse from identification to anecdote and onto storytelling. One of the prods we heard was some form of negation comment, when a listener took issue with the shower’s identification or description. For example we might hear:

A . . . “And here’s our Marilyn, on Prom Night (pause). I think that’s Mike (standing with her), just before they broke up the following week. B . . .” What? No. You’re thinking of Ron. She stayed with Mike for over a year or so. They even planned to go to the same junior college together in Yeardley, I think. Then something went wrong – I think his parents divorced and his mother moved away and needed his help – so he left everything including Marilyn. A . . . “Are you sure because . . .” B . . . “Yes, I should know” (laughter).

From such examples we see how an Identification can be transformed into an Anecdote and subsequently, how a Story may emerge. In turn, our data also gives examples of potential counter narrative. Here is another important example of transformation – when a corrective commentary can evolve to an argumentative anecdote, implicitly to be resolved by a contested story.

One final point is reserved for relationships of counter narrative and related examples of home media. My sense is that there are dramatically few examples of counter narratives illustrated in the communication patterns central home media in general and family album imagery in particular. Few if any viewers will question the source of information regarding relationships of narratives and counter narratives because of shared and common understanding about “what’s going on” (high context) when people are shown family pictures, be they in albums, shown as 35mm slides, as 8mm or Super-8 home movies or now as videotape. As part of the sociability of photograph album exhibition, no one generally contests or offers opposing or “minority opinions.” The photographs comprising home-mediated communication seem to conform to dominant cultural narratives in a self-fulfilling manner. As images, they seem to offer few counter narratives. However counter narratives may emerge in the storytelling that sometimes accompanies the display of such pictorial materials to one or more people.

I have presented this material because we have so few accounts or examples of verbatim narrative (stories or otherwise) that accompany the showing of such pictures. We can only speculate on how narratives generated with such pictures generally conform and confirm culturally approved agendas dis-

played in the pictures. Harrison's article presents us with a good foundation for taking the next steps.

Notes

1. As a sidebar, and with regard to written narrative that may accompany personal photographs, as in annotation and search functions for personal photo libraries, readers might like to examine work on Personal Photo Libraries and software tools that enable easier organization (<http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/photolib/>). The practice of recording ambient sounds as well as voice annotations with still photographs through the use of an audiocamera has also been suggested (see Frohlich and Tallyn, (n.d.) at 6QZdmf@hplb.hpl.hp.com.) The authors state: "Audiophotography is enabled by digital cameras which have the potential to support the capture and combination of multiple media including sound, handwriting, text, and video."
2. Sam Pack is currently living in New Mexico while completing his dissertation on "Navajo Watching Television" for his doctorate in anthropology at Temple University.

References

- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin.
- Chalfen, R. (1987). *Snapshot versions of life*. Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press.
- Frohlich, D., & Tally, E. (n.d.). Audiophotography: Practice and prospects. Hewlett Packard Labs, Bristol, UK. (textitdmf@hplb.hpl.hp.com).

Show is tell

Michael Rich

Harvard Medical School/Harvard School of Public Health

Images as narrative or research data present rich information, but many problems. The central, and probably false, assumption that images must be translated into words to analyze or discuss them gives rise to a lack of clarity and cohesion that plagues visual research. To resolve these issues, visual researchers must clearly define the data and how they are to be analyzed, developing analytical methods that are standardized, rigorous, and, as much as possible, preserve the visual data in its original form. (*Visual research, Participant-created image, Video Intervention/Prevention Assessment (VIA), Scientific rigor, NVivo qualitative analysis software*)

“Photographic Visions and Narrative Inquiry,” Barbara Harrison’s examination of photographic imagery in narrative inquiry, provokes important questions and debates about the nature, value, and uses of images in research. As an investigator who developed and practices one of the research methods with which she illustrates her essay, my experience is both resonant and dissonant with her observations. Working with images as narrative data, I share her attraction to their richness of information, yet I am wary of reading too much into them and am often frustrated at the complexities that they present to the investigator who is trying to conduct thorough analysis in a rigorous and reproducible way.

During the early 1990s, when I was first developing Video Intervention/Prevention Assessment (VIA), [www.viaproject.org] a visual research method which uses patient-created visual illness narratives as its data (Rich, Lamola, Gordon, & Chalfen 2000; Rich, Lamola, Amory, & Schneider 2000), I surveyed previous uses of images as narrative research data. Unlike Harrison, I found a significant body of literature in a variety of fields, ranging from anthropology to photography, from psychology to education. It was clear that, from the earliest stages of machine-based image-making technology, there were storytellers and researchers who found that their work was better pursued using images rather than words. Many historians argue that Matthew Brady’s photographs of the American Civil War did far more than newspapers and historical texts to inform people, then and now, about the nature and dimensions of that conflict. Margaret Mead consciously used still photography in her exploration of Balinese culture (Bateson & Mead 1962). The ability to show and

tell stories with motion pictures was used by Thomas Edison and the Lumière brothers in the earliest stages of developing cinema technology. Not long after, that ethnographic filmmaker Robert Flaherty used film to explore the lives of Inuits (Flaherty 1922), Samoans (Flaherty 1926), and Irish fishermen (Flaherty 1934).

More recently, storytellers (Hubbard 1991, 1994) and researchers (Asch, Cardozo, Cabellero, & Bortoli 1991) have put image-recording technology in the hands of those whose stories are to be told or whose experiences are to be investigated. Perhaps the most intriguing of the pioneering explorations of participant-created imagery as narrative data was “The Navajo See Themselves” project, pursued in 1966 as a collaboration between an anthropologist, Sol Worth, and a filmmaker, Jon Adair (Worth & Adair 1972). With the assistance of their research coordinator, Richard Chalfen, they loaned 16mm film cameras to Navajo with little or no previous exposure to motion pictures. The Navajo participants were taught only the mechanical aspects of operating the camera and editing film, but no elements of filmmaking or visual style. Worth and Adair wanted to examine the films that were produced in much the way linguists study language to understand how a people see, synthesize, and make meaning out of the world in which they live. This conceptual stance and visual method were parallel to that which I developed in VIA, where I sought to examine the experience of illness from the patient’s perspective, from the inside out. In the physician-centered world of medicine, where disease is studied from the outside in, this perspective was unnerving and revolutionary. Imagine asking patients to teach doctors about their experiences and needs! After I had struggled for several years with VIA, particularly with some of the issues presented by images as data, I sought out these researchers to see if their experience and insight could enrich the process of collecting and analyzing the visual illness narratives created by children. Only Richard Chalfen was still working in this field; at the time, he was completing work on the second edition of the book about the Navajo project, *Through Navajo Eyes* (Worth & Adair 1997). When I showed him the VIA visual narratives, he resonated strongly with them, finding that they extended the visual research that he had explored with the Navajo and subsequent projects (Chalfen 1981) into practical application. As a result, Chalfen has become not only a mentor, but a colleague and co-author (Rich & Chalfen 1999; Rich, Lamola, Gordon, & Chalfen 2000; Rich, Taylor, & Chalfen 2000). While Chalfen has also analyzed family snapshots as research data and he speaks to that experience in his commentary here, my observations that follow are limited to what I have learned pursuing another of the three types of

visual data distinguished by Banks (Banks 1995), visual records produced by the researched.

Harrison presents the dilemma faced by any researcher working with images, that “a transposition into words had become a necessary element.” Her conclusion that this is “because cameras or images have been used as a resource for, rather than the topic of, study” rings false, however. There is a long history, ranging from art historians to visual anthropologists to semioticians, of studying images independent of the content that can be verbalized. It is not clear how a conscious study of cameras and images would lead to less dependence on verbal communication. The assumption of a “necessary” translation of the visual into the verbal so that it can be analyzed underlies many of the problems faced by visual researchers. Ironically, historical evidence indicates that visual narrative, in the form of hunts or other critical events acted out around the fire or painted on cave walls, preceded verbal story-telling by thousands of years. Nonetheless, in more recent history, the abstraction of experience into language has developed into a more intellectually sophisticated and reliable means of communicating information, and is thus the currency of scholarly pursuit. Language, unlike visual imagery, has a widely accepted and standardized syntax. The critical translation between the visual and the verbal gives rise to many of the issues raised by Harrison.

First, we must remain conscious of the fact that images and their capture are related, but separate issues. Linked to this is the difference between still and motion picture recording of images. The hypothetical caveman acting out the hunt is the image, a still photograph of his performance crystallizes one or more “moments” from his continuous narrative. The dynamic image of the story told can, in turn, be better, but still incompletely, recorded by motion pictures or video. Recording images by means of still or moving pictures functions in two ways: it preserves those images for later retrieval, review, response, and analysis, and it eliminates all but a single perspective on a multi-dimensional, temporally dynamic image. The images captured are reduced to this single perspective.

In preserving images, we give them the same *gravitas* as the written word, in the sense that they are converted into an entity that remains unchanged (particularly now that we have digital imaging technology that creates, for all intents and purposes, a permanent archive that will never deteriorate). This entity can be examined at leisure, re-examined at any point, duplicated in unlimited copies, and disseminated broadly. This visual record-keeping is, as Harrison, quoting Holland, states, both “an act of recognition of the past” and “an act of faith in the future.” It is one way of clinging indefinitely to people, places,

and times that have meaning, and it is an attempt to learn from history lest it repeat itself. This perspective on creating and archiving images is based on the shaky foundation that they record “reality.” Images are suspect on a number of levels, ranging from the potential for mechanical or digital manipulation to how the image is presented or “framed” by verbal or other visual information.

Admittedly, “it is not cameras but people who take pictures,” but it is also people who “make” pictures. The picture is “taken” when a person trips the shutter or activates the video camera, creating the image; it is “made” when that person or another responds to the image. The distinction between narrative picturing and picturing the narrative lies not in the images, but in ourselves.

Both in research (photo-elicitation) and in everyday social life, images are used as “triggers” of memories, impressions, and thoughts about the world. In effect, this is using images as Rorschach blots, points from which to take off into narrative that springs entirely from the mind and memory of the viewer who is “making” the picture. The image is useful only to the extent that it elicits these responses. While this a long-established and well-loved tradition in social life, it is problematic as research. If “any meaning is derivable from a photographic image,” one can argue that the image is useless as data and the research finding reduced to “white noise.” One cannot produce valid, reproducible results when the evaluation of those data is dependent on an infinitely variable measurement tool, in this case, the personality, experience, and biases of whomever is responding to the image. As with a Rorschach, the narrative elicited from the image-viewer will tell you more about the viewer than it does about the image or the content that the image portrays. The diversity of response that an image provokes is interesting from a psychological or sociological perspective, but in that case, the image is not data, but a catalyst for the generation of the real data – the responses that arise from the viewers of that image. What appears to be happening is that we are falsely grouping unrelated types of inquiry simply because they work with images. Perhaps we need to re-examine the field with a more disciplined eye, one that discerns the true data being collected and analyzed.

Images take on a power of their own simply because someone made the conscious choice to record them. Still images create individual moments out of a continuous action, giving each of the photographed moments greater importance than others, unrecorded, that went before or after. Similarly, motion pictures and video, while recording continuous activity, “frame out” far more than they include, prioritizing what they document over events and actions that were not recorded. This special quality accorded the photographed moment works in the other direction as well. One could argue that there is no

such thing as “everyday” photography, that photographs are always taken for a reason, to document some element of experience for future review. This is why Jo Stanley (Stanley 1991) struggled with data collection and it is why I do so. As researchers, we see ordinary people’s everyday lives as interesting, complex, and having the potential to reveal important understandings about the human condition. Our research participants, on the other hand, understand image-making very differently. In most of their experience, it is a means of preserving special events – birthdays, graduations, and holidays. “My life is boring! Why would you want me to videotape a family meal?” In our experience, it is often extremely difficult for participants to move beyond the meanings of special importance that they have assigned to recorded images and encourage them toward more open, comprehensive documentation of their day-to-day lives.

Given these preconceptions held by participants about the importance of image-making, we can view the images that they do record as having meaning to them. Similarly, we should consider what they do not record and attempt to make sense of the omissions in the context of their lives. In using VIA to study asthma, obesity, sickle cell disease, and physical disability, we have been struck by how some participants adamantly refuse to document certain aspects of their lives and also by how freely some participants, often the same ones, show aspects of their lives that they would never reveal to their physician in a clinical situation for fear of blame or disapproval. This dynamic tension between their self-protective instincts and their desire to show and tell about their most problematic concerns reveals much about them and their lives.

Images contain far more than a graphic representation of concrete “realities.” Much of their richness as data derives from their ability to capture elements that cannot be quantified with numbers or fully described by words, elements such as body language, direction of gaze, or the nuances of human emotion. The importance of these elements increases when the subjects of research produce the images, resulting in the camera’s gaze itself being a focus of study. Harrison sees the clinical value in images revealing that a girl with severe asthma and cat allergies had a cat sleeping on her pillow, but she disconnects it from “our sociological interest in the story or narrative as about human experience.” Of far more interest than the fact of her cat exposure is the observation that she chose to reveal this fact to her physicians, authority figures whom she knew would not approve of her choices. She showed the cat and herself in context, not only in the bedroom, but in her life, where one could see how important that pet is to her happiness and well-being. The simple story of the cat being a problem to her asthma status is made much more complex, interesting, and clinically problematic. In isolation, the cat makes her asthma

worse. But in the larger framework of her life, she derives comfort, stability, and psychological benefit from the cat. She is not simply taking an unnecessary risk by exposing herself to a known asthma trigger. She has prioritized her values and concerns, making a conscious choice that the benefits of having the cat outweigh the risks. As one of Harrison's respondents noted, "photography is as much about recording our life's emotionality as it is about recording something that happened." If we ignore or dismiss the emotional components of images for fear that they are too subjective, we will be missing one of the richest types of information contained in images. Therefore we must develop the analysis of images as data so that these valuable, non-objective data are not lost in the process of standardizing the analytical method.

Using images as data is simultaneously exhilarating and overwhelming; the processes of data collection and analysis are both frustrating and enriching. Images carry great quantities of information, much of it different from that which words carry. The same features that make images rich data also present many opportunities for bias. In attempting to remain open to the data, researchers who are not vigilant can be seduced into responding to influences from within themselves. A critical step in using images as research data is developing a means of managing, structuring, and analyzing images in a standardized and rigorous way. The work of researchers who use visual data will only be able to stand up to the standards set by other research methods when we have developed visual syntax and standardized analytical methods so that different researchers can analyze the same data and reproduce the results. Anticipating the difficulties that we might face when presenting our research in the medical literature, side by side with genetic engineering, pharmaceutical testing, and epidemiology, I and my colleagues on the VIA research team have made a concentrated effort to develop valid and standardized strategies for analyzing the visual data produced by young patients of their illness experiences (Rich & Patashnick 2002). Our goal was to create an analytical tool that would respond sensitively to both the objective and the subjective components of the visual data, while producing findings that were replicable. While I disagree with Harrison's observation that "photographic images mainly functioned as a means to obtaining verbal or written narrative data," I share her frustration that visual research must, at the present time, be converted to a verbal form for analysis and dissemination. We have attempted to address the latter problem by publishing some of our research in online electronic publications with streaming video of the original data to illustrate our findings (Rich, Lamola, Amory et al. 2000). Unfortunately, however, there is as yet no effective software support for direct analysis of images. We have developed an interface between image and

word, a standardized means of translating the visual narratives into text so that the text record of the data can be managed and organized, while remaining linked to the original video by the qualitative analysis software, NVivo (Rich & Patashnick 2002). This is only a partial solution. The next step for us, and I believe, for all visual researchers is to develop a visual syntax that is as powerful, flexible, and sophisticated as the verbal, and to standardize methods for analyzing and presenting these data entirely within the visual realm.

References

- Asch, T., Cardozo, J. I., Cabellero, H., & Bortoli, J. (1991). The story we now want to hear is not ours to tell: Relinquishing control over representation: Toward sharing visual communication skills with the Yanomami. *Visual Anthropology Review*, 7(2), 102–106.
- Banks, M. (1995). *Visual research methods. Social research update (No. 11)*. Guildford: University of Surrey.
- Bateson, G., & Mead, M. (1962). *Balinese character, a photographic analysis*. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences.
- Chalfen, R. (1981). A sociovidistic approach to children's filmmaking: The Philadelphia project. *Studies in Visual Communication*, 7(1), 2–33.
- Flaherty, R. (1922). *Nanook of the North* (R. Flaherty, Director).
- Flaherty, R. (1926). *Moana* (R. Flaherty, Director).
- Flaherty, R. (1934). *Man of Aran* (R. Flaherty, Director).
- Hubbard, J. (1991). *Shooting back: A photographic view of life by homeless children*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Hubbard, J. (1994). *Shooting back from the reservation: A photographic view of life by Native American youth*. New York: New Press.
- Rich, M., & Chalfen, R. (1999). Showing and telling asthma: Children teaching physicians with visual narratives. *Visual Sociology*, 14, 51–71.
- Rich, M., Lamola, S., Amory, C., & Schneider, L. (2000). Asthma in life context: Video Intervention/Prevention Assessment (VIA). *Pediatrics*, 105(3), 469–477.
- Rich, M., Lamola, S., Gordon, J., & Chalfen, R. (2000). Video Intervention/Prevention Assessment: A patient-centered methodology for understanding the adolescent illness experience. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 27, 155–165.
- Rich, M., & Patashnick, J. (2002). Narrative research with audiovisual data: Video Intervention/Prevention Assessment (VIA) and NVivo. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 5(3), 245–261.
- Rich, M., Taylor, S. A., & Chalfen, R. (2000). Illness as a social construct: Understanding what asthma means to the patient to better treat the disease. *Joint Commission Journal of Quality Improvement*, 26(5), 244–253.
- Stanley, J. (1991). 'Well who'd want an old picture of me at work?' In J. Spence & P. Holland (Eds.), *Family snaps: The meaning of domestic photography* (pp. 60–71). London: Virago Press.

Worth, S., & Adair, J. (1972). *Through Navajo eyes: An exploration in film communication and anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Worth, S., & Adair, J. (1997). *Through Navajo eyes: An exploration in film communication and anthropology*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

RESPONSE

to commentaries on “Photographic visions and narrative inquiry”

by Barbara Harrison

The venture undertaken for this edited collection, which invites responses to a paper and then offers a right of reply, has proved to be a very stimulating exercise. The author might be tempted simply to correct what she perceives to be misunderstandings of her intent, but that would be to deny both that certain arguments might not have been made clearly and the opportunities that the response provides for moving the debate on further. In this response I do a little of the former, but only in an attempt to be of service of the latter. The second point to be made by way of introduction is that each of the three responses to my paper raises both different and similar issues, as a consequence organising the response so that it has some coherence has been a challenging exercise. I have chosen to do so by taking a thematic approach. Inevitably this has led to the omission of some interesting minor points. I continue to draw on the example of my own empirical work on photography in everyday contexts, as well as drawing on other kinds of photographic projects.

‘Pictures do not verbalize anything’

The quotation above comes from Chalfen’s commentary on my paper. The immediate counter-response might be to say of course not, but herein lies a core problem that my paper attempted to address and which has clearly also exercised the respondents. It is important to distinguish between what we ‘see’ in a picture or image and what people may say about it. As Chalfen rightly says it is people who do the work of encoding and decoding the visual text, and these processes involve ‘ways of seeing’ as well as reflecting cognitive processes. However, my argument is that it is upon verbalization that we generally have to rely in order to achieve understanding of these texts, in the same way that people communicate the meaning of visual images in everyday life. So while these are

valid points, I still have some difficulties with his analysis of how the image does not 'speak' – even though of course literally it does not. I accept the point that the idea of speaking or saying is what presses the narrative into action, but I disagree that the reading and then the telling cannot be filled with the subtleties of tone and emotion; there are pictures that shock, that make one smile and so on. I also think that for some viewers other senses do come into play so that we can 'hear' something or remember something in a tactile way. This is not to disagree, however, with his point that there may be problems with the metaphorical use of 'saying' or the commonly used idea that pictures 'speak' of things in themselves. We do need to adopt a critical stance towards these assertions or assumptions, and to unpack or investigate the processes of viewing, reading and verbalizing responses to any image. This includes the taken-for-granted assumptions about what pictures 'say' or are used to say. Clearly their meaning goes beyond the manifest content of the image, and, for example, the family 'snap' that ostensibly shows togetherness may hide conflict and/or unhappiness. Here Chalfen interestingly raises another example of the possible problem of metaphorical language that people use (and I use) when a photographic image or images are spoken about. This is the concept of 'trigger' which many respondents in my research used to describe what happens when they look at home media. It is also a metaphor that researchers who employ photo-elicitation use to describe the way in which responses are stimulated by the presence of an image. As Rich points out in using this term in his commentary, the image acts rather like a Rorschach ink-blot might – 'it is a take off point for a narrative springing from the mind and memory of the viewer'. I am not worried about metaphors as such, because such language use can be a starting point for trying to understand the processes themselves, but I agree with Chalfen that they need investigation. Thus the respondent who talks about 'flipping' the pages of his or her albums on a wet Sunday afternoon, is doing something different to the respondent who is 'mapping out' a 'family history' to one of his or her children.

If we know little about the process of how something works as a 'trigger', and such knowledge is necessary to understand the relation between image and narration, it is less easy to think through how this might be done. There is a suggestion that there may be nothing more complicated here than the processes involved in developing signage by graphic artists or, we might add, how semiotics is deployed by advertisers, but both these approaches utilize some idea of how cognition works in relation to the manifest content of the image. However, some researchers (such as Winckler, [personal communication], mentioned in my chapter) have found that what is narrated indeed seems to bear no relation-

ship to the manifest content of the image, in the sense that the relationship is not visible to any other viewer. Two things seem important here. Are the cognitive processes used to devise images that sell things or give us direction different from those invoked when the image is not required to do something specific? I am not sure we know the answer to this-but we should not presume they are the same. Secondly, we are generally using photo-elicitation as a resource, as a means of accessing data about lives, experiences, emotions, relationships and so on. This might mean that the processes are similar to those of everyday orality, or when we ask a formalised question as a means of eliciting oral narratives or life stories. The question/conversation triggers the verbalization. I suspect I am right in thinking we do not understand that process that well either. We might wish to claim more value for the image as 'trigger', just as Rich claims the 'added value' of visual images as data, in which case we then need to justify such assertions.

Topic and resource

My use of the topic/resource distinction in relation to visual materials draws on the distinction originally made about the analysis of language, particularly communication, within ethnomethodological work. To reiterate, as topic this would involve analysing how we arrive at a 'sense' of the image – how it is we come to see what we see – whereas as resource we use the visual as source of data about other kinds of social phenomena. Rich seems to suggest that the distinction I make between topic and resource is related to the problem of the transposition into words, whether in the research or in everyday contexts. I think this is a different point, not necessarily related to the resource/topic distinction. I was not arguing that a study of cameras (his example of a 'topic') would lead to a lesser dependence on words. I agree with his point that the topic/resource distinction does not help us lessen this dependence at all, since it might be argued that both still rely heavily on verbalization. Rather I wanted to pose the question whether a focus on topic (i.e. what constitutes 'ways of seeing' or as he might put it 'visual syntax' or 'visual literacy') might enable us to see whether indeed pictures can speak for themselves, and if so how. If you can find out how people do interpretation then you might begin to find out the ways in which pictures 'speak'. Thus my emphasis was precisely that we need to understand how the visual 'works' in order to use visual media in inquiry. So, for example, it might be the case that we do need to think about how people use cameras if we want to use participant-produced images in research

projects. Rich confirms this in relation to his own work: 'In our experience it is often extremely difficult for participants to move beyond the meanings of special importance that they have assigned to recorded images and encourage them toward more open, comprehensive documentation of their day to day lives' (p. 155).

While there are two different kinds of inquiry around the production and use of everyday photographs, when they are topic and when resource, the commentaries have suggested to me I have perhaps overstated my contention that knowing how photographs function in everyday life is important to how we then use them in research. It has reminded me that what researchers want from their engagement with research participants and research data, often bears little resemblance to everyday patterns of activity and living, even when these are seen as a primary aim of data collection and analysis. It is rather like the difficulties associated with researchers' claims to 'naturalism'. Thus, while the method of Video Intervention Assessment (VIA) used by Rich and Chalfen (1998) proposes to reveal data about children living with asthma, the activities engaged in by these children in using the video camera, are not what these children would 'normally' do. Hence we may find it more fruitful not only to take this activity as something which provides us with data about the selected and meaningful worlds of these children, but also to take their behaviour with and in front of the camera as being equally revealing. As other researchers have argued (see Lomax & Casey 1998, for example) the way cameras are deployed and the reactivity of participants to their presence can be valuable data in their own right, and it is data which is only obtainable by this means.

Conflict and counter-narratives

In his commentary, Poddiakov gives particular emphasis to potential and 'real' sources of conflict 'when people try to achieve the keeping of memories, narrate everyday experiences and influence their future' (p. 137) The likelihood that conflict does occur then leads him to consider how pictures might be used to defend narratives and counter-narratives. He posits the idea that counter-narratives involving images might be 'negative' or 'bad', although later he acknowledges that photo-therapy, an example I used in the paper, can be seen as a positive counter-narrative. I think it is a fundamental mistake to conceptualize counter-narratives as essentially 'negative'. On the contrary their producers have often been stimulated by the desire to produce an alternative (positive) and often counter-hegemonic view of lives, experiences or social worlds.

In considering the possibility of conflict as one of the ways people participate in the world of making and consuming images, we should not presume at the same time that the means by which that conflict is dealt with is an inherently problematic one for those concerned. Nonetheless it might become so. It is useful, as Poddiakov has done in his paper, to think about where sources of conflict are and equally the potential for conflict around photographic images in everyday contexts or scenarios. He is correct that I did not consider this in the chapter. However, I have considered this possibility in relation to my work on photography in general, and in the context of my investigation into photographs in everyday life. My data reveal conflict over a number of different dimensions. These include, for example, the ownership of images, such as in whose possession should they be, and who should 'inherit' them; whether images should be displayed at all, as in framing, and if so which; what kinds of photographs should be taken, such as when couples have different views of holiday images; and finally what is a 'good' and 'bad' photograph, leading often to conflicts over disposal. I also have respondents who report acts of defacement and destruction. The consequence of these actions may be feelings of regret or loss rather than resentment or anger. I have been interested in the relation of photographs to the deployment of power and as a mode of resistance (Harrison & Aranda 1999). In this context I have suggested we do see photographic counter-narratives emerge. The nature of a counter-narrative is a complex and multi-faceted one, as are acts of destruction and preservation as illustrated by Poddiakov's example of how the destruction of images has been viewed as necessary to preserve life. There is potential for counter-narrative with any image or set of images. Chalfen implies that the 'conforming' nature, of say, family photographs may result in conventionalized responses while less conforming images may give potential for counter-narratives. Examples from photo-therapy (Martin & Spence 1987) give some support to that suggestion, in that the 'alternative' images are certainly not those we would 'normally' see in family albums. However, just as I think it would be a mistake to see counter-narratives as 'negative', so I think counter-narratives can emerge in relation to the conventional or everyday image. Kuhn (1995) and Walkerdine (1991), for example, use photographs of themselves as children to develop counter-narratives of family relationships and family lives. They use the image as the basis for a number of fundamental questions about why it was taken, by whom, and what the takers wanted to represent to a presumed audience. They do not accept the remembered collective narrative which had accompanied them, but rather posit alternative readings and versions of themselves and their family relationships.

Consider a further example, an exhibition by the photographer and anthropologist Barbara Hind (2001). Hind's father committed suicide when she was a child and away from home with her mother and siblings on holiday. However, this event was kept from the children and all traces of him were removed from the house, including photographs. Later, after her mother's death, she found one photograph of her father, but set out on a photographic project to recreate some sense of his presence in her earlier life; pictures of the Mersey ferry, the stairwell in the family home, his shaving brush on the bathroom shelf. It was also a challenge to the silence that surrounded the stigma of suicide. Poddakov might see this as an example of the conflict he feels frequently surrounds photographs. What is important to one family member to preserve has been important for another to destroy, but this was never overt conflict of any sort, since the significance of these actions was only realized in retrospect. As a child Hind's knowledge about her father had been denied her. For some people what is needed are memories, while for others there is the need to forget. But Hind was still engaged in producing a counter-narrative. It was to remember not to forget, to realize presence rather than absence, to have knowledge rather than not, to allow the grief or mourning that had not been permitted.

Both destruction and preservation are what people do with photographs, as with discursive accounts. I do not think it is always the case that destruction or preservation act to maintain a given narrative, since narratives are not fixed in this way, and constantly change as self and others view images at different points in time and in ever-changing contexts or 'frames'. What is hidden and what is shown are devices available to tellers in the construction of what is told. As Chalfen rightly emphasizes, action and communication are important aspects of people's relationship with home media (Chalfen 1987), a point I have addressed more fully in a recent paper (Harrison 2002a). I agree that we need to ask how images work as a material part of people's lives. It may be that, as his own cited research suggests, people's responses to the everyday photograph often take the form not of narrative but rather of brief identifications and anecdotal responses. If this is so then generating or using visual imagery in narrative inquiry is a different and distinct activity and form of communication, involving a particular relationship (to the researcher), and it requires evaluation in these terms. My argument that the topic/resource distinction in relation to everyday photography has general value on reflection may overstate the necessity of understanding patterns and activities involving photographs in everyday life for an evaluation of how these can be used in research setting.

Using visual images in narrative inquiry

Rich takes issue with my assertion the use of images in relation to narrative inquiry has rarely been discussed. He argues that I did not take account of a long tradition of work with visual images within a number of disciplines. Of course he is absolutely right, and elsewhere (Harrison 1996, 2002b) I have drawn attention to precisely those traditions to which he alludes here. My point relates to two kinds of invisibility. Outside of a few examples (for example, Collier & Collier 1988, on anthropology and photography, and Henny 1986, on visual sociology) it has only been in the last few years that a number of social scientists have produced texts that tackle both the variety of methods available for the analysis of images and the production and use of images within a number of different research traditions (examples of which I gave in my chapter). We now also see visual methods referred to in more general research texts. Like Rich, when I first started working in this area I found numerous examples of researchers who had used a variety of visual methods, it seemed to me, as it did to Prosser (1998) that both the practice and the practitioners were fragmented. This resulted in a lack of debate about the kinds of issues which have been explored in the dialogue within this volume. Over and above this, my point related to narrative inquiry in particular. So, as Chalfen acknowledges in his commentary, while he has been interested in ideas about how the visual/pictorial and verbal/spoken relate to each other in the context of home media, ideas around the visual as a resource for narrative inquiry were not found in his own publications.

Many of the studies or projects that Rich mentions in his commentary are important ones in the tradition of visual methods; Worth and Adair (1972) in developing the idea and practice of indigenous media productions, and Bateson and Mead (1942) who used photographs as data and as analytical tools in their own right. But these are not, I would argue, forms of narrative inquiry. My reason for using Rich's own work (particularly that in collaboration with Chalfen (Rich & Chalfen 1998)) was precisely because it was one of the few examples of an approach that did generate illness narratives. Not all forms of photo-voice or participant created imagery are narrative inquiry either in aim or in outcome. Of course, this also begs the question of what we take to be narrative inquiry. So an important issue for me in my chapter, and one that remains, is how the understanding of everyday photography can inform an evaluation of how participant productions or photo-elicitation, using imagery, can be used by narrative researchers. The commentaries of Chalfen and Rich have implications in this respect.

At the heart of my chapter and of the commentaries of Chalfen and Rich are questions about the relation of images to words, and image and image production as the data or the means of deriving data. I agree with Rich that it is important not to confuse the use of images in inquiry with images themselves as forms of data (topic and resource again). That is precisely why I raised the question originally about whether images in themselves can be treated as forms of narrative, that is data that tell a story. Like Rich, I am inclined to the view that in the main they do not. If so, then it matters little that images are variable or momentary instances in time. At the same time, Rich as a researcher wants to use participant-produced video material as data. Such data, he rightly argues, have meaning for the people who record them, and in taking up one particular image to which I referred, of the young girl with her kitten, he suggests that the image is full of interpretable meaning outside of its significance clinically. It is Rich's contention that what is needed in using visual records as data are more standardized, rigorous modes of analysis, something he is trying to do in his own work. Some forms of narrative or biographical inquiry systematically analyze the structure and forms of the verbally given life story, that is, how it has been told (following the tradition of biographical interpretative method such as Breckner 1998). Thus the form as well as the content of the narrative provides the analyst with important clues about interpreting the life. However, many other researchers do not proceed in this way, and while I am not averse to the idea that we should be attempting an analysis of visual syntax, would a standardized tool allow us to retain the emotional, subjective and unique experiential worlds of visual producers? Why would it be any less acceptable to work with standard tests of validity, including that of face and construct validity, when the data are visual rather than verbal? Perhaps one of the ways we can begin to explore some of these issues is to make use of the archives of visual data that Rich now sees as having the potential for examining how they may be analysed.

Conclusion

It is evident that there is still considerable uncertainty about how the visual should be used in the research context, and questions about what validity it has either as a tool or as data in its own right. My chapter, and the three commentaries and this response reveal these uncertainties while still wishing to claim that the visual has much to offer. An understanding of how the visual 'works' in everyday and other contexts is an interesting topic of inquiry in its own right.

It also has the potential to inform the uses to which some kinds of imagery and image production can be put in the research context. A core theme of this debate is the relationship of images to words and the transposition to words that so frequently occurs in both everyday life and in research. How we can understand the processes involved in this transposition remains a challenge for researchers in relation to visual images.

My chapter and the commentaries in this volume have a specific aim of understanding the relation of photographs to narration and the kind of narratives that occur. This response has argued more fully than in my original chapter that conflict and counter-narratives are a complex and multi-faceted aspect of people's relationship with photographic images. They are both positive and negative; empowering and destructive; everyday occurrences and more consciously formalized projects. The potential first for narrative, and hence for counter-narrative, is everywhere. These too are topics for continuing investigation.

References

- Bateson, G., & Mead, M. (1942). *Balinese character: A photographic analysis*. New York: New York Academy of Sciences.
- Breckner, R. (1998). *The biographical-interpretative method: Principles and procedures* (Social Strategies in Risk Societies, Working Paper No. 2). London: University of East London.
- Chalfen, R. (1987). *Snapshot versions of life*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
- Collier, J., & Collier, M. (1986). *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method* (2nd ed.). Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Harrison, B. (1996). 'Every picture tells a story': Uses of the visual in sociological research. In E. S. Lyon & J. Busfield (Eds.), *Methodological imaginations* (pp. 75–94). London: Macmillan.
- Harrison, B. (2002a, July). *Everyday photographic practice: Relationships, networks and 'community'*. Paper presented at the Annual International Visual Sociology Conference, Santorini, Greece.
- Harrison, B. (2002b). Seeing health and illness worlds: Using visual methodologies in a sociology of health and illness. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 24 (6), 856–872.
- Harrison, B., & Aranda, K. (1999). Photography, power and resistance: The case of health and medicine. In J. Hearn & S. Roseneil (Eds.), *Consuming cultures: Power/Resistance* (pp. 155–177). London: Macmillan.
- Henny, L. (Ed). (1986). Theory and practice of visual sociology [Special issue]. *Current Sociology*, 34 (3).
- Hind, B. (2001, February). *Our fathers: Childhood loss and memory*. Exhibition with Mike Simmons, De Montfort University, Leicester, England, UK.

- Kuhn, A. (1995) *Family secrets: Acts of memory and imagination*. London: Verso.
- Lomax, H., & Casey, N. (1998). *Recording social life: Reflexivity and video methodology*. Retrieved August 8, 2000, from <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/3/2/1/html>.
- Martin, R., & Spence, J. (1987). The use of the camera in therapy. In R. Betterton (Ed.), *Looking on: Images of femininity in the visual arts and media* (pp. 267–279). London: Pandora.
- Prosser, J. (1998). The status of image based research. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image based research* (pp. 97–112). London: Falmer Press
- Rich, M., & Chalfen, R. (1998). Showing and telling asthma: Children teaching physicians with visual narrative. *Visual Sociology*, 14, 51–71.
- Walkerdine, V. (1991). Behind the painted smile. In J. Spence & P. Holland (Eds.), *Family snaps: The meaning of domestic photography* (pp. 35–45). London: Virago.
- Worth, S., & Adair, J. (1972). *Through Navaho eyes: An exploration in film communication and anthropology*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

“That’s very rude, I shouldn’t be telling you that”

Older women talking about sex

Rebecca L. Jones

School of Health and Social Welfare, The Open University

This article discusses narratives created during interviews with 23 older women (aged 61–90) about their experiences of sex and intimate relationships in later life. For analytic purposes, the paper understands narratives to be neither pre-existing nor a simple reflection of experience, but to be made moment-by-moment in the interaction between parties drawing on available cultural resources. Attention to the interactional situation in which the narrative is produced helps to explain the ways in which speakers perpetuate or resist dominant cultural storylines. Older women’s accounts of sexual relationships provide a particularly rich site for this analysis because a dominant cultural storyline of ‘asexual older people’ is often evident in popular culture. This storyline provides an important cultural resource which older women who are talking about sex can both draw on and resist in order to produce their own accounts. This article uses a discourse analytic approach to discuss some of the moments in which speakers explicitly produce counter-narratives. These moments are visible to the analyst by the participants’ own orientations to telling a counter-narrative. The article also considers parts of the accounts which the analyst identifies as counter-narratives, although the speakers do not orient to this. The analyst’s own position is thus implicated in the analysis and is reflexively considered.

This article aims to add to the debate about how speakers draw on cultural resources in producing narratives about their personal experiences. It focuses particularly on the question of how counter-narratives might be defined and identified within data. It uses data from accounts given by older women (aged over 60) of their experiences of intimate relationships in later life. The article begins with a brief summary of the circumstances of creation of the narratives

that are analysed. I then move on to a summary of the discursive approach to narratives used here and discuss the idea of 'dominant cultural storylines'. There follows a section on the identification of dominant cultural storylines and counter-narratives in relation to the topic of older women and sexual activity. The fourth section is a more detailed consideration of how these different sorts of narratives, and in particular counter-narratives, might be identified within the data. The fifth section begins the analysis of data from my research by looking at parts of narratives where participants themselves 'orient' to telling a counter-narrative. The sixth section returns to a more theoretical discussion of how one might identify counter-narratives when participants do not orient to telling them. The final section discusses some examples of these parts of narratives which I, as the analyst, identify as counter-narratives, including reflexive consideration of that process of identification.

The creation of the narratives

This article draws on data from interviews with 23 women aged between 61 and 90 living in different parts of England. Respondents replied to newspaper and newsletter articles, posters and local radio features asking them to talk about their experiences of intimate relationships in later life. The group of women who responded were not intended to be a representative sample of women aged over 60, but they are a reasonably diverse group in terms of age, social class, sexual orientation and past and present sexual experience.¹ The interviews were undertaken mainly between January and July 2001. Most women were interviewed once in a session that lasted for around an hour to an hour and a half. Interviews were relatively unstructured and varied in the topics covered.

In the recruitment phase and in the introductory phases of the interview, I used the phrase 'intimate relationships' rather than 'sex'. This was for a variety of reasons² and has important implications for an analysis of the narratives that were then produced. This phrase is one of the many factors that created the local context of the talk. Many of the women appeared to understand 'intimate relationships' as a euphemism for 'sex', but they did not all do so and additionally they all will have understood the phrase in slightly different ways. But, in general, the phrase 'intimate relationships' places sex within a context of relationships and thus may have made less likely narratives about sex outside relationships, masturbation or biological or medical accounts. Such approaches, however, were not entirely absent from the interviews, since the local context

of a narrative, whilst crucially important, does not completely determine the account which is given.

A discursive approach to narratives

The analysis of narratives has been approached in many different ways, and each type of analysis has tended to take a different definition of what constitutes a narrative. In this paper I do not focus on the structural features of narratives in the way that much work following Labov has done (Labov & Waletzky 1967); neither do I take the very broad interest and definition that some writers have done (Seale 2000). Any definition of narrative is imperfect and encounters examples that are problematic. I define narratives quite narrowly to be consequentially ordered talk which predominantly relates past events, and which is to some degree distinct and separable from the surrounding talk (Riessman 1993). I therefore consider that some of the talk that takes place in an interview cannot be considered to be a narrative and I explicitly exclude activities such as explaining, theorising or justifying from the category of narrative. Whilst these activities may refer to narratives, they are not themselves part of a narrative. The border between narrative and commentary on narrative is sometimes unclear in practice, but the distinction remains a useful one.

This paper applies a discursive approach to narratives, drawing particularly on the work of discursive psychologists (Edwards & Potter 1992; Potter & Wetherell 1987) and also on less discursive work which is interested in questions of representation (Gubrium & Holstein 1997; Gubrium & Holstein 1998). Such an approach treats narratives not as reflections of reality but as themselves shaping the social world (Abell, Stokoe, & Billig 2000). Narratives are argued not to pre-exist, even though participants may have told similar stories before, but to be created in the interaction between the participants. I understand narratives to draw on culturally and locally specific discursive resources and to be produced by speakers in order to do particular rhetorical work within an interaction. This rhetorical work is both small-scale and constantly changing (as analysed by conversation analysts in terms of turn taking, preferred and dispreferred responses, membership categorisation analysis etc. Sacks 1995) and longer term and more constant. This longer term and more constant rhetorical work is particularly influenced, in this context, by questions asked during the interview designed to invoke narratives – e.g., “tell me about your own experiences of intimate relationships and growing older”. I understand the form, content and unfolding of the narrative to be influenced not only by the relationship

between the people involved but by their shared and differing understandings of what sort of talk is appropriate to this context (Gubrium & Holstein 1997).

Another important concept that I use in this paper is that of 'storyline'. By this I mean a family of related plots which carry with them recognisable characters, expected situations and anticipated outcomes. So, for example, one might write of a 'Mills and Boon'³ storyline, although individual books have their own plots as well as different characters, situations and resolutions. If speakers share cultural knowledge, then the evocation of a storyline is sufficient to suggest to the listener the sort of characters, situations and outcomes which go with it, regardless of whether the speaker actually elaborates these. I thus discuss narratives as relatively small and discrete entities and storylines as broader, more general phenomena, rather than using one term for both.

Whilst there are a large number of potential storylines relating to a topic, not all storylines have the same cultural status. Some storylines attain the status of normative or dominant storylines. These powerful and prevalent storylines have been theorised variously as: culturally available narratives (Antaki 1994), canonical narratives (Bruner 1987 1991), dominant discourses (Gergen 1995; Gee 1992, both cited in Talbot, Bibace, Bokhour, & Bamberg 1996), and master narratives (Mishler 1995), amongst other approaches. Whilst all these terms differ somewhat in their implications, concerns and underlying epistemology, I would argue that there is sufficient similarity between the phenomena they are describing to treat their existence as an acceptable working assumption. In this paper, I use the term 'dominant cultural storyline'.

Dominant cultural storylines and counter-narratives

Whilst the theoretical existence of dominant cultural storylines may be relatively uncontested, the establishment of the existence and nature of any one dominant cultural storyline is a far from straightforward matter. It is particularly complex in relation to the topic of older people and sex. Many academics and practitioners working in this area assert that older people are expected to have lost interest in sex. See, for example, two particularly well known books on the subject (Greengross & Greengross 1989, p. 20; Brecher 1984, pp. 17–21). This dominant cultural storyline is almost always challenged as soon as it has been invoked in practitioner literature, in academic work or in 'serious' journalism. There is little published work which can be cited straightforwardly to support the existence of this storyline. However, it is implicitly present in much popular culture, especially in the realm of ageist jokes and birthday cards. For

the rest of this paper, I shall describe this complex of ideas as the 'asexual older people' storyline.

The situation is complicated by the existence of another very available cultural storyline which I shall describe from here on as the 'liberal' storyline. This might be summarised as 'of course older people have sex too' and is associated with the idea that sexuality is lifelong (or at least adult-life long); that sexual activity is basically good for people; and that it is ageist to treat older people as asexual. It is particularly prominent in academic and practitioner literature about older people and sexuality. (See for example, Hodson & Skeen 1994; Weg 1983; Herron & Herron 1999). This liberal storyline draws on a wider interest in telling sexual stories (Plummer 1995) and an accompanying tendency to treat sexual experience as the touchstone of truth. An important part of this storyline is the idea that 'in the past' people did not speak about sex and that by speaking about sex we are breaking taboos and taking part in a liberatory project (Foucault 1976). Whilst not all types of sexual stories are valued equally, Foucault argues that we are peculiarly prone to seeing the locus of truth in confessions of sexual secrets. I would also argue that the popularity of talk shows such as 'Oprah' and the frequency of articles about unusual sexual experiences in women's magazines means that very many people, even if they have never talked about their own sexual behaviour before, have heard other people do so. This provides them with interpretative resources, storylines, topics and even vocabulary that they can draw on in constructing their own narratives in accordance with the liberal storyline.

Significantly, this liberal storyline is constituted as explicitly counter to the first asexual older people storyline – for example, practitioner literature on older people and sexuality has an almost inevitable first paragraph about the common idea that older people are asexual. The asexual older people storyline is often described as 'a myth' and writers then proceed to set up the liberal storyline as the truth. Thus (Brecher 1984) in the introduction to one of the major studies of sexuality in later life describes how more than 3,000 of their 4,246 respondents agreed with the statement that "society thinks of older people as nonsexual" and then describes this statement as a "misconception." Thus a narrative drawing on the liberal storyline can be argued to be a counter-narrative, precisely because it constitutes itself counter to the asexual older people storyline. Whilst the asexual older people storyline logically runs counter to the liberal one and appears to be its mirror image, I would argue that narratives drawing on it are seldom counter-narratives because they are rarely set up as such. Talbot et al. (1996) argue that "because the propositions implicit in master narratives or dominant discourses are widely accepted as

self-evident, narrators who cast their own account in terms deriving from such a discourse are free to present the personal story as a description of events that is isomorphic to 'reality' (p. 226). This means that, in this context, people using the asexual older people storyline do not usually have to do the discursive work of establishing the truth of their account that people using the liberal storyline do.

Whilst, by this definition, a narrative drawing on the asexual older people storyline is not usually a counter-narrative, since it is normally presented as uncontested, in my data it was occasionally treated as a counter-narrative. Similarly, the liberal storyline was occasionally treated as a dominant cultural storyline when speakers invoked it in an uncontested and normative way. Thus, one storyline cannot be argued to be exclusively dominant and the other to be associated exclusively with counter-narratives. While the asexual older people storyline is more often treated as a dominant cultural storyline and the liberal storyline is more often drawn on by counter-narratives, this is not always the case. In this article, I take the position that the status of narratives and storylines as dominant or counter is determined not by any property of their content but either by participants' orientations or by explicit analyst's identification.

During the course of a long narrative, speakers rarely draw exclusively on only one of these storylines. Although if asked directly they might state that they agreed with one or the other storyline, in actual talk, most speakers draw on both storylines at different points, depending on the interactional work they are undertaking at that particular moment. In order to achieve their conversational aims, speakers perform complex negotiations around the more available storylines.

In the next section I move from the more theoretical question of how dominant cultural storylines and counter-narratives might relate to one another to the more technical question of how one might be able to identify counter-narratives within data. One way of thinking about the different levels at which one might identify counter-narratives is in terms of the difference between 'emic' and 'etic' analyses. Silverman (Silverman 1993, p. 24) describes emic analyses as "working within the conceptual framework of those studied" and etic analyses as "using an imposed frame of reference". In the following section, I discuss one way of identifying counter-narratives by undertaking an 'emic' analysis. In later sections I deal with the use of 'etic' analysis.

Identifying counter-narratives within data – emic analysis

Conversation analysis has predominantly worked with emic analyses and makes particular use of the concept of participants ‘orienting to’ a topic. Whilst this paper is not itself within the domain of conversation analysis, and indeed later sections will deal with etic analyses, the concept of ‘orienting to’ is worthy of attention as one level at which one might identify counter-narratives. Sacks (Sacks 1995, vol. 2, p. 223), in a discussion of the status of analysts’ categories, suggests a useful way of identifying when someone is orienting to telling a story. He argues that the analyst should ask, “Is the fact that someone is telling a story something that matters to the teller and the hearer?” Sacks argues that a story can only be considered to be a story if participants orient to it as a story, but this paper also uses etic analysis at a later stage. His question can be transposed to my context as one emic angle of approach in the identification of counter-narratives. The question becomes “is the fact that someone is telling a counter-narrative something that matters to the teller and the hearer?”

Participants are said to have ‘oriented to’ something if they invoke it and then treat it as relevant and pertinent to the conversation. Stokoe and Smithson (Stokoe & Smithson 2001) provide a useful discussion of the uses and limitations of the idea of ‘orientation’ in relation to gender. Applying their summary to my context suggests paying attention to those instances where participants overtly disagree with another statement, use words or phrases such as ‘taboo’, ‘I know I shouldn’t’ or ‘I know most people wouldn’t agree’ or characterise themselves as rebellious. In the analysis that follows, I take the use of such phrases and rhetorical moves to indicate orientation to telling a counter-narrative. It should be noted that orientations by speakers to telling a counter-narrative rarely take place within the body of the narrative. That is to say, such orientations usually take the form of commentary on a narrative and are thus not considered to be themselves part of a narrative.

Participant’s orientations to telling a counter-narrative

This section begins the analysis of my data by looking at those points in the interviews where participants themselves oriented to telling a counter-narrative. One example of someone overtly orienting to telling a counter-narrative comes from Liz’s⁴ account. Liz had been in a relationship with one woman for nearly 40 years when her partner left her. She now has a new partner and is describing the early stages of their sexual relationship:

- Liz: Erm she erm she has, as many many women do, even younger women, she has she has a very very dry vagina
- Rebecca: Right.
- Liz: So erm, you know, there has to be care taken but, in fact, erm she said it was because she was, erm it was to do with her hormones but we discovered that it wasn't anything to do with that at all
- Rebecca: Right.
- Liz: Which was a huge awakening for her
- Rebecca: Right yes
- Liz: you know
- Rebecca: Yes yes,
- Liz: So that's interesting you know cos several of my friends have said "oh I couldn't possibly have sex any more because" and they're in their fifties.
- Rebecca: mmm
- Liz: Erm "because, you know, erm I couldn't possibly because I have a problem" you know erm and it's quite interesting
- Rebecca: Mmm.
- Liz: and what it means is, I think, is that you're not with the right person for sex anyway, you know.

In this section, Liz ascribes the notion she is countering to her friends – she claims that they say "Oh I couldn't possibly have sex any more because . . . I have a problem". In this context, it seems likely that Liz is saying that their problem is vaginal dryness, although she does not spell this out. She makes their age relevant when she states that they are "in their fifties" and thus implies that they are claiming that their experience of painful sex due to vaginal dryness is because of their age. This idea is congruent with the asexual older people storyline, although Liz does not explicitly refer to it. Having invoked this notion, she then positions her own experience and understanding counter to it. She asserts that vaginal dryness is not due to increasing age but to not being "with the right person for sex."

A sub-category of the counter-narrative could be described as the transgressive narrative. Speakers can be said to have oriented to telling a transgressive narrative if they invoke the notion of taboo, rule breaking or sanction, for example. Not all counter-narratives take the form of transgressive narratives – a counter-narrative could take the form 'people always say . . . but I know . . .', which does not engage with the notion of transgression or taboo. But I consider all transgressive narratives to come within the category of counter-narratives. Such transgressive narratives are marked in my data by the use of phrases such as, "it's all getting very frank" (Polly), "this is getting pornographic" (Liz) and

“if we’re going to be basic” (Kate), which pay attention to the possibility of offence in telling a transgressive narrative and attempt to ward it off. Another such example comes from the extract that includes the phrase I have used in the title of this paper. Lesley begins this part of her narrative by talking about when she had first learnt the term ‘wanker’.⁵ She moves into a story about her last sexual partner:

Lesley: She used to like being held and doing, masturbating herself.

Rebecca: Right yeah yeah.

Lesley: sometimes it was just one of the things she liked but

Rebecca: Yeah yeah.

Lesley: but erm she she, I don’t know why she found that so comforting, but that’s what she wanted to do. Wanted somebody to hold her kiss her and comfort her and erm make her feel loved and feel in the mood, and then do this for herself.

Rebecca: Yeah yeah mm.

Lesley: and we used to talk about it quite a lot and we heard the term frequently in the town, village rather, village a hundred and two in the population erm was Wigton. We nicknamed ourselves the Wigton wankers. [both laugh] [laughing] That’s very rude I shouldn’t be telling you that.

Lesley explicitly orients here to telling a narrative that is counter to normative storylines, when she says “I shouldn’t be telling you that.” However, it should be noted that whilst it is clear that in the phrase “I shouldn’t be telling you that” Lesley orients to having just told a counter-narrative, it is far from clear what it is a counter-narrative to. It could be counter to the idea that one should not speak explicitly about sex, to the idea that one should not use explicit slang in interview situations or when being tape recorded or to the idea that she should not talk to me, perhaps as a younger person, in this way. Although she says that she shouldn’t have told me this, which might be argued to be in line with the dominant cultural storyline of asexual older people, in one sense at least this is still a counter-narrative in that she has told me it, even if she does regret doing so. However I would also argue that the laugh which accompanies “that’s very rude I shouldn’t be telling you that” constitutes an instruction to hear this comment as not entirely serious. She orients briefly to the asexual older people storyline when she says “I shouldn’t be telling you that”. With this comment she seems to hold up the asexual older people storyline like a mirror to her other comments, but in a way which points up her more common orientation to the liberal storyline, which is a type of counter-narrative. It can thus be seen that narratives drawing on dominant cultural storylines and counter-narratives can be used within the same sentence.

One way of orienting to telling a counter-narrative is to briefly orient to the dominant cultural storyline and then to resist it. Lesley could be argued to do this in the example above, and Liz does something similar when she talks about her new sexual relationship:

Liz: I've had difficulties with this relationship as one always does you know with new relationships.

Rebecca: Yes.

Liz: Erm and sometimes I'm I get fed up and I think at my age what the hell am I doing? You know shouldn't, shouldn't I just be a grandmother figure at home, you know, knitting or something.

Rebecca: Mmmm

Liz: And er and I touch wood that neither one of my children have got grandchildren cos I haven't got time actually [both laugh]

Rebecca: Yeah

Liz: And erm you know erm so there you go. I mean obviously if they did have one I'd be all over it and all that stuff

Rebecca: Mmm.

Liz: but erm you know that hasn't happened so erm erm.

Rebecca: A lot of the grandmothers I've spoken to are off having new relationships anyway so.

Liz: I think that's wonderful. I really do

Liz's use of the phrases "at my age", "shouldn't I" and the emphatic "what the hell am I doing" point out her experiences as untypical and arguably unsuitable in establishing a new sexual relationship at her age. These phrases constitute a brief orientation to the asexual older people storyline. Her rejection of this storyline is suggested by her use of the caricature of "a grandmother figure at home knitting". This caricature makes it clear that she does not see her current existence in these terms. My comment "a lot of the grandmothers I've spoken to are off having new relationships anyway" invokes the liberal storyline without orienting to it as a counter-narrative. This, then is an example of the liberal storyline being treated as a dominant cultural storyline, in that its truthfulness is taken for granted.

As well as the asexual older people storyline, there are other associated storylines which speakers sometimes orient to. In the following example, Win refers to the dominant cultural storyline that disabled people are asexual, which seems closely related to the storyline that older people are asexual. Win has been disabled all her life and was married to a disabled man. Her account is characterised by a lot of explicit orientation to telling a counter-narrative. She rarely positions herself as an older woman but constantly positions herself as a

disabled woman. She describes what happened sexually when her husband had a stroke and lost his speech:

- Win: So, and then the frustrations get worse and worse. But we tried. Sometimes we were, sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. But we could still give each other pleasure, and to me, penetrative sex is not essential. It has, as long as we can pleasure each other, and the ... erm ... hmm, what do I say? ... both have orgasm, does it matter? Am I shocking you?
- Rebecca: No, not at all. Several people have said this to me, because, you know, particularly as men get older, more of them become impotent
- Win: Yeah, but, you see
- Rebecca: and it doesn't mean the end
- Win: they, they, you see, if you look at what people assume to be normal, at our point, at that point in time they would have assumed that we hadn't, we wouldn't bother. But there are still people that think that disabled people have no sexual needs.

In this extract, Win deals with dominant cultural storyline and counter-narrative in reverse order to what might be expected. Firstly she tells her counter-narrative, oriented to in the question "am I shocking you?" She then sets up the dominant storyline that she is resisting "at that point in time they would have assumed that we hadn't, we wouldn't bother. But there are still people that think that disabled people have no sexual needs." This contrast structure creates an orientation to telling a counter-narrative. It seems possible that she presents dominant cultural storyline and counter-narrative in this backwards form because she positions me as sharing her belief that disabled people do have sexual needs.

In the example above, it is very clear which narrative Win presents as her favoured one. In the following example, Win very clearly orients to telling a counter-narrative but she is guarded as to whether she agrees with the mainstream storyline or the counter-narrative. She is talking about how when she was growing up she never expected to marry:

- Win: And, as I say, the idea that a disabled person wants, has sexual needs had never even been thought of. Although, thinking back, when I was a child in hospital, there was an Algerian nurse who taught us, the girls, to masturbate.
- Rebecca: Really? Gosh.
- Win: Because, she said to us, there were three of us in the ward together, erm she said "I can't imagine you'll ever get married, but you're going to need to learn to relieve yourself".
- Rebecca: Right

- Win: So we were fourteen when she taught us
Rebecca: Gosh
Win: to masturbate. But that would be regarded as totally shocking in today's world, they'd call it abuse.
Rebecca: They would, wouldn't they.
Win: But ... it stood me in good stead on, at times. As I say, how much of this you dare put into it I don't know [laughs]
Rebecca: [laughs]
Win: But ... I hope it's not shocking you.
Rebecca: No, it's not, it's really [?good]
Win: Erm but you see, people d-, because people don't think I need anything like that, mostly if I spoke to friends of mine in this vein, they'd be absolutely erm ... well, they wouldn't believe me.
Rebecca: Mmm
Win: But, from what you said you wanted, you wanted some base honesty
Rebecca: Yeah absolutely
Win: So I'm
Rebecca: this is, this is great
Win: trying to be as honest as I can be.

Her phrase "it would probably be regarded as abuse in today's world" seems carefully neutral – she does not say that she regards it as abuse or whether she thinks that 'they' are right to regard it as abuse, she merely states that this is the case. She further marks this account as a counter-narrative when she says "how much of this you dare put into it I don't know." The "it" in this sentence seems to refer to my research, a comment which invokes the notion of a distinction between what she can tell me in private and what I can report in public, which seems highly relevant to the question of how counter-narratives come to be produced. Win seems to be implying that her counter-narrative is more acceptable in a relatively private sphere than in a relatively public one. Not only is Win cautious in her telling of this counter-narrative but I respond in an equally cautious detached way ("they would, wouldn't they"). By claiming that she is being honest, Win draws on the notion of being a good interviewee who helps the interviewer by telling the truth despite difficulties – behaviour which is affirmed by my comment "this is great." This good behaviour helps to further legitimise the telling of her counter-narrative. Invoking the notion of being honest also serves to establish that these events really happened which pre-empts any potential criticism of her for supporting the nurse's potentially unacceptable behaviour. If she were to be so challenged she could respond along the lines of "but it did happen, I'm just telling you the honest facts". In setting up

the interview I did not use terms such as 'honesty', 'truth' or 'myth' because my theoretical framework was discursive, not realist, so her introduction of the concept of honesty seems particularly significant. In interpreting my research interests in this way, Win establishes a particularly enabling context for the telling of counter-narratives.

All the examples discussed so far have involved interviewees countering the asexual older people storyline or the closely related storyline of 'asexual disabled people'. I move now to a much more unusual example where an interviewee, Kate, orients to telling a narrative which is counter to the liberal storyline. Kate talked about probably not wanting a new relationship in the future and has just told a story about looking at other older people's relationships and thinking how horrible they are. The extract that follows can be understood as her theorising about the story she has just told:

Kate: I suppose it's also the thing of of er, sex drive is not meant to exist in older people and I certainly think it probably does decrease. I imagine if you're in a partnership it doesn't necessarily ever decrease. But I don't think you're the hunter or want to be the hunter or want to be the hunted anymore as you get older. I mean I think biologically, um, certainly I didn't find any huge difference pre and post menopause but I think in in in what's important to you as a person you certainly wouldn't seek casual sex, I don't think. Well I don't think I ever did but, and I did, I've had a number of affairs through my life but er yes, I think I think probably sex, and [laugh in voice] I know this is against all Women's Hour⁶ teaching, [voice normal again] I think sex probably does become less important.

Her movements between the asexual older people and liberal storylines are complex and are further complicated by her final orientation to telling a narrative which is counter to the liberal storyline. She initially orients to the asexual older people storyline when she says "sex drive is not meant to exist in older people and I certainly think it probably does decrease." The word "meant" provides strong evidence that she is orienting to this as a dominant cultural storyline, since it invokes normative expectations. When she says "I imagine if you're in a partnership it doesn't necessarily ever decrease" she could be argued both to be resisting the dominant cultural storyline of asexual older people and to be perpetuating the associated storyline that older people who are sexually active are monogamous. She concludes her summary of the role of sex in later life by positioning what she has just said in contrast to another point of view which she draws on assumed shared cultural knowledge to describe as "Women's Hour teaching." Although she does not spell out what this is, it is clear from context that this is congruent with the liberal storyline and Kate

can thus be argued to be orienting to telling a narrative which is counter to a storyline which is constituted as a counter-storyline itself. This extract further complicates the question of what constitutes a dominant cultural storyline because Kate positions the liberal storyline as dominant when she orients to her own account as a counter-narrative.

This section has analysed one angle of approach in identifying counter-narratives – those moments in interviews when participants themselves orient to telling a counter-narrative. The next section discusses a different angle of approach to identifying counter-narratives when participants do not orient to telling a counter-narrative.

Identifying counter-narratives within data – etic analysis

The second approach to the problem of identifying counter-narratives is to undertake an etic analysis of the data. Instead of looking for moments when the participants themselves orient to telling a counter-narratives, an etic approach uses the analyst's knowledge as an interpretative resource (Billig 1999; Wetherell 1998; Potter & Wetherell 1987). This knowledge includes awareness of the ways in which respondents were recruited, the interviews were set up and of the conversations that took place before the tape recorder was switched on.

A very important feature of the context in which these accounts were produced is that it was one that was permissive of accounts of being a sexually active older person. At some stage before I switched the tape recorder on, I usually said that I had been introduced to this topic when I was working for a local *Age Concern*⁷ group and was asked by the local hospital to produce a leaflet on HIV & AIDS and older people. I described how I got together a group of older people to produce this leaflet and how the conversations that went on in this group made me think about the assumption that older people were no longer sexually active and were unwilling to talk about their experiences. Although I made considerable efforts to make space for accounts in which speakers did feel that older people are no longer sexually active (and some respondents did produce accounts along these lines), it seems unlikely that I was perceived as entirely neutral myself. In explaining my interest in the topic, I revealed that I had produced a leaflet on HIV & AIDS and older people – there would be no point in doing this unless I thought that older people were sexually active and potentially at risk of contracting HIV. In addition, the word 'assumptions' is perhaps hearable as an undesirable thing, and the very fact of doing research on this topic suggests that I think there are at least some things to say about it.

All these factors meant that the accounts were produced in a context that was at least permissive of, and arguably encouraged, accounts of being a sexually active older person. This meant that, in interactional terms, respondents did not always need to do the work to establish the possibility of being a sexual person that they might have needed to do in other contexts. So orienting to telling a counter-narrative was not always work that was necessary to produce the accounts.

The analyst's identification of counter-narratives

However, I as the analyst, using my cultural knowledge, still want to argue that they are producing counter-narratives. Given the existence and prevalence of the asexual older people storyline, it seems reasonable to argue that, at this level, narratives by older women concerning their sexual activity constitute counter-narratives. Thirteen of the 23 women who talked to me told stories about being sexually active after the age of 60 so these narratives can be argued to be counter-narratives. In addition, an idea which is often associated with the asexual older people storyline is that older people are unwilling to talk about topics to do with sex. Most of the other ten interviewees told stories about wanting or not wanting a new sexual relationship, about past experiences of sexual activity and about other older people's sexual relationships. In doing so, I would argue that they were telling narratives counter to the associated idea that older people do not talk about sex.

I will discuss in more detail one particular example where I argue that the speaker is telling a narrative which constitutes a counter-narrative to the asexual older people storyline. This comes from the interview with Rosa. A few years ago, Rosa had a sexual relationship with a man she knew to be married to someone else. Her account involves a lot of talk about the moral status of this man. She seems to be trying to reconcile the contradictory facts that he made her very happy and that she feels that he cannot have been a good man because he was deceiving his wife. She says:

Rosa: So the whole sexual part of it was absolutely wonderful.

Rebecca: Mmm.

Rosa: Erm and like nothing I'd ever experienced before, which is so strange.

Rebecca: Yes.

Rosa: Erm being that er he was also on Warfarin, so what you got effectively, I'm trying to talk something which isn't my language

Rebecca: Mmm.

Rosa: Erm, there was no erection, there was no completion as such. But there's what I think, I don't know this woman certainly found enormously satisfying, joyous and satisfying and erm it was wonderful. And we both thought it was wonderful.

In these extracts, Rosa does not explicitly orient to telling a counter-narrative. But since she was in her mid-70s at the time of the events she describes, she is telling a counter-narrative to the storyline that older people are asexual.

The dominant cultural storyline of asexual older people is closely related to a number of other dominant cultural storylines of particular relevance to narratives about being a sexual older person. One prevalent associated storyline is that really good sex happens between young people because youth is sexually attractive and age is physically repulsive (The Hen Co-op 1993). Not only is Rosa clear that this was 'wonderful' sex but she comments several times that her partner was very attractive and 'trim'. Another associated storyline about sexual activity is that it is synonymous with heterosexual penetrative intercourse (Koedt 1996). In this example, whilst the couple are a man and woman, the man is impotent and there is an implication that they did not have penetrative sex. However, Rosa is clear that both partners experienced great pleasure. Her phrase "there was no erection, there was no completion as such" is ambiguous. She might mean that he or possibly both of them did not have an orgasm or she might just be referring to the fact that they did not have penetrative sex (understanding anything else to be 'foreplay' and penetration to be 'completion'). If she does mean that they did not have orgasms, then this account is still more of a counter-narrative, since mutual orgasm is usually taken to be an essential part of good sex.

Liz was the interviewee who made the most overt references to her experiences being untypical and possibly unsuitable for a woman of her own age. As already mentioned, she had lived for nearly 40 years with her female partner and they had adopted and brought up two children together. As they were approaching retirement, her partner left her. Since then, Liz has started a new relationship with a woman who lives in Switzerland. Liz is currently trying to decide whether to move to Switzerland to be with her partner or to remain in the UK to look after one of her sons who is disabled. Throughout her account, Liz orients to how unusual her experiences are in that her life is changing radically so late in her life. She does not usually orient to her experiences in having women partners as unusual and indeed says that she had never really considered herself to be a lesbian until her partner left her – she just thought that she loved one particular woman. Her talk about being a lesbian tends to normalise

her experiences, not to set them up as counter to a dominant cultural storyline of heteronormativity. Whilst she does not orient to telling a narrative which is counter to a heteronormative storyline, I would argue that she is still doing so because not only does heteronormativity mean that heterosexuality is taken as the norm but older women are not generally expected to be lesbian.

In earlier sections of this paper I have described another very prevalent storyline which affects older women's narratives about sexual activity: this is the liberal storyline. Whilst interviewees seldom explicitly oriented to telling a narrative which was counter to the liberal storyline, some of their narratives can be argued to run counter to it. Betty's husband was severely disabled in later life, eventually losing his speech as well as being completely physically dependent on her. Betty talked about how she felt that her relationship with her husband improved during the years when his disability meant that they were no longer sexually active. She characterises these years as lovely, calm and peaceful. She says that whilst she would not describe herself as exactly frigid, she had never been that interested in sex so did not really miss it. She comments that people do tend to be less interested in sex as they get older and that older people who remarry are probably doing so for companionship alone. I would argue that her narratives about this period run counter to the liberal storyline which states that sexuality is lifelong and that sexual activity an important part of a successful relationship.

In producing such an etic analysis of this data questions arise as to the analyst's own interests and how these have influenced the sort of analysis which is produced. In identifying counter-narratives which are not oriented to by speakers, I necessarily draw on my own particular cultural knowledge and am more prone to noticing counter-narratives relating to my own interests and commitments. The analysis above is undoubtedly influenced by my readings in feminist theory which has drawn attention to the social construction of sexuality, gender and, more recently, 'biological' sex (Jackson & Scott 1996; Segal 1997). In particular, feminist theory around heteronormativity and its implications has influenced my thinking very greatly. In addition to this influence, my interest and work in HIV & AIDS awareness have sensitised me to accounts of non-penetrative sex, since this forms part of the advice on 'safer sex' practices. My very terminology is influenced by this – I tend to use the phrase 'penetrative sex' without problematising it, but my own use of the phrase derives from 1980s health promotion literature. Finally, my past employment in an organisation working with older people and my current membership of various academic gerontological networks have sensitised me to the social construction of ageing and the often negative effects of such constructions, particularly

as they affect older women (Macdonald & Rich 1984; Pearsall 1997; Harper 1997). This makes me particularly prone to notice narratives relating to this.

The logical extension to this question of how I come to pay attention to particular sorts of counter-narratives is to ask what happens if interviewees want to create narratives which run counter to my own preferred storylines. My own preferred storylines were not straightforward or always constant, but it seems fair to say that I did want people to have something to say about intimate relationships in later life. What this 'something' was could include no longer being interested in sex, but the interviews were predicated on the assumption that interviewees had a story to tell about this topic. The two interviews where this was not the case were very difficult and rather uncomfortable. In both cases, the women had unusual reasons for taking part in the research. Jo claimed that she had nothing particular to say and that she had just responded to my advert in a moment of boredom. She was no longer interested in either sex or intimate relationships and did not seem to want to talk about them except to reiterate how much she did not want anything to do with them. I did not manage to induce accounts about this lack of interest. I had the impression that Mrs Rosenberg had only taken part in the research to oblige her daughter-in-law, who is an acquaintance of mine. The interview with her was particularly uncomfortable and a close analysis of the transcript suggests that this was at least partly because she was treating the interaction as a social occasion whilst I was treating it as an interview, situations which have very different conversational norms. It could be argued that Mrs Rosenberg was resisting being positioned as an interviewee and repositioned herself in the arguably more powerful position of 'the hostess' (Harré & van Langenhove 1999). In both these interviews, I found it very difficult to induce the extended turns of talk by interviewees that usually characterise interviews. It can thus be seen that the production of counter-narratives, or even narratives at all, is greatly affected by the researcher's assumptions and interests, making reflexive considerations of the processes of research and analysis essential in the use of etic analysis.

Conclusion

In this paper I hope to have demonstrated that the dominant cultural storylines relating to older women and sexual activity are very complex and that the identification of counter-narratives is far from straightforward. One level at which counter-narratives can be identified is by looking at participants' own orientations to telling a counter-narrative. Sometimes participants do this in a

relatively straightforward manner, but more often the teasing out of narratives drawing on dominant cultural storylines and counter-narratives is difficult because they are intertwined. While they are telling counter-narratives speakers often briefly orient to telling narratives that draw on dominant cultural storylines. I have suggested that a sub-category of counter-narratives might be described as transgressive narratives. I have demonstrated that the production of some counter-narratives is particularly strongly indicated in speech and that speakers can make moves to protect themselves from the potential danger of telling unacceptable counter-narratives. At another level I have argued that a contrasting way of identifying counter-narratives is by using the analyst’s categories. This is a particularly valuable approach when the context in which the narrative is created makes it easy to tell counter-narratives without orienting to doing so. Any such use of the analyst’s categories requires reflexive consideration of the ways in which their cultural knowledge and commitments affect their analysis.

Notes

1. They are less diverse in terms of ‘race’/ethnicity: ethnicity is a complex issue which was often not explicitly oriented to by the speakers in this study. However, two women identified themselves as Jewish.
2. I wanted to imply a broad and contextualised definition of ‘sex’, particularly in contrast to much of the gerontological literature which has often limited discussion to heterosexual penetrative sex. I also chose this phrase rather than ‘sex’ because, in recognition of the sensitivity of the topic, I wanted to give respondents the scope to talk at different levels of explicitness. I also felt some hesitation at putting my own name in public places next to the word ‘sex’ when recruiting for respondents.
3. ‘Mills and Boon’ are the publishers of numerous relatively formulaic romances. An equivalent series in the US is ‘Harlequin Romance’.
4. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms and all references to places and unusual professions or hobbies have also been changed.
5. British slang term for someone who masturbates, usually used as an insult.
6. ‘Woman’s Hour’ is a long-running radio programme on BBC Radio 4 in the UK. It has a broadly liberal agenda and often features stories about women overcoming difficulties, experiencing previously unnoticed discrimination or undertaking unusual activities.
7. *Age Concern* is a well-known voluntary organisation in the UK that provides services and runs campaigns around older people’s issues.

References

- Abell, J., Stokoe, E. H., & Billig, M. (2000). Narrative and the discursive (re)construction of events. In M. Andrews, S. D. Sclater, C. Squire, & A. Treacher (Eds.), *Lines of narrative: Psychosocial perspectives* (pp. 180–192). London and New York: Routledge.
- Antaki, C. (1994). *Explaining and arguing: The social organization of accounts*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage.
- Billig, M. (1999). Whose terms? Whose ordinairiness? Rhetoric and ideology in conversation analysis. *Discourse and Society*, 10, 543–558.
- Brecher, E. M. (1984). *Love, sex and aging: A consumers union report*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company.
- Bruner, J. (1987). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, 54 (1), 11–32.
- Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18, 1–17.
- Co-op, The Hen (1993). *Growing old disgracefully: New ideas for getting the most out of life*. London: Piatkus.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage.
- Foucault, M. (1976). *The history of sexuality – volume 1: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). London: Allen Lane.
- Greengross, W., & Greengross, S. (1989). *Living, loving and ageing: Sexual relationships in later life*. London: Age Concern England.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1997). *The new language of qualitative method*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1998). Narrative practice and the coherence of personal stories. *Sociological Quarterly*, 39 (1), 163–187.
- Harper, S. (1997). Constructing later life/constructing the body: Some thoughts from feminist theory. In A. Jamieson, S. Harper, & C. Victor (Eds.), *Critical approaches to ageing and later life* (pp. 160–172). Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (Eds.). (1999). *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Herron, M. J., & Herron, W. G. (1999). Elder sexuality. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 8 (3), 167–176.
- Hodson, D. S., & Skeen, P. (1994). Sexuality and aging: The hammerlock of myths. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 13 (3), 219–235.
- Jackson, S., & Scott, S. (Eds.). (1996). *Feminism and sexuality: A reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Koedt, A. (1996). The myth of the vaginal orgasm. In S. Jackson & S. Scott (Eds.), *Feminism and sexuality: A reader* (pp. 111–116). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1967). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In J. Helm (Ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts* (pp. 12–44). Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Macdonald, B., & Rich, C. (1984). *Look me in the eye: Old women, aging and ageism*. London: The Women's Press.

- Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5, 87–123.
- Pearsall, M. (Ed.). (1997). *The other within us: feminist explorations of women and aging*. Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press.
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories: Power, change and social worlds*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London, Beverley Hills, Newbury Park and New Delhi: Sage.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, London and New Delhi: Sage.
- Sacks, H. (1995). *Lectures on conversation* (Vol. 1 & 2). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Seale, C. (2000). Ressurective practice and narrative. In M. Andrews, S. D. Sclater, C. Squire, & A. Treacher (Eds.), *Lines of narrative: Psychosocial perspectives* (pp. 36–47). London and New York: Routledge.
- Segal, L. (Ed.). (1997). *New sexual agendas*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan.
- Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage.
- Stokoe, E. H., & Smithson, J. (2001). Making gender relevant: Conversation analysis and gender categories in interaction. *Discourse and Society*, 12 (2), 243–269.
- Talbot, J., Bibace, R., Bokhour, B., & Bamberg, M. (1996). Affirmation and resistance of dominant discourses: The rhetorical construction of pregnancy. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 6 (3), 225–251.
- Weg, R. B. (1983). *Sexuality in the later years: Roles and behaviour*. New York, London etc.: Academic Press.
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretative repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse and Society*, 9 (3), 387–412.

COMMENTARIES

Narratives as *drawn-upon* and narratives as *occasioned*: Challenges in reconciling an emic and etic analysis

Neill Korobov

Frances L. Hiatt School of Psychology, Clark University

Jones' analysis of older women discussing their experiences of "intimacy" brings into tension a view of "narratives" as *actively produced* and a view of "narratives" as *drawn upon*. In trading on both views, her discussion indexes a controversial debate concerning not simply the question of how to synthesize an "emic" and an "etic" analysis, but also the extent to which the "emic/etic" or "macro/micro" distinction is itself problematic. While critically assessing different levels of analysis is an important endeavor, my position is that the emic/etic and micro/macro *distinction* is itself problematic, and as such, needs to be rejected. I will consider how Jones' works through both levels of analysis, paying particular attention to how she warrants her claims at the "emic" level of analysis. (*Narratives, Emic, Etic, Ethnomethodology, Participant orientations, Talk, Discourse analysis*)

Jones' article explicitly deals with excerpts from 5 different women (ages 61–90) who are said to draw on "dominant cultural storylines" and "counter narratives" of such "storylines" to produce personal accounts about "intimate relationships" and "sex" in later life. She is attempting to unite two different levels at which analysts often think about and analyze "narratives". It is an undertaking that most discourse analysts only talk about methodologically or theoretically, and usually avoid actually doing empirically. To that end, her work is ambitious and important. In this commentary, I will first discuss how she attempts to bring together these two views of narrative. Secondly, I will focus on the specific emic and etic analyses that she provides. While I would have enjoyed being able to focus on *both* her emic and etic analysis in detail, as well as the controversy between the emic/etic distinction, due to space limitations I will focus in detail only with her emic analysis. Suffice it to say that, in my opinion, the emic/etic distinction itself needs to be problematized, and in the end, rejected.

Two views of narrative

Encircling her entire analytic endeavor is what I consider a rather ambitious and salutary attempt to integrate two separate, but related views of narratives. She wants to identify how narratives are both interactively occasioned resources that are *actively produced* and also extra-discursive cultural resources *drawn upon*. In the first view, narratives do not pre-exist nor are they simply experiential by-products. Rather, they are worked-up or *occasioned*, actively produced and mobilized within interaction, and seen as *resources* for doing rhetorical work. It is a view of narratives which focuses, as she puts it, on things like turn-taking, preferred and dis-preferred responses, and membership categorization analysis. She is advocating a view of narratives as endogenously produced, one that offers an emic analysis of the “participant’s orientations” and the categorical and sequential aspects of talk within interaction. As I will soon discuss, one of my central concerns is with the robustness of her emic analysis. My concern is that her emic analysis quickly slides into what I will argue is a more top-down form of discourse analysis – one that runs the risk of sacrificing analytic technicality for a more broad and loose paraphrasing of how “dominant cultural storylines” are signaled by certain keywords or phrases.

In the second view, Narratives are treated as general cultural storylines which aren’t so much worked-up as they are a kind of pre-figured “family of related plots which carry with them recognizable characters, expected situations, and anticipated outcomes” (p. 172). In this view, narratives are akin to storylines, are broad and general, and have an independent, extra-discursive dimension to them. In arguing for both views of narrative, she is trading on a controversial (Schegloff 1997, 1998; Speer 2001) kind of “synthetic” discourse analysis (reminiscent of Wetherell & Edley’s work – 1998, 1999) which invokes *both* a micro (bottom-up) and macro (top-down) view of context. By doing this, she situates herself squarely within the thicket of recent debates surrounding the controversial dichotomization of macro and micro views of context and analysis (see Billig 1999; Edley 2001; Schegloff 1997, 1998; Speer 2001; Speer & Potter 2000; Wetherell 1998; Wetherell & Edley 1998, 1999). Unfortunately, Jones does not discuss this debate nor does she justify her synthetic or blend approach.

Her agenda is to point out that some of these storylines attain a dominant or normative status. She calls these “dominant cultural storylines”, and points out two for her current analysis: the “asexual older people” and “liberal” dominant cultural storylines. Of particular importance is Jones’ desire to argue that the “asexual older people” and “liberal” storylines are explicitly counter to one

another. She wants to show how some older women index the “liberal” storyline as a way to resist the “asexual older people” storyline. She also wants to show how some are caught between both. And she also wants to demonstrate how some women orient to the “asexual older people” storyline as a way to resist the liberal storyline. It is the participants’ orientations and analyst’s identifications, she argues, that determine which storyline is treated as dominant and which is used as a resource (or “counter-narrative”) for resistance. Her technical aim is to identify these “counter-narratives” within the data. I will begin by discussing how she attempts to do this at the emic level of analysis.

Warranting claims at the “Emic” level of analysis

Jones sets out the task of looking for how and when participants “orient to” telling a counter-narrative. Such orientations are signaled, she argues, by the use of certain keywords or phrases, like “taboo”, “that’s very rude, I shouldn’t be telling you that”, etc. Jones believes that these phrases or words index counter-narratives, and as such are ways of ‘orienting to’ broader counter-narratives of resistance. I will comment on her analysis of selected cases.

Excerpt 1 – *Liz* (and a brief comment on excerpt 3 – *Liz*)

Jones argues that Liz ascribes the asexual older people storyline to what her friends think is normal for older women (a dry vagina because of old age) and then resists this storyline by asserting that vaginal dryness is the result of not being with the right person. Age is made relevant as Liz notes that her friends are “in their fifties”, thus casting their opinion as an exemplar of the asexual older people storyline. Other than noting this, Jones offers us little more in terms of analysis. Her analysis works as a paraphrase of a less than detailed transcript. I believe there are some important things happening that are worth mentioning. First, there is a chain of appreciations used by Rebecca (“Right”, “Right, yes”, “yes yes”) that do important interactive work. Appreciations of the form Rebecca uses are much less vague than simple response tokens (like “mmm”) in that appreciations signal a type of understanding and alignment with what is being said (Sacks 1989). You can see Liz orient back to these appreciations with the repeated use of “you know”. There is a definite dialogicality going on which is highly relevant for the establishment of Liz countering her friend’s opinions. In jumping to the third excerpt with Liz, there again (in Rebecca’s last turn) Rebecca normalizes Liz’s ambivalence about dating while

being old. There is a notable co-conspiratorial resistance going on. Unfortunately, Jones' does not develop this co-coordination or sequential arrangement of turn-taking. It is at that level, I would argue, that resistance surfaces as a joint endeavor that is being conversationally worked-up.

Secondly, there is a definite tentativeness to Liz's resistance to category ascription that Jones does not underscore. Her strategy is one of hedging as a way of *cautiously* denying the possession of certain associative features (Widdicombe & Wooffitt 1995) of the asexual older people storyline. There are two instances where Liz softly characterizes the asexual older people storyline as "interesting" ("so that's interesting" and "quite interesting"). Characterizing it as "interesting" is far different from characterizing it as wrong. It is a more reserved or tentative way of hedging about making a direct claim. Coupled with this, when Liz does index the asexual older people storyline, she puts it in the mouths of her friends (using reported speech). And then, again, she characterizes their reported speech as "quite interesting". This is all a very tentative set-up. When she does finally solidify her resistance in the final lines, notice how she descends the epistemic hierarchy (for the first time) from 5 repeated uses of "know" to "I think". The "anyway" is a tying mechanism that re-orient this statement as an answer to the reported speech of her friends, and the tag question of "you know" at the end again re-orient to Rebecca and re-signals that this counter-narrative is a joint endeavor with Rebecca. Pointing out this little bit of interactive work is simply one possible way of doing analysis. I am not suggesting that Jones should have performed an exhaustive analysis on each excerpt. My point is that the dialogicality and linguistic set-up of Liz's resistance needs to be detailed and analyzed, which it was not.

Excerpt 2 – *Lesley*

Lesley is said to be using a certain kind of resistance device, or "transgressive narrative" to signal the possibility of offence. Although she is cautious about doing so, Jones wants to make the case that the transgressive "that's very rude I shouldn't be telling you that" is an example of resistance to the asexual older people storyline. I believe this claim is questionable. There is no evidence that I can see (and really none offered) to indicate that Lesley is occasioning her remarks as relevant given her *age*. Perhaps if the "you" in "I shouldn't be telling *you* that" was emphasized, we could try to make the case that Lesley was signaling out Rebecca as younger, but the transcript (unfortunately) is very undetailed. Other than this, the more likely explanation is that Lesley's transgressive comment is (maybe) counter to a narrative of decency. It might be a device for

managing the embarrassment of being overly crude or personal, particularly to an interviewer you hardly know. The *assumption* that it is relevant because of her *age* seems unconvincing. It seems like a reasonable comment for anyone, regardless of age. It is hard to imagine anyone, at any age, who would feel comfortable in sharing how their partner prefers to masturbate while being kissed and caressed. Age is simply not occasioned as relevant in Lesley's resistance-commentary, at least not in this excerpt. This begins what I will argue is a trend in Jones' claims-making towards "ascriptivism" (Widdicombe 1998) – that is, improperly imputing a discursive strategy to a text without sufficiently detailing the basis for that imputation. It is a mistake that will surface in both Jones' emic and (especially) etic analysis.

Excerpt 4 – *Win*

The danger of ascriptivism again surfaces in Win's excerpt. Jones argues that Win *herself* orients to the dominant storyline that she is resisting. She argues that Win is herself orienting to the dominant asexual older people storyline with the "what people assume to be normal, at our point" comment, but has already resisted it (in a backwards order) in her first turn with the counter-commentary of "Am I shocking you?". Again, I disagree with this interpretation. Win's resistance or counter commentary of "Am I shocking you?" in her first turn is arguably irrelevant in so far as it orients to *age* or *disability*. If anything, it is relevant sequentially as a commentary on her attempted repair "erm. . .hmm, what do I say?..both have orgasm. . .". Her "does it matter? Am I shocking you" could *even* be interpreted as a straightforward question (after all there is no laughter, and Rebecca's next turn is opened very directly with "No, not at all"). Or it could be interpreted as a transgressive-commentary as having possibly offended Rebecca. In any case, I believe it is acceptable for Jones to call this transgressive commentary a kind of counter-narrative. But I don't see how it is a counter-narrative to the asexual older people storyline or the disabled people storyline, at least not at that point in the dialogue.

This brings up my other point concerning this excerpt. If anyone occasions the asexual older people storyline, it is Rebecca, not Win. Rebecca clearly orients to the asexual older people storyline by first normalizing it (men becoming impotent as they get older) and then countering it ("it doesn't mean the end"). Then, and only then, does Win follow suit and critically take-up the asexual older people storyline. In terms of the structure of the turn-taking, Win's transgressive comment was made relevant *in terms of age* by Rebecca (not Win), and then used as a resource for invoking the asexual older people storyline. As a

result of this set-up, it was made relevant as a resource for resistance by Win. Here again, we have a very co-ordered and dialogical movement between Win and Rebecca for doing resistance. Unfortunately, Jones does not draw any attention to this highly relevant sequence of turn-taking. Jones seems more interested in highlighting key phrases and giving rather loose explanations for how they signal that counter-narratives and storylines are at play. There is very little attention paid to the linguistic or sequential occasioning of ‘participant orientations’ or dialogicality, let alone a sufficiently detailed transcript from which to make claims.

Excerpt 5 – *Win*

In this excerpt Jones presents Win as “clearly” doing counter-narrative work, but is uncertain about which storyline Win is resisting and which one she is advocating. Jones’ uncertainty derives, in part, from her belief that Win’s comment “But that would be regarded as totally shocking. . .” is “carefully neutral” and her own response “They would, wouldn’t they” is made in a “cautiously detached way”. Here again, I demur with Jones’s interpretation. Rather than being innocuous, I believe that this exchange of turns is highly relevant as a type of preference organization whose function is to set-up Win’s counter-commentary of “how much of this you dare put into it. . .”. To begin, there is a definite collusion going on in the first three turns with Rebecca’s appreciations (“Really? Gosh”, “Right”, and “Gosh”) that set Win’s remarks off as somewhat interesting – and because of the likely context of rapport, they function to signal and renew (turn-by-turn) understanding and support. Win’s use of “but” in “*but* that would be totally shocking” is a *contrast device* for juxtaposing the way she has been talking about it up to that point (i.e., *not* in terms of its shock value, but as a potentially good thing) with what follows the “but” (i.e., that it is “totally shocking”). The “but” is a device used to signal that she is about to characterize the topic *differently* than she has been presenting it. Further, the use of “totally” is an extreme case formulation (or ECD device) which is often used to exaggerate (and thus possibly gently mock) these other people’s response. And the two modalizations of *would* in “that *would* be regarded” and “they’d call it abuse” is highly relevant as a stake or interest device (Edwards & Potter 1992) for characterizing the motives of these other people. In other words, rather than seeing the potential good of what the nurse was doing, they *would* be totally shocked and they *would* call it abuse. In my way of seeing it, Win’s comment is anything but neutral.

And neither is Rebecca's completion of the turn. The "they would, wouldn't they" is highly recipient designed as a collusion strategy. This construction is a quintessential example of the classic "Mandy Rice-Davies" device for characterizing stake or interest (Edwards & Potter 1992). It ironizes these other people's reaction as the product of pre-conceived interests, rather than as sensitive to the situation as Win and Rebecca see it. Again, this is performed through the modalization of *would* in both "they *would*" and in the tag question "*wouldn't* they?". It solidifies an interactional context of agreement and collusion between Win and Rebecca – one that has been slowly built up, beginning with Rebecca's string of appreciations. This entire set-up, I would argue, is what produces Win's direct counter-commentary. This counter-commentary comes in two parts. First, she directly affirms the usefulness of what the nurse taught her ("it stood me in good stead on, at times") and then resists the possible inappropriateness of saying this with the transgressive comment of "how much you dare put into it I don't know". The mutual bit of laughter following this makes sense, for it is very clear that Rebecca and Win are co-ordering the construction of openness and resistance.

Again, not to sound redundant, but the purpose of bringing this up is to argue that Jones is (not intentionally, but unfortunately) side-stepping some very relevant interactive turn sequences between Rebecca and Win. And not simply in this excerpt, but the majority of her emic analysis would have been more robust had it given more attention to what I consider to be a very rich tapestry of dialogical co-ordering of "resistance" and collusion between Rebecca and the other women. A satisfactory emic analysis needs to be highly attentive to the very things Jones pointed out earlier in her article – for instance, turn-taking, preferred and dis-preferred responses, and membership categorization devices, not to mention some level of linguistic rigor and transcript notation detail. And if a close study of participants' orientations is to be the staple of one's emic analysis, then one ought pay close enough attention to the categorical, linguistic, and sequential features of the interaction so as to make a convincing case for how participant orientations are analytically *tractable* and how storylines are endogenously *occasioned* across turns. While I believe Jones intentions at the emic level were laudable (and a very important direction that more discourse analysts should move towards), her execution of it was lacking.

Warranting claims at the “Etic” level of analysis

In the final section of the article, Jones moves to the etic level of analysis. I want to make two points here. The first is a basic skepticism regarding the emic and etic dichotomy. Like other scholars (Schegloff 1997; Speer 2001; Speer & Potter 2000), I think the dichotomy itself needs to go (although I am not recommending a “blend” of the two levels, or of a “synthetic” approach to discourse analysis). As soon as one makes the emic and etic distinction, a war of words begins. The emic hard-liners complain that an etic approach is often too heavy-handed in its reading of people’s talk through various socio-political concepts that are often left unsubstantiated and vague (hence, ascriptivism) in their actual analysis (see Speer 2001). This is said to lead to a kind of intellectual imperialism. At the other end, the etic hard-liners complain that a pure emic analysis risks ideological complicity while promoting a kind of “naïve realism” or quiet scientism that participant orientations are simply there to be read-off, as if the data speak for themselves (see Edley 2001). The problem isn’t that one side is right and the other wrong. The problem is that it is a *false* dichotomy – being more a liability than an asset.

My second and final point concerns the “reflexive” way Jones sets up her etic analysis. In her discussion of *Rosa*, she wants to argue that Rosa is telling a counter-narrative to the asexual older people storyline, even though Jones’ admits that Rosa does not explicitly orient to her age, nor to the storyline in general. The best evidence we have is NOT what Rosa says, but what Jones’ already presumes to know is relevant. My point is that while an etic analysis is said to rely upon what the analyst already knows as a *necessary* condition for claims-making, I do not believe it is a *sufficient* condition. If anything, background assumptions and theoretical knowledge are the starting-points for approaching the data, not the end points. Again, my concern is with the abuse of etic privilege, or ascriptivism. After all, if one is going to make claims about the data when there is not evidence *in the data* for those claims, then it begs the question: why even do *discourse* analysis?

References

- Billig, M. (1999). ‘Whose terms? Whose ordinariness? Rhetoric and ideology in conversation analysis’. *Discourse & Society*, 10(4), 543–558.
- Edley, N. (2001). Conversation analysis, discursive psychology and the study of ideology: A response to Susan Speer. *Feminism & Psychology*, 11(1), 136–140.

- Edwards, D. (1997). *Discourse and cognition*. London: Sage.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. London: Sage.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. London: Sage.
- Sacks, H. (1989). Harvey Sacks – Lectures 1964–1965. In G. Jefferson (Ed.), Special issue of *Human Studies*, 12(3–4), 183–404.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1997). Whose text? Whose context? *Discourse & Society*, 8(2), 165–187.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1998). Reply to Wetherell. *Discourse & Society*, 9(3), 413–416.
- Speer, S. (2001). Reconsidering the concept of hegemonic masculinity: Discursive psychology, Conversation analysis, and participants' orientations. *Feminism & Psychology*, 11(1), 107–135.
- Speer, S., & Potter, J. (2000). The management of heterosexist talk: conversational resources and prejudiced claims. *Discourse & Society*, 11(4), 543–572.
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretive repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse & Society*, 9(3), 387–412.
- Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1998). Gender practices: Steps in the analysis of men and masculinities. In K. Henwood, C. Griffin, & A. Phoenix (Eds.), *Standpoints and differences: Essays in the practice of feminist psychology* (pp. 156–173). London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1999). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices. *Feminism & Psychology*, 9(3), 335–356.
- Widdicombe, S. (1998). Uses of identity as an analysts' and a participants' tool. In C. Antaki & S. Widdicombe (Eds.), *Identities in talk* (pp. 191–206). London: Sage.
- Widdicombe, S., & Wooffitt, R. (1995). *The language of youth subcultures. Social identity in action*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

“But what’s at stake?” Older women talking about sexuality

Jill McLean Taylor

Departments of Education and Human Services,
and Women's Studies, Simmons College

Interviews with women between the ages of 60 and 91 support the position that dominant cultural story lines about sexuality and aging are well-known at the same time as intimate relationships show them to be reductionist and over-simplified. This commentary asks about the space created between interviewer and interviewee that allows for narratives that are radical rather than counter-narratives, and raises questions about standpoint.
(*Counter-narratives, Sexuality & aging, Liberatory elements*)

In January, 2002, at the end of an Human Services Advocacy class at the women's college where I teach, a student asked me if I would be in the stu-

dent production of *The Vagina Monologues* (Ensler 1998).¹ I was surprised for many reasons: the student describes herself as an athlete, blushes when speaking in class, and generally discounts her remarks with “this is probably not the right answer.” But mainly I was surprised because of my age, something that students may not know precisely, but could probably guess at with reasonable accuracy. Just as most adolescents and young adults shudder when their parents and sexuality are linked, so I thought some degree of that shudder would extend to professors who are older than students’ parents. Research demonstrates that most young adults believe older women as a group to be among the most conservative and inhibited of all adults (Hodson & Skeen 1994). As I agreed to be in the play it was with the assumption that I would be one of several faculty members taking a small part along with this student and others.

As is evident, the above is filled with stereotypes and assumptions that include a dominant cultural storyline or master narrative about sexuality and aging. The interviews with over 200 women from diverse backgrounds that became *The Vagina Monologues* may be understood collectively as a counter narrative to the master narrative about women’s bodies, and what has been acceptable to say in public, and for some women, to say in private. The group of women between the ages of 65 and 75 interviewed by Eve Ensler were, for her, the “most poignant of all,” as “most had never spoken about their vaginas, and had very little conscious relationship to their vaginas” (Ensler 1998, p. 23). The liberatory elements (Foucault 1980) in speaking and hearing about vaginas may be assessed in terms of the numbers of women and men who have been to performances of *The Vagina Monologues* in 28 countries.²

The narratives that form the background for the article, “‘That’s very rude, I shouldn’t be telling you that’: Older women talking about sex” are co-constructed in the interaction of researcher and the interviewee. For analytic purposes, Jones “understands narratives to be neither pre-existing nor a simple reflection of experience, but to be made moment-by-moment in the interaction between parties drawing on available cultural resources” (p. 169). In her research, participants were oriented to, or given permission to break cultural taboos in speaking about sex and aging by virtue of the fact that they had responded to efforts to recruit women “to talk about their experiences of intimate relationships in later life” (p. 169). Many of the older women in Jones’s study understood this to be a euphemism and that they would be speaking about sex, thus allowing them as narrators to enter the territory of counter-narrative without necessarily orienting the listener that they are about to do so.

The familiar dominant cultural storyline about sexuality and aging may be summed up in a few phrases: older people are asexual; are less interested

in sex than companionship, and that the indignities of aging bodies (female ones in particular) act as a deterrent to interest and stimulation (Brecher 1984; Gullette 1997). Alongside this is a liberal storyline that states that of course older people are sexual, and that mental – and even physical health – owe a debt to a satisfying sex life (Hodson & Skeen 1994). *Sex After Sixty* is reputed to be the largest-selling large print book (Heilbrun 1997), which in itself becomes a source for the type of humor that pervades birthday cards for aging baby boomers. A norm of heterosexuality underlies this humor and the majority of mainstream media accounts of sexuality and aging. We do not, for example, necessarily think of Viagra for gay couples, nor are lesbian women featured in advertisements in medical journals for vaginal lubricant creams.

Jones draws a useful distinction between counter-narratives to the dominant cultural storyline on sexuality and aging and a liberal story line, noting that people using the latter need to do discursive work that establishes the authenticity of that storyline in a way that is not necessary for the former. Longer narratives frequently contain both storylines, and there is also a subset of counter-narratives that Jones names transgressive narratives, as seen in the title of her article. In this example and others is the idea that the speaker has oriented “to telling a transgressive narrative if they have invoked the notion of a taboo, rule breaking or sanction.”

Complicating counter narratives

The first three narratives Jones presents are those of two women, Liz and Lesley, who are speaking of sex within the context of their same sex relationships. The narratives are examples of the simultaneous use of counter and transgressive narratives and both participants orient to the counter narrative of sexuality and aging at different points. Cultural resources known and available to the research participants and the researcher (Squire 2000) seem implicitly understood to include what is already a counter-narrative writ large; that of sexually active, older lesbians. Win, the third woman who orients to a counter narrative, was married to a disabled man and has been disabled all her life. Her narrative counters a master narrative about sexuality and disabled people, and like Liz and Lesley, she checks with the interviewer that her openness and honesty are appropriate for research purposes.

The space created to speak freely may be because the narrators have set up a context that is already counter to a culturally normative heterosexual story-line by speaking about sex within a same sex relationship, or between two disabled

people. Understanding narratives as collaboratively performed events emerging in the relationship between a teller and an audience (Langellier 1989, 2001), the women in Jones's study are using complex discursive strategies as they tell their stories: They are simultaneously cultural performers and cultural critics (Squire 2000), standing as they do, outside a normative cultural story-line in multiple ways (Fine, Stewart, & Zucker 2000).

Rosa, a women in her seventies, tells of an affair with a married man that was "enormously satisfying, joyous, and satisfying and erm it was wonderful. And we both thought it was wonderful" (p. 184), although she describes her partner as impotent, identifying another dominant cultural story-line about heterosexual penetrative sex as normative. Unlike the narrators discussed above, Rosa does not orient to a counter narrative, but in describing her experience is producing a counter-narrative to the "asexual older person," which could also be heard as a liberal story-line.

As Rosa is speaking of sexuality within the context of a heterosexual relationship, she also is complicating the usual counter-narrative or liberal story-line. She too stands outside the parameters of cultural norms by having an affair and beginning a new sexual relationship as an older woman, giving a freedom to speak that may not exist for those within the dominant heterosexual, married or in monogamous relationships, culture. Jones may want to add another subset in counter-narratives: a radical storyline.

Sticking to the dominant cultural storyline

Women in the study had been alerted through recruitment and discussion with the researcher that they were encouraged to speak about sexuality and aging, and all but two of the twenty-three participants responded accordingly. Thirteen women told stories of being sexually active after the age of 60, thus producing counter narratives to the older people as asexual storyline. Others spoke of sexuality, thus belying the associated idea that sex is a topic not talked about by older people. An excerpt of Kate's theorising about the story she has told is a good example of movement between countering a liberal storyline and the asexual older people storyline. Kate draws on shared cultural knowledge by invoking the "Woman's Hour" and its views that would include a liberal story-line, at the same time as she places sexuality for older people within the context of a longterm partnership.

I would like to suggest that some women in heterosexual relationships appropriate the asexual older person storyline for their own use, as it makes re-

dundant the excuses of headaches and other physical changes and discomforts. Women in their fifties, presumably post menopausal, as Liz notes, are thought to have a problem with vaginal dryness and not be able to have sex anymore, although Liz refutes this idea. Her understanding is that this means “that you are not with the right person for sex anyway” (p. 176). That Liz is in a new relationship after 40 years with the same woman may account for her somewhat romanticised shaping of a physiological fact for some women (Miracle, Miracle, & Baumeister 2002).

Literary critic Carolyn Heilbrun (1997), writes of her exasperation with dreams of romantic sex (for older women) presented by women authors, concluding by stating her regret after much consideration, that she is unable “to suggest a substitute, unromantic adventure for women’s later life” (p. 113). She does believe however, “that as we women reach our later years, sex, if it is part of our lives, is a by-product, not the dominant element. Like happiness, or beauty in a work of art, sex after sixty cannot be the object of any undertaking, although it may sometimes be a wonderful and unsought-for result” (p. 113).

The production of counter narratives

In our daily lives we draw on familiar dominant cultural storylines from an available discursive repertoire and use them in contexts where it would be unwise, inappropriate, or even dangerous to do otherwise.³ As a teacher in courses on human growth and change over the life-cycle and gender and sexuality I am certain that I will not discuss my sexuality, and I would probably have declined had I known I was to be the only faculty member in *The Vagina Monologues*. Some students in class or in papers about their adolescence are not inhibited in discussing their sexuality as they assume that I know the master narrative about youth and sexuality, and that I have liberal views. The research participants in Jones’s study who produce counter narratives may be in a particular relationship and position vis-à-vis the dominant culture and the storylines around sexuality and aging. Some sex relationships benefit from the perceived difference in aging for women and men in popular culture, which would have us believe that men age “better,” which leaves only the opposite place for women (Ussher 1989). The danger of internalising negative images about aging female bodies may be reduced when relationships are with other women, when both are disabled, or the male impotent. In those particular interviews there is a space that allows counter narratives to be co-constructed and to acknowledge, but then continue anyway, the transgressive nature of what they are doing. Others who

are more firmly within the dominant culture and associated storylines of asexual older people may have more difficulty with this as their lives are embedded within wider cultural discourses about aging and sexuality that are difficult to interrupt.

Creating a space for counter narratives is liberatory work that relies on participants' knowledge – shared with the researcher – of dominant cultural storylines regarding the particular subject. It also requires a context that allows a counter narrative to enter into, and be supported in a research relationship, which is collaborative and where talk is co-constructed. Jones has provided this space and alerted us to the importance of researchers recognizing their research participants orienting to a counter narrative. Without that recognition it is fair to assume that many participants would remain on safer ground, speaking within the constraints of a master narrative. The women in her study teach us about the power of speaking about subjects considered unsuitable in the everyday world, and permit us to produce and live our own counter narratives.

Notes

1. When performed on college campuses it is common for many students to have parts. In commercial theatre venues three different women usually perform. Eve Ensler does *The Vagina Monologues* as a one women show.
2. Information on the V Day website, www.vday.org.
3. I am thinking here of discourses about race. It would be unwise and perhaps dangerous for me as an anti-racist white woman to engage in a discussion with members of a white supremacist group. It would be more dangerous for women and men of color.

References

- Brecher, E. M. (1984). *Love, sex and aging: A consumers union report*. Boston, MA: Little Brown & Company.
- Ensler, E. (1998). *The vagina monologues*. New York: Random House.
- Fine, M., Stewart, A., & Zucker, A. N. (2000). White girls and women in the contemporary United States. In C. Squire (Ed.), *Culture in psychology* (pp. 59–72). London & Philadelphia, PA: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *The history of sexuality. Vol. I: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gullette, M. M. (1997). *Declining to decline: Cultural combat and the politics of the midlife*. Charlottesville: Virginia. University of Virginia Press.
- Heilbrun, C. G. (1997). *Last gift of time: Life beyond sixty*. New York: Ballantine Books.

- Hodson, D. S., & Skeen, P. (1994). Sexuality and aging: The hammerlock of myths. *The Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 13(3), 219–235.
- Langellier, K. M. (1989). Personal narratives: Perspectives on theory and research. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9, 243–276.
- Langellier, K. M. (2001). ‘You’re marked’: Breast cancer, tattoo and the narrative performance of identity. In J. Brockmeier & D. Carbaugh (Eds.), *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self, and culture* (pp. 145–184). Amsterdam & Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Miracle, T. S., Miracle, A.W., & Baumeister, R. F. (2002). *Human sexuality: Meeting your basic needs*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Squire, C. (2000). Introduction. In C. Squire (Ed.), *Culture in Psychology* (pp. 1–16). London & Philadelphia, PA: Routledge.
- Ussher, J. M. (1989). *The psychology of the female body*. London & New York: Routledge

What discourse analysis reveals about elderly women, sex and the struggle with societal norms

Janet Spreckels

Graduertenkolleg, University of Heidelberg, Germany

In my commentary on Jones’s study concerning how older women talk about their sexuality and intimate relationships I will focus on two issues: (1) What the study reveals about the intertwining of personal and cultural meaning and on its contribution to gerontological research. (2) Entering the field of narrative studies from a more sociolinguistic background and working within a more ethnographic orientation to the analysis of talk, I am particularly interested in methodological questions of empirical research. Hence, I will have a closer look at Jones’s study with an eye to her methodology, trying to point out some techniques that might be of help for further research on narratives. (*Gerontology, Dominant Cultural Storylines, Discourse Analysis, Micro-analysis, Emic and Etic Analysis, Contextualization Cues*)

Available roles for elderly women: Asexual, liberal or both?

In her article, Rebecca L. Jones succeeds in giving a vivid insight into a topic commonly considered taboo: older women talking about their sexuality and intimate relationships. The title “That’s very rude, I shouldn’t be telling you that” is a quote of one of the women Jones interviewed. It is well chosen, as it echoes the widespread perception that women above the age of 60 should re-

frain from talking about their sexual lives. After all, they are not even expected to *have* sexual lives.

Despite feminist achievements and the day-time TV-talk shows (see Squire, this issue), women talking about their sexual activity remains a delicate topic. With the recent appearance of the French bestseller “The sexual life of Catherine M.,” it has once again become a subject of discussion in the cultural sections of newspapers. Published in spring 2001, the explicit account of the author’s adventurous sexual life evoked a diverse response. While some critics called it a provocation, many, especially women who praised the courage of the 53-year-old author Catherine Millet, celebrated it as a confession and even a manifesto (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*). Whatever their particular perspective, most reactions share the underlying assumption that unlike men, women are not supposed to speak about their sexual lives in public. For when women speak of their eventful sexual lives, they are often accused of being *sluts* or *whores*, while men who do the same, are likely to be labeled *studs*.

Jones’s study reveals that it is even more difficult for *older* women to speak about sexuality. This, Jones argues, goes partially back to the appropriation of broader cultural discourses when narrating personal issues. In her refreshing and challenging analysis she gives a lucid description of the intertwining of personal and cultural narratives. To identify this sophisticated relationship, Jones operates with two key concepts. The first one she terms the “dominant cultural storyline of ‘asexual older people’”. This storyline reflects the widespread perception that older people are not expected to be sexually active any longer. The second cultural storyline or “master narrative”, if we use the terminology of Mishler (1995), Jones terms the ‘liberal’ storyline. This storyline can be summed up as ‘of course older people have sex too’, and stands in direct opposition to the first.

Jones is able to show how all the personal narratives of her corpus basically reflected these two cultural storylines in one way or another. Her study, thus, seems to be in line with Bamberg who argues: “Attempting to construe an answer to the question ‘Who am I?’, the speaker/narrator positions him-/herself vis-à-vis cultural discourses, either by embracing them, or by displaying neutrality, or by distancing, critiquing, subverting and resisting them” (2002, p. 12). Depending on the respective “position” (cf. Hollway 1984) the women took up, they had to do a different amount of discursive work. Since the “asexual older people storyline” is the more established one in our society, Jones labels narratives drawing on the “liberal storyline” counter-narratives (p. 173). Thus, when appropriating the liberal storyline, people typically have to do more discursive work to legitimate their personal narratives than when they

simply employ the “asexual older people” storyline. Interestingly, however, this was not always borne out by the empirical data based on the interviews Jones conducted. She therefore rightly concludes that “one storyline cannot be argued to be exclusively dominant and the other to be associated exclusively with counter-narratives” (p. 174). The study thus shows that even if we assume the existence of rather clear-cut existing dominant cultural storylines, it is not that easy to elicit these in talk-in-interaction. Some of the women, for example, seemed to draw on *both* storylines when trying to meet their conversational goals. Whatever their exact orientation towards either of the two dominant storylines, one conclusion which we can draw from Jones’s study is that none of the women’s personal accounts existed in a vacuum. Instead, it seemed that all of the personal narratives were “caught” in one way or another within broader cultural narratives, thus limiting the possibility of individualized roles. In this respect, the study again reverberates Bamberg (2002, p. 9) who states that as individuals we “are ‘free within limits’, i.e., we can pick among a variety of already existing discourses”.

For me, Jones’ paper was of great interest, especially because I am currently working with members of the other end of the age spectrum, that is, with adolescents. Investigating the communication of youths, I often observe mostly pejorative associations of advancing age among younger groups. Sexual inactivity is one of the many negative elderly stereotypes (re)produced in the talk of adolescents. Their perspective of “older people” is in the majority congruent with what Jones calls the “asexual older people storyline”. Yet, how do elderly people themselves deal with this notion? The intimate information Jones gathered demonstrates how older women struggle with having certain needs and desires while at the same time wanting to conform to societal norms. Since these two goals are often contradictory for many older women, cultural assumptions can become a heavy burden for them. In this respect, Jones’s analysis resonates with existing studies in social gerontology (i.e., Coupland & Coupland 1993; Coupland, Coupland, & Giles 1991; Thimm 2000). All of these works have drawn attention to the way that social stereotypes of the elderly and a generally “ageist” social climate limit the roles available to elderly people.

One of these roles seems to be what Jones calls the “asexual older people storyline”. If we see the pressure it imposes on some older women, it seems desirable to challenge this asexual storyline. Coupland et al. (1991) draw attention to the fact that social roles are not “cultural givens” but can and should be subject to change: “The social roles we require elderly people to play are rapidly changing, in the English-speaking world and far beyond; more and more older

people are questioning the legitimacy and stability of these roles (Coupland et al. 1991, p. 191)."

The interviews revealed that another cultural storyline is coming into existence. Yet, this "liberal" storyline, which would presumably have been unthinkable a few decades ago, usually does not receive much attention in public discourse. Many recent gerontological studies have regretted that older people are underrepresented in every social area of language research. Coupland et al. claim that we live in a culture which "in part through patterns of social interaction comes to marginalize its older members and to define them as a minority group (though certainly not in the numerical sense)" (1991, p. ix). Jones, however, contributes to this neglected field of research. In this respect, Jones's analysis of a sensible topic such as older women addressing their own sexuality is an important contribution not only to narratological and feminist studies, but to gerontological studies as well.

Employing Goffman and Gumperz: The value of a micro-analytic approach to talk-in-interaction

Having pointed out the great value of Jones' investigation, I would like to turn to the second point mentioned above, namely a more critical appraisal of Jones' methodological approach. After reading her article, one is not quite sure where to place Jones methodologically. Although she claims at the outset to make use of a discourse analytic approach, she later points out that "this paper is not itself within the domain of conversation analysis" (p. 175). Whereas she partially applies a discursive approach to narratives, she does not proceed micro-analytically. Other recent research in the field of psychology, however, has shown the merits of such an approach. In the following, I will try to demonstrate how Jones's study could as well have profited from a more micro-analytically oriented methodology.

In order to define and identify counter-narratives to the two dominant storylines, the author works with two distinct types of analysis commonly used to examine conversations: emic and etic analyses. Quoting Silverman (1993) she describes emic analyses as "working within the conceptual framework of those studied". This type of analysis has proven to be a highly valuable tool in explaining phenomena in everyday interaction (cf. Deppermann 2001). Etic analysis, in contrast, uses "an imposed frame of reference" (p. 174), that is, working with the analyst's own categories which are far more interpretive and culturally loaded.

The emic analysis illustrates rather unambiguous cases of counter-narratives. Phrases such as “I know I shouldn’t” and “I know most people wouldn’t agree”, for example, clearly indicate the speaker’s intention to draw up a position vis-à-vis some normative discourses and probably to tell a counter-narrative. Interestingly, Jones was able to show how different women apply different strategies to construct counter-narratives. One such strategy employed by two women (Lesley and Liz) was to “briefly orient to the dominant cultural storyline and then to resist it” (p. 178). By doing so, these women demonstrated their knowledge of societal norms and expectations so that they could emphasize more forcefully their deviation from these norms in the course of their narrative. This requires, of course, a fairly self-confident personality.

It is interesting that both women who used this strategy are lesbian women. Although the reasons for their rhetorical strategies are unclear, this might be because they have learned to deal with being treated as members of an out-group. Both sequences are accompanied with laughs, indicating that a fairly serious topic is treated by them with a sense of humor. In her analysis Jones, however, does not take laughter into account. This, among other things, led me to scrutinize the method of her approach in some more detail.

After having successfully identified counter-narratives from an emic angle, the author proceeds to an etic approach, that is to identify counter-narratives when participants do *not* give explicit cues of telling a counter-narrative. In contrast to an emic analysis, etic analysis is generally less grounded. Relying on different kinds of knowledge when working hermeneutically with data is, of course, a reasonable method for social scientists. The psychologist and conversation analyst Arnulf Deppermann distinguishes three types of knowledge that usually play a role when evaluating conversational data: (i) common knowledge (“*Alltagswissen*”), (ii) ethnographic knowledge (“*ethnographisches Wissen*”) including “insider information” about a specific peer group, cultural background, milieu etc., and (iii) theoretical knowledge (“*theoretisches Wissen*”), e.g. in the field of psychology, sociology etc. (cp. Deppermann 2001, pp. 87/88). With the help of this tripartite conception of knowledge, the researcher can arrive at a more complex analysis of the data. What Jones refers to in her article as the “analyst’s (cultural) knowledge” seems to be a combination of these three types of knowledge. Yet, this knowledge can only be applied effectively if the analyst works very closely with the data at hand.

Interpreting the account of one woman’s sexual relationship with a married man, Jones claims (largely on the basis of her own cultural knowledge) to be able to identify a counter-narrative to the “asexual older people storyline”. Yet, she does not base this assumption on an analysis of what has been said. For the

analyst's knowledge alone does not provide a strong enough foundation for her argument, this analysis is not as convincing as her previous analysis from the emic angle. To reinforce their arguments, conversation analysts usually apply a more thorough analysis of factors that go beyond the words uttered. For example, they take into account the para- and nonverbal signs which often reveal important additional information about the speakers' accounts. A study especially like Jones's, in which speakers obviously have to deal with a great amount of shame or insecurity while narrating, could profit tremendously from such additional forms of analysis.

Analysts dealing with narratives typically agree on the dynamic and interactive nature of communication. Jones seems to be in line with this notion when she emphasizes at the outset of her article that she understands narratives as being "created in the interaction between participants" (p. 171). This definition is strongly reminiscent of Gumperz's well-known concept of contextualization. According to Gumperz, contexts do not pre-exist but are created by the participants of a conversation in the course of verbal interaction (Gumperz 1982).

Many empirical research has noticed the merits of Gumperz's concept of contextualization and has approached the analysis of talk-in-interaction from a micro-analytic vantage point. It is surprising that in her own analysis Jones hardly considers any contextualization cues like prosodic, proxemic or kinetic aspects of the interaction. As mentioned above, the fact, for example, that most narratives in her data were accompanied by laughter is neglected. Only once does she refer to a laugh in order to interpret her data (p. 177). Laughter, however, along with other cues such as pauses, eye gaze and supra-segmentation, could have been very helpful for the identification as well as analysis of counter-narratives.

Another methodological problem in Jones's study concerns the situation of the interviews. Anyone who has done this kind of research knows how much the personality and behavior of the interviewer can affect the outcome of the interviews. Bamberg (2002, p. 3) sums up this difficulty when he says, "narrative talk is situated in interactive settings and tailored for a particular audience, i.e., it is always designed in terms of particular interactive purposes".

Although Jones argues that she tried to appear as neutral as possible in her role as the interviewer, by explaining her interest in the topic, mentioning her engagement in an "Age Concern group," and noting that she produced a leaflet on HIV & AIDS and older people, she unintentionally revealed her own liberal attitude towards the topic. As Jones herself points out, this may have created an atmosphere which influenced women whose narratives were congruent

with the “asexual older people storyline” to conform more to the interviewer’s perspective.

Aware of these issues, Jones herself concedes that within the context of the interviews, it was presumably much easier for the women to talk about their sexual activity than in everyday life. The women may have felt that a frank narrative of being a sexually active older person was not only accepted but presumably even desired by the interviewer. Jones thus concludes that the “production of counter-narratives, or even narratives at all, is greatly affected by the researcher’s assumptions and interest” (p. 186).

One can share Jones’s self-critique at this point. Indeed, one could go even further by claiming her responses in the interviews with Liz (p. 178) and Win (p. 179) to be ‘manipulative’, for they could be taken to reinforce, rather overtly, the liberal storyline. Jones, thus, unwillingly becomes a “co-author” of the narratives. In Jones’s defense, however, it must be said that all empirical social research is constrained, but also ultimately born out of the highly influential role of context. And rather than attempting to ‘limit’ and ‘control for’ the role of context, we may have to seriously rethink how we could make the analysis of context a more central aspect of our analysis.

Among others, the well-known sociologist Erving Goffman has pointed out the complexity of talk-in-interaction. In order to better describe what he calls the “interaction order”, Goffman developed some highly useful concepts for conversation analytic purposes. One of these is his notion of “footing” which helps to characterize participants’ status within a specific moment of the interaction. Another prominent concept of Goffman’s work is the notion of “face” which emphasizes that individuals are constantly doing “face-work” in social interaction (cf. Goffmann 1959, 1981). Talking about intimate relationships requires, no doubt, a great amount of “face-work” on the older women’s part. Taking into consideration the two important concepts of “face” and “footing” would certainly add to the analysis of subtle aspects of the interaction. Among other things, these concepts may shed some light on the interviewer’s potential influence and co-narratorship in the narratives.

All narratives and counter-narratives are culturally, socially and historically, and even situationally located. Whereas Jones claims that the women she interviewed “are a reasonably diverse group in terms of age, social class, sexual orientation and past and present sexual experience” (p. 170), and while her findings probably hold for many contemporary Western societies, her sample also represents a rather culturally specific population. To research similar questions possibly across different nation states in culturally even more diverse settings would be a valuable task for future research. In this sense, Jones’ in-

triguing and important study can be used as a valuable take off point for future research in the social sciences.

References

- Bamberg, M. (2002). We are young, responsible, and male: Form and functions of 'slut-bashing' in the identity constructions in 15-year-old males.
<http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/virtual/bamberg1.html>
- Coupland, N., Coupland, J., & Giles, H. (1991). *Language, society & the elderly*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Coupland, N., & Coupland, J. (1993). Discourses of ageism and anti-ageism. In *Journal of Aging Studies*, 7 (3), 279–301.
- Deppermann, A. (2001). *Gespräche analysieren*. [Analyzing conversations.] Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. London, UK: Sage.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis. An essay on the organization of experience*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Goffman, E. (1981). Footing. In E. Goffman (Ed.), *Forms of talk* (pp. 124–159). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hollway, W. (1984). Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* (pp. 227–263). London: Methuen.
- Millet, C. (to appear in English in June 2002). *The sexual life of Catherine M.*
- Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5, 87–123.
- Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. London, UK: Sage.
- Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 31, 6.2.2002, p. 16.
- Thimm, C. (2000). Alter-Sprache-Geschlecht. Sprach- und kommunikationswissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf das höhere Lebensalter. [Age-Language-Gender. Linguistic and communication perspectives in later life.] Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag.

RESPONSE

to commentaries on “‘That’s very rude, I shouldn’t be telling you that’: Older women talking about sex”

by Rebecca L. Jones

I would like to thank the three commentators for their responses to my article (Jones 2002) and for engaging with it in such thoughtful and thought-provoking ways. The three commentators have obviously seen quite different things in the data and in my analysis of it. Clearly the data itself is rich and generates a variety of responses in readers. The differences between the commentaries also demonstrates the many different ways in which researchers work. The commentators are drawing on different academic repertoires to produce unique and occasioned responses to my article which I hope will help other readers to place my work in relation to other traditions. My own response in this article is part of this project. I found the responses very stimulating, especially where they touch on major debates about epistemology and methodology. There is not space here to reply in detail to the wide range of comments or to respond to all the criticisms of my analysis. Instead I focus on some major theoretical issues which underlie questions about how counter-narratives can be identified in data.

Emic and etic analysis

Both Spreckels and Korobov are dissatisfied with some aspects of my analysis in relation to the degree to which analysis must be demonstrably grounded in the immediate data. Conversation analysis and other discursive traditions which are strongly influenced by it (such as Edwards & Potter 1992) limit analytic attention to those things which are treated as relevant by participants in a particular extract. Clearly I do not do this in either my emic or etic sections. By stating that my own work was not conversation analytic, I meant to signal that I was not proceeding with a conversation analytic understanding of the proper way to treat data. On reflection, my use of the word ‘emic’ may have been mis-

leading if readers inferred from it that I was aiming to follow conversation analytic principles in my emic section. This was not what I intended to imply, for theoretical reasons which I discuss below. I meant simply to make a distinction between counter-narratives which are treated as such by participants and those which the analyst identifies in the absence of any immediate orientation by the participants. I was concerned to refute any simplistic notion that the 'asexual older people' storyline was always the dominant cultural storyline and that the 'liberal' storyline was always a counter-narrative. My distinction between emic and etic styles of analysis was focused around different ways in which the two different storylines might be identified, not on different theoretical stances.

Theoretical positions

As Korobov correctly identifies, I am drawing on Wetherell's (1998) reply to Schegloff (1997) to try to synthesise an approach that both pays attention to the locally occasioned nature of narratives and also sets these narratives in their broader historical and cultural location. Such an approach is consonant with other work which is often described as critical discursive psychology (such as Edley 2001; Edley & Wetherell 1997; Seymour-Smith, Wetherell, & Phoenix 2002; Wetherell & Edley 1998). However, while work in this tradition may sometimes use micro-analytic *methods*, it does not accept conversation analytic *theory* about the desirability or even the possibility of limiting analysis to those things which are oriented to by participants (in the way further argued by Schegloff 1998). Instead, I consider analysis to necessarily involve the analyst introducing their own categories and would argue that even conversation analysts import their own categories when they talk about phenomena such as turn taking, membership categorisation devices, participants' orientations, epistemic hierarchies, contrast structures, three-part lists and so on, when these are not participants' concerns. There is nothing improper in the use of such analyst's categories but I do not accept that there is an ontological difference between the categories used by conversation analysts and those used by critical discursive psychologists.

This is part of a much wider epistemological and methodological debate between discourse analysts working within different traditions, as usefully summarised in Wetherell (2001a). I recognise that I am unlikely to convince readers coming from traditions which are strongly influenced by conversation analytic theory since fundamentally different views are typically held of such major issues as; the role of politics in research, the status of the data, what

counts as relevant context, the nature of discourse and the status of analyst's findings. These issues are inter-linked and implicated in one another but I focus here on one issue which was particularly apparent to me as I read the commentaries. Spreckels and Korobov seem to be drawing on a particular understanding of what sort of contextual and background information it is permissible to use in analysis. This seems to be consonant with conversation analysis and some forms of discursive psychology which limit analysis to those things which participants themselves treat as relevant.

In contrast, those discursive approaches which are more influenced by post-structuralism theorise context differently which means that the border between participants' orientations and analyst's knowledge becomes less clear. I find Wetherell's (1998, pp. 393&403, 2001a, p. 389) extension of Laclau's metaphor of society as an argumentative fabric a particularly useful way of thinking about the relationship between extracts from transcripts and broader cultural phenomena. She argues that taking a broad definition of discourse as human meaning-making and thinking of society as an argumentative fabric enables the analyst to have a broader definition of what is relevant and oriented to by participants. If society is imagined as a piece of fabric, extracts from transcripts can be seen as a part of the fabric which has had a circle drawn on it with a pen. Drawing the circle (selecting a piece of transcript for analysis) creates a boundary and an object of study. However, if as analysts we are more interested in modes of representation than in the nature and sequence of talk, we remain interested in the threads that make up the fabric and continue either side of the circle. Thus, the necessarily arbitrary boundary becomes less important and it is possible to define participants' orientations more widely to include the broader argumentative structure of their particular utterances. Participants' orientations remain very important but they need not be understood in a narrow sense as those things which are evident in the immediate piece of transcript. Wetherell (1998) also argues for paying attention to phenomena such as implicit heteronormativity, silences and absences in data. These are necessarily not in the data as participants' concerns in the way understood by conversation analysis but they are in the data in that the analyst, by drawing on their knowledge of other ways in which it could have been talked about, can see that things have been framed in a particular way.

So, for example, Korobov argues that Lesley does not make age relevant or occasion age in the excerpt which I present. He is quite right that she does not do so in this excerpt. However, if we are interested in the argumentative threads which are part of the excerpt, what counts as making age relevant or occasioning it might be more inclusively defined. In other places in the interview Lesley

does position herself as an older woman and treats age as relevant. This begs the question: how long does a relevancy last? If someone positions themselves as an older woman at line one of a transcript, where does this positioning cease to apply? You might even argue that since Lesley had been recruited to take part in an interview about older women's experiences of intimate relationships, age is implicitly relevant throughout the interview. It is not always the topic of our conversation but it is one of the ongoing argumentative threads of the interaction. I included this extract in the emic section because she does clearly orient to telling a counter-narrative, even though, as Korobov and I agree, it is not clear what narrative she is countering. A more inclusive definition of participants' orientations such as this is not without its difficulties, particularly the risk of straying too far from the data. Nevertheless, I consider the risk worthwhile for the accompanying benefits of enabling attention to wider historical and cultural contexts.

The benefits of microanalysis

However, there are also many benefits to focusing on the turn-by-turn construction of talk in a microanalytic way. I am indebted to Korobov for pointing out the tentativeness in Liz's resistance to the 'asexual older people' storyline. Korobov also comments on Win and Rebecca's evaluations of the nurse teaching Win to masturbate and points out that there is more than simple neutrality going on in this extract. It is indeed important to note that while we are using some cautious phrases, we are also positioning ourselves as more sensitive than other people. However, I do want to resist any implication that what is *really* going on is that we are not being neutral because this seems to imply that there is a real event beyond the discourse which is accessible to analysis. Rather I want to say that we are doing both things – 'doing being neutral' and positioning ourselves in opposition to insensitive others. This then raises the further question of what interactional purpose is served by this layered talk that attends both to neutrality and to our own status as knowing better than other people. It seems highly pertinent that this occurs when Win is talking about something which could be cast as the sexual abuse of children, as she makes relevant with her use of the word 'abuse'. To draw in some of the argumentative threads beyond the circle of the extract, in the current climate of concern about 'paedophilia' in the UK it may be particularly important to frame her story in a way that wards off the accusation that she is defending child sexual abuse. By positioning ourselves as both detached observers and also as people who know

better than most people, we simultaneously protect ourselves from accusations of defending child sexual abuse and enable this dangerous narrative. Thus, I might add to my original analysis that some counter-narratives are particularly dangerous to tell and that these are likely to be marked in the text with such cautious and hedging remarks.

Co-construction

Another important point, which all three commentators raise and which was implicit but perhaps insufficiently spelt out in my article, is the degree to which the accounts are co-constructed. Co-construction occurs at both micro and macro levels. As McLean Taylor emphasises, by setting up these interviews in the way that I did I created a space which allowed interviewees more scope for telling counter-narratives than many other everyday contexts. My influence on the sort of stories that were told is significant at this level. It is also significant at a much more micro level. However, my involvement at this level is far from 'unwilling' as Spreckels claims. I do not theorise interviews to be about gaining as pure as possible access to pre-existing thought, stories or experiences. I make no claims at all that this is the same account that the person would have created had I interacted with them in a different way. As I state in the Abstract of my article, I understand narratives to be "made moment-by-moment in the interaction between parties drawing on available cultural resources". I theorise my own role in responding, encouraging and suggesting new avenues of talk to be an inevitable part of the creation of the narratives. I want to strongly resist the words 'collusion' (Korobov) and 'manipulative' (Spreckels) to describe my part in the creation of the narratives since this implies a realist notion that my role is improper and that an interviewer could or should be detached and uninvolved in the interview process. I am myself a member of the culture that I am analysing so I am drawing on the same publicly available ways of understanding older people's sexual experiences as those that I describe. It is therefore not surprising that I myself draw on the liberal storyline within the interviews when it suits the action orientation of my talk which includes such activities as eliciting narratives and demonstrating interest. This is not to say that demonstrating the extent to which accounts are collaboratively worked up cannot be a valid form of analysis, and Korobov's analysis is very useful in this respect. However, my focus of interest in this article was not on the detail of how the accounts came to be produced in the way that they were, but on speakers' use of more widely available cultural resources.¹

What counts as discourse analysis?

Korobov concludes his article with a challenge that demands a response: “if one is going to make claims about the data when there is not evidence *in the data* for those claims, then it begs the question: why even do *discourse* analysis?” It depends, of course, on what you mean by evidence in the data. If you accept the broader idea of context described above, then the question of what is evident in the data is more complicated, as I have discussed. The issue of what makes academic work discursive is an important one and answers are likely to be coloured by an individual’s theoretical position. There is certainly a cluster of features that tend to be evident in discursive work, including a particular concern with tying analysis relatively closely to presented data. However, following Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Wetherell (2001b), I consider the crucial feature to be that discursive approaches have a theory of language which understands it as constitutive not representational. That is to say, analysis is not about trying to discover pre-existing cognition, actions or intentions beyond the words that are used. Rather, analysis is about studying how different ways of talking about something construct the world differently. By imagining alternative ways in which a narrative could have been formulated, analysts can begin to understand the particular interactional work undertaken by the narrative which was actually produced. Such analysis often entails relatively close study of data in order to explicate how things come to be said in the way that they are. But the feature that marks work as discursive, I argue, is not microanalysis but the theorisation of language as constituting the world.

In terms of older women’s narratives about sexual experiences in later life, looking at participants’ orientations to telling counter-narratives means that simplistic assumptions that the ‘liberal’ storyline is always a counter-narrative can be avoided. Simultaneously, attention to the broader argumentative threads of accounts means that the analyst can take account of regularities across wider bodies of discourse which mean that some storylines are relatively privileged, such as the ‘asexual older people’ storyline. These two approaches do not always sit comfortably together but both are necessary if we are to produce analysis which is sensitive to both the locally occasioned nature of talk and the wider cultural setting in which it occurs.

Note

1. The level of transcription is also a methodological choice which has analytic implications (Potter & Wetherell 1987, p. 166; Taylor 2001). What is appropriate depends upon the analytic focus of the work – since my focus was on broader cultural resources rather than on turn-by-turn interaction, I chose a relatively simple transcription scheme. More detailed transcripts greatly reduce readability, especially for readers who are not familiar with their technical notation.

References

- Edley, N. (2001). Analysing masculinity: Interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis* (pp. 189–224). London: Sage.
- Edley, N., & Wetherell, M. (1997). Jockeying for position: The construction of masculine identities. *Discourse and Society*, 8, 203–217.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. London: Sage.
- Jones, R. L. (2002). “That’s very rude, I shouldn’t be telling you that”: Older women talking about sex. *Narrative Inquiry*, 12 (1), 121–142.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1997). Whose text? Whose context? *Discourse and Society*, 8 (2), 165–187.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1998). Reply to Wetherell. *Discourse and Society*, 9 (3), 413–460.
- Seymour-Smith, S., Wetherell, M., & Phoenix, A. (2002). ‘My wife ordered me to come!’: A discursive analysis of doctors’ and nurses’ accounts of men’s use of general practitioners. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 7 (3), 253–267.
- Taylor, S. (2001). Locating and conducting discourse analytic research. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis* (pp. 5–48). London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretative repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse and Society*, 9 (3), 387–412.
- Wetherell, M. (2001a). Debates in discourse research. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse theory and practice: A reader* (pp. 380–399). London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M. (2001b). Themes in discourse research: The case of Diana. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse theory and practice: A reader* (pp. 14–28). London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1998). Gender practices: Steps in the analysis of men and masculinities. In K. Henwood, C. Griffin, & A. Phoenix (Eds.), *Standpoints and differences: Essays in the practice of feminist psychology* (pp. 156–173). London: Sage.

White trash pride and the exemplary black citizen

Counter-narratives of gender, “race” and the trailer park in contemporary daytime television talk shows

Corinne Squire

University of East London

This paper examines narrative representations of “race” and gender in daytime television talk shows. This television genre is saturated with told stories; indeed, it often seems to be these stories that account for the genre’s critical and academic dismissal, despite its fifteen-year dominance in daytime television, particularly in the US. The genre is also characterised by visual patterns that have narrative features. Disparities have been claimed between “serious” shows that try to analyse social issues and tell “true stories,” and “entertainment” shows in which issues of gender, “race” and sexuality are subsumed by stories of “trailer park” class otherness and emotional anarchy. The paper draws on social-scientific and cultural-studies research, and on two small, time-sampled groups of US shows, to argue for a continuum between serious and entertainment shows. It suggests that serious shows are also characterised by story-telling and moments of emotional incoherence in narrative, and that these elements can be as resistant and persuasive as the shows’ more explicit arguments. On the other hand, entertainment shows can provide a forum for the affective staging of social conflicts, in the process turning their narratives into counter-narratives that are a form of theory. The paper thus argues that visual and auditory narratives on all the shows work in similar ways to produce counternarratives.

Linda (mother, white) (under restraint) She’s not going to sit there and tell him

Angela (daughter, white) (under restraint) (inaudible)

Geraldo Rivera: Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop

Angela: You’re a (bleep) lying (bleep). And I got proof to prove it

(Linda and Angela: inaudible)

Theme music

Commercial break.

Theme music

Rivera to camera: I feel almost sick to my stomach as, I'm sure, many of the people who've seen this – this spectacle – not – not just the eruption into physical violence. But that a mother and a daughter could be so profoundly estranged, so profoundly separate, so divided.

Turns to expert (white female family therapist)

(Geraldo 1994)

Female African American audience member: You say he's unfit, how do you know he's unfit if you don't ever let him see his child? (Audience applause)

White father: Thank you, thank you

White mother: He's unfit if he can't see his child,

(Audience reaction shot of audience still applauding the audience intervention)

White mother voiceover: he took off for two and a half years, I would say that's unfit

(Ricki 2001)

Over the past 15 years, narrative has increasingly been recognised as an important object of social research (Andrews, Day Sclater, Squire, & Treacher 2000; Bruner 1992; Riessman 1993). This recognition has in large part been driven by the political power of personal stories, a power that has been exercised in the west from the nineteenth century but that has assumed a pivotal place in popular culture since the 1960s, though the media aspects of campaigns around for instance civil rights and antiracism, gay rights and feminism. This narrative politics quickly became an integral part of some political, social, cultural and literary theory, through the work of for example feminist writers and “post-structuralists” such as Barthes (1974), Foucault (1967) and Derrida (1979). However it impacted the psychology and sociology of personal narratives more partially and gradually, inhibited by researchers’ concerns about stories’ individuality and complexity, and storytellers’ agency. Such research seems now, though, to have reached an accommodation that allows personal narratives to be read both as individual and cultural, and as articulations of both convention and resistance (Harris, Carney, & Fine 2001; Talbot, Bibace, Bokhour, & Bamberg 1996). For instance, Molly Andrews’s account in this volume of culturally and politically made-over narratives of motherhood points up this ac-

commodification's concerns with contest between narrative formations, not just with their relativistic coexistence. It is from such contested and contesting accommodation that the other chapters in this edited volume, mine included, start.

Social researchers now take personal narratives seriously; narratives in popular culture are a different matter. Social scientists still treat popular cultural phenomena predominantly as either more or less accurate reflections of social realities, or as forces operating more or less strongly, for good or, usually, bad, on the individual (Blackman & Walkerdine 2001). Moreover, for social scientists, popular culture still seems the soft feminine underbelly of the cultural world, always at risk of dangerous excess, as it has been since the eighteenth century (Douglas 1977; Mullan 1988) and correspondingly reviled or avoided. And so we often treat popular-cultural narratives as inferior to personal stories: filtered by their medium, determined by their producers, offering stereotyped, femininely shallow representational possibilities.

It is certainly the case that a story told on television is told according to televisual constraints; but interpersonal, contextual narrative constraints operate on personal narratives, too (Mishler 1986). Moreover, types of story show considerable cultural range, spanning popular and personal tellings. As Todorov (1990) argued, genres are vertically integrated within a particular cultural place and moment. The particular version of the intimate storytelling genre (Plummer 1995) that is the daytime television talk show, for instance, is recognised – and excoriated – for its Oprification of people's interpersonal talk. More generally, it is hard to deny that popular-cultural stories affect us and can provide resources for both dominant and counter-narratives (Jacobs 2000; Walters 2000). There is, indeed, a well-developed body of work in cultural studies that explores the strength and direction of relations between popular culture and lived, everyday culture. From such a perspective, stories in popular culture are emblematic material for the accommodating reading of narratives described above.

This perspective is the one I shall adopt in looking at the narratives of "race," gender and citizenship on daytime television talk shows. I am going to look at the shows, and the mobile representational place women in particular have within them, as a way of examining some of the narrative possibilities opened up by one of the most derided forms of popular culture. The divisions people often make between entertainment-oriented 'sensationalist' and serious 'issues' talk shows is not as firm as it seems. All these shows can at times provide the ground for some interesting stagings of conflicts around gender, 'race' and class. I'm going to suggest, using a few examples, that the possibilities as

well as the limitations of talk shows in staging these conflicts come from aspects of their narrative structure or ‘language’, the way they tell the *stories* for which they are so notorious. This genre is loaded with told stories. Often indeed it seems to be these stories that are responsible for the genre’s critical and academic neglect, despite its fifteen-year domination of daytime television in the US, its high profile in other western countries and its increasing globalisation. The genre’s visual patterns also have narrative elements. I shall argue, in addition, that women in these shows are often the storytellers and story subjects through which the shows patrol but also transgress boundaries of gender, sexuality, class and colour.

The shows’ destabilisings of gender and sexuality have been very ably discussed within cultural studies (Masciarotte 1991; Shattuc 1997), and gender and sexuality are perhaps the categories most explicitly under question in the shows. But the shows are most often dismissed today not in gender terms, as “women’s shows,” but in class terms, as voyeuristic freakshows, exhibitions of predominantly North American “white trash” and “ghetto blacks” that global media conduct around the world like a travelling circus. The changes the shows mark in the stories told by and of people of colour within mainstream western media, while often remarked on, seem to most to be drowned out by their political indeterminacy – many of them are not “good” stories – and by the noise of the trailer park. The confused, fragmented stories of whiteness that the shows tell are usually heard as being about psychological dysfunction or social class, rather than “race.”

I want to start by reviewing some of the existing literature on talk shows, and looking at the shows’ recent history. I shall then draw on a group of shows sampled and studied in 1994 (Squire 1997) and early 2001 to make these arguments.

A brief history of recent talk on television

People think of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* as the originator of the fifteen-year recent history of the daytime television talkshow format. Certainly it is the most widely seen and profitable example. Books like *Coming After Oprah* (Abt & Mustazza 1997) take it as a landmark. However the contemporary structure of host, guests, experts and participating studio audience addressing a single topic was developed first by the *Donahue* show (Carbaugh 1986). Winfrey’s style, more expressive, tactile and communicative, more woman-oriented and racially aware, was developed in a rapidly won competition with *Donahue* in

the Chicago market. But it drew also on Winfrey's own broadcast idol, the newcaster and interviewer Diane Walters, the already-running *Geraldo* show, hosted by a Latino with a prior journalistic career that addressed race and itself addressing some race issues; the concurrent rise of presenters of colour throughout network television and the immediately preceding smash success of the black-owned *Cosby Show*. There was earlier, short-lived precedent in the *Haislip Show*, too.

"Where do genres come from?" Todorov (1990) asks, and answers, "Quite simply from other genres" (p. 15). *Oprah* and the other daytime talk shows' narrative genre draws heavily on a set of mainstream, white-dominated media narrative forms that include tabloid journalism; supermarket tabloids such as the *National Enquirer* and *The Globe*; women's magazines; radio talkshows and phone-ins; morning entertainment television programming like *The Today Show*; the melodrama of afternoon television soaps and the interactionism of night-time television talk shows. In the 1990s, talk show genre-bending produced a whole new clutch of subgenres, soon recognisable in their own right. In the rush to capture the enormous audience opened up by *Donahue* and *Oprah*, a flood of new US shows launched each season, speeded up, more confrontational, with more guests, less structuring by experts and less problem-solving. Genre crossovers with game shows, court tv, and docusoaps, appeared, and shows like *Ricki* targetted an after-school youth audience the earlier shows had only sometimes addressed. This period culminated, mythically, in the 1994 *Jenny Jones* murder by one show guest of another who had revealed on camera that he had a crush on him. At this point, the contemporary serious-versus-entertainment division arose between the shows, with for instance *Donahue* and *Oprah*, in the first category, addressing issues like self-esteem and single parenting and following their daily themed narratives towards closure, while shows like *Ricki* and *Jerry Springer* pursued horrific excesses, emotional anarchy and fun in narrative fragments that at most gesture parodically at a happy ending. While some critics lambast the second category, others like Paul Fussell (1991) find the middlebrow pretensions of the first to a kind of ersatz knowledge capital-letter Bad in contrast to the lower-case badness of the avowedly entertainment-oriented shows.

There is some evidence of talk show audiences segmenting by age, class and education in their viewing (Shattuc 1997) but there is also a lot of commonality; people report learning from all these shows. For several reasons, I think such reports are not just socially desirable responses, that is, people thinking that it is more acceptable to say they learn from than that they enjoy these shows. First, people report learning from many kinds of entertainment televi-

sion, for instance advertisements; and even the entertainment shows do contain overt though at times perfunctory attempts to deliver serious messages after the obligatory sleazefest is over. Second, these shows also address issues of social inequity around for instance gender and “race” in fairly liberal ways, if more cursorily than on the “serious” shows. They also frequently have the more ethnically and class-diverse guests and studio and home audiences; some of Shattuc’s (1997) respondents said they learned from the diversity of such shows. These shows, like the “serious” shows, are also perceived as particularly appropriate and even helpful for women. Thirdly, the narrative structures which I’m going to argue destabilise culturally dominant narratives of social conflict on the shows, appear perhaps even more often in the faster and less-regulated shows. And fourthly, even the serious *Oprah* subgenre is not as uniformly elevated as it claims – it too is full of melodrama, repetitiveness, salaciousness and trivia, and its narratives transgress social categories in ways that are as emotional and at times incoherent as the “entertainment” shows. It is reductive to divide talk show narratives into those that seek closure around their daily themes, and those that pursue fragmentation and burlesque closure, as if this kind of television moved from modernism to postmodernism in a break-neck 5 years around the early 1990s. As with most breaks, the breaks in talk show genres are not that clean or simple.

As aspects of the above description suggest, daytime television talk shows are often perceived as a feminine if not a women’s genre, in which female hosts do well, women predominate on the guest lists and the panels of experts, a female-associated communicative style is the norm, topics identified with women dominate the shows and feminist perspectives are articulated on a variety of political, social, but mostly personal levels (Squire 1994). At the same time, the shows make efforts to represent men’s concerns and to be seen to take men seriously. They are, the hosts say, for everyone, regardless of gender, class or “race.” Class is hard to read off from the shows, given its unspokenness in North American context where most of the shows are produced, its culturally variable signifiers, and the different advertising profiles the shows have in different countries. But given the whiteness of all but a few “ethnic” pockets on western network television, and the continuing dominance of men in serious television journalism, talk shows’ diversity in their representations of racialised groups is, like their feminisation, striking, and perhaps helps account for their popularity in nonwestern markets, for instance southern Africa.

If *Oprah* is not the mother of daytime talk shows, it is at least the mother of racially aware talk television – and like *Cosby* it enabled other black-perspective programming in the US, like the nighttime *Arsenio Hall* talk show and Win-

frey's own tv projects such as *The Women of Brewster Place*. It was the first networked show with a black female host; it had and has many black guests, particularly experts, whose race is sometimes remarked and sometimes ignored; it focuses on many political and cultural issues important to black audiences – racism, the position of African American men, black hair – and it has an ethnically diverse studio and home audience. A variety of commentators have argued that *Oprah* allows, in ways that are very unusual on network television, black women's voices to be heard (Masciarotte 1991), new forms of organic black intellectualism to gain a platform (Shattuc 1997) and a powerful version of black feminism to be articulated (Squire 1994).

A number of commentators have also suggested that talk shows enable a more general hearing of the voices of the socially excluded. Gamson (1998) in *Freaks Talk Back* has argued that gay men and lesbians participating in the more entertainment-oriented shows view them overall as positive for them and as queering popular culture. Few people have suggested, as I'm going to, that there's anything interesting around "race" going on in these shows beyond the pathologising stereotyping, in an almost gladiatorial "spectacle," as Rivera himself describes it in the quote that opens this paper, of poor whites and blacks. Yet the *Oprah* orientation around 'race' described above is now almost hegemonic within daytime talk television – *Ricki* may be a "gay" show (Shattuc 1997) but both it and *Jerry Springer* have large African American audiences and Lake herself often seems to be quoting Winfrey in her performance as indeed many black hosts do – Montel Williams, the "male Oprah," Bertice Berry who fronted a short-lived show in the mid-1990s, the eponymous *Tricia*, a successful British version hosted by a Black British woman. Some shows have also mimicked *Geraldo's* earlier success, with racially salient topics and a Hispanic host (*Charles Perez*, again in the mid-1990s). In this climate of, to paraphrase *Ebony* magazine (Whitaker 1992), the "browning" of talk shows, what is white (Squire 1997)?

I want to argue that the story of a certain shade of white, which we could call white trash or trailer park white, has become the story of social pathology on these shows; that this off-white story contains within it, as a subtext, other, implicit narrations of blackness (Morrison 1992); and that the exact shading of the story is most often contested around women. At the same time, the emergent narrative norm of citizenship on the shows seems to be a story told by an African American, usually female: a story that is most often about family, and responsibility for children. Whites also tell this story, but their narrative power is less. In the quote from the *Ricki* show that begins this article, from a show entitled, "Stop spending child support on yourself!", a story told by a white man

about his ex-wife using child support herself and refusing him access, is modified by the white ex-wife's account of him never paying, and being "unfit," and is then evaluated by an African American female audience member, who turns the story away from economics and towards concepts of parental "fitness." The strong endorsement of this move by the rest of the studio audience is relayed to the home audience by the reaction shot. This audience member's contribution turns a particular narrative, and then a whole episode, towards a story of parenting as citizenly responsibility rather than paid work. Her narrative power in this context is, I would argue, strongly related to her represented identity as an African American woman.¹ And so the shows can present a spectacle quite different to the one Rivera remarks on. Here, for instance, is a story of citizenship, made new and oppositional by its Black storytellers. But this counter-narrative is also told alongside the story of a dirt-poor socially excluded whiteness, one of the few popular-media stories in which white *is* a colour (Dyer 1993), albeit "dirtied" by its associations with an unrepresentable but still very culturally powerful pathology of blackness. As a counter-narrative, this "white trash" story is perhaps harder to follow, and I shall deal with it first.

Women are trash

On talk shows, white trash masculinity is either beyond the pale, a horror zone from which angry young men emerge with shaven heads and swastikas to bomb Oklahoma City; or it is just outside normalcy, a kind of probational respectability from which men can be promoted if they earn more. White trash femininity is more liminal and uncertain, and in some ways therefore even more horrific.

The story to which Rivera is referring at the beginning of this paper is of a young white woman who on a show called "I Have A Terrible Secret: Women Confront Their Past," accuses her white stepfather of abuse and her white mother of collusion, and is supported in her allegations by her white husband. The mother accuses her daughter of betrayal, the stepfather protests his innocence and love for the girl, which he ties to his abject but respectable struggles to earn money and buy her things. The story moves on, through a historically and socially precise child-centred discourse of motherhood articulated by a woman in the studio audience, who says that all mothers should love their children, no matter what; the mother rejects this move. Mother and daughter then have a physical fight in which the men also get involved, and the show goes to a break. There is a classed voyeurism in this performance of a story of gendered abuse between women, and in its acting out of what is

for the psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (1984) the foundation of abjection – the fascination and horror of the maternal body. When the show returns, Rivera expresses his disgust – he feels sick, and it is white trash femininity that has turned his stomach. Then Rivera turns to a white female expert who tells how all this could in therapeutic and feminist terms have been avoided by listening.

Here, as in the *Ricki* example above, a person of colour – in this case the talk show host – offers a key “counter-narrative” intervention in this storyline’s stuttering, minor progress. For Rivera, as he turns to the family therapist, directs the story towards resolution – albeit a psychological resolution that declares itself unraced. But there’s also a point in many talk shows – here, where the show went to a commercial break – where something escapes the dominant televisual narrative, but still manages to make itself felt as another kind of counter-narrative: a narrative that performs incoherence, an implicit narrative of disruption. Commercials frequently feature in such narratives of disruption on talk shows. They interrupt the fights; they give people on the show and in studio and home audiences time to get over overwhelming tears, or shocks that render them speechless. They are also the structural markers of narrative breaks that cannot be smoothed over by television, although television continues around them. And women seem to be specially useful figures in such muddled and muddled counter-stories of social conflict on talk shows, because of their ambivalent relations not just to stories of gender, sexuality, ‘race’ and class, but also to narrative itself, that is, their general cultural instability. You can see this instability causing problems to television, as here, at the same time as it creates good television, for this is also television that’s in danger of being excessive, *too* good: too full of bleeps and fights or simply too incoherent to broadcast or to continue making.

In this example and many others, the feminine abjection that counters dominant televisual narratives seems class and “race”-specific. For this disruptive, elusive femininity is telling the counter-cultural story of the trailer-park whiteness that is often seen as defining the shows, and that is derided by many conservative and some liberal commentators. It is the story of what such commentators call the underclass. This “underclass” is, as many positive and negative commentators on the genre accept, rarely represented anywhere on network television, certainly not by its own story. Some might argue that a black ‘underclass’ is included in this category. Yet it is very rare to see talk show stories about African Americans that involve the enumerative sequences of economic and educational disadvantage and sexual and family dysfunction that characterise the stories from *Geraldo* or *Ricki* that I’ve been discussing. There are certainly occasions when the shows tell familiar, negatively stereotyped stories

about black gang members and single mothers, for example, just as they parade positively stereotyped stories about responsible, achieving African American masculinity and strong, nurturing African American femininity. The shows also sometimes feature narratives that “white out” racialised differences within categories like “Out-of-control teens” or “Two-timing love rats.” But what is unusual in representations of black guests or audience members, is a detailed specification of the abjection of poverty, of the kind featured, for instance, in a 1994 *Bertice Berry* episode, “My Daughter’s Sleeping With A Jerk.” In one story on this show, studio and home audience meet the mother and stepmother of Joy, a 17 year old white woman. The older women define the nature of her boyfriend’s abjection: he is currently unemployed, has not finished school, has been unfaithful, badmouths and physically threatens her. Then Joy and her boyfriend, Billy, come onto the set; he is a thickset young white man with uneven teeth in a lumberjack shirt, while Joy, like the other women, is carefully dressed and made up. Reaction shots of audience members looking shocked follow his entrance, in a kind of explicit visual pathologising. Berry follows up these reactions and a white female audience member expresses her visual disgust:

Shot of Berry and white female audience member, standing

Audience member: I went, “Oh.”

Berry: Why?

Audience member: I don’t know, just by the looks of him . . . I think she’s better than that.

(*Bertice Berry* 1994)

Trailer park whiteness is as many commentators have pointed out (Shattuc 1997) abject but also carnivalesque – literally here, since the women said the man has worked in a carnival.

Again, women’s position is the least stable and most contested. Men presented as ‘white trash’ on the shows retain some narrative agency around this category: as Billy later does, they tell a story of self-improvement, describing how they are moving towards social inclusion by doing more work, earning more or going back to school, and audience members often join in to co-construct these stories. Joy however is presented here as on the edge of the trailer park, the infantilised object of a neverending story of the class border dispute between her mother and stepmother, who want her to go to college, and her “carny” boyfriend. As you might expect in stories about which shade of white is the paler, the margins of trailer-park white are not very well defined and pure white is always in danger, for all of us, white and non-white, of shad-

ing into its economic and social failure. Berry instructs the audience not to knock carnys because “you know you all take your children to those carnivals”; Joy’s story could be any audience member’s story. It is a counter-narrative to the romance of the American dream: not a tragic narrative of failure but a more insidious story of uncertainty that engages with yet ironically undercuts the romance. It is Berry, in a position of power on the show that is tied up with her position as a powerful African American woman, who is most explicitly ironic, suggesting for instance that “compassionate” Joy should save “dolphins and things” rather than male members of the “underclass.” Jacobs (2000) points to the historical and current importance of irony within resistant African American media narratives. Like the African American female audience member on *Ricki*, Berry is here a “raced” voice of citizenship, reiterating yet in the process commenting on and changing the conventional narrative.

What also emerges is that failed, trailer-park whiteness is itself associated, culturally and narratively, with blackness or more precisely, miscegenation. The image of her biracial child is not incidental to the story of Joy’s liminal class position. “. . . You have Arianna to think about. What’s going to happen when he comes home drunk with his buddies and is shoving you around?” Joy’s stepmother asks, just before the child’s racialised visual image is shown to the home audience and the stepmother’s voice continues over it, “Where’s that baby going to be?” Later in that show Joy’s stepmother commented on people in the town calling Joy racialised names. Her stepmother explicitly denies the significance of the child’s racial heritage, as if to white out the difference: “That (insults to Joy)’s why we were upset, not the black – we love Arianna, that’s our baby,” she says. But across this verbal denial, the image of the black child in the white family remains in the story. Joy is also turned “black” in the dominant cultural narrative not just by her child but metaphorically, by teen motherhood. Often the fury directed at whites in these liminal positions on the shows seems indeed a kind of displaced racism. Trailer park whiteness seems especially likely to be mixed up narratively with blackness when women are in the frame; women therefore become a preferred vehicle for this kind of racism by proxy.²

At the same time, these stories of miscegenation demonstrate that white as no colour, or as a colour divided from blackness, is impossible to maintain. Stereotypes are, after all, pursued with a fixity in direct relation to their instability (Bhabha 1994). When the picture of Arianna is shown in the middle of a story about maternal responsibility, the image contradicts the colour-blindness of the verbal narrative. As a consequence, it often seems that talk shows’ stories are implementing the kind of resistant programme advised by the African

American artist Adrian Piper in her piece *Cornered* when she asked any white with even a hint of African ancestry to declare themselves black (Piper 1991). As with class, the stories become narratives that counter dominant cultural stories of stable, well-defined social categories.

Whiteness turns out to be a much bigger part of these shows' stories than it is in many other cultural narratives. The shows thus end up not just as "trash pride" shows that assert their value as entertainment, democracy and personal empowerment, but as *white* trash pride shows, within which the classed nature of this imperfect, abject whiteness shows up very clearly, and the interconnections of categories of whiteness and blackness appear as inescapable. These demonstrations are I think intimately bound to the shows being themselves trash television, and therefore full of stories that are highly emotional, unregarded, and unregulated. The shows may at times seem judgemental, but they are much more multivocal and less normative than the mainstream culture that intones, for instance, the stories of motherhood against which Andrews's (this volume) interviewees speak.

White trash pride

The shows' narratives assert white trash pride in two ways. First, the stories' silences or stutterings sometimes indicate the emotional power, not representable by narrative though showing up within it, of racialised, classed and gendered categories, the limits of emotional commonality. This happened in the *Geraldo* example when the women fought, the show went to a break and the host was left, he said, sick to his stomach, in the face of the horrors of femininity. In the second, *Bertice Berry* example, the visual and apparently unspeakable difference of the child had the same disconcerting effect, and later, Joy's stepmother was almost lost for words: "... it's not the black – we love Arianna, that's our baby." These breaks provoke in viewers a step beyond the shows' own rationalist psychological or egalitarian explanations, towards a recognition of the unresolvable lived difficulties of these subject positions, and the limitations of television in representing them (Squire 1994). Second, white trash pride sometimes emerges when the repeated inadequacies and contradictions in the shows' narratives point us, again, beyond television, but this time towards other explanatory narratives. Joy's boyfriend is both trying hard and not trying at all; Joy is both loved and not loved by her parents, and the instability of white gendered and classed positions manifests itself in these ambiguities. The mismatch between verbal and visual stories – black Arianna in her white

family – also manages to convey through its ambiguity that white is a variable but definite colour, and one that is inescapably related, as a category, to blackness. Such contradictions force a kind of sociological understanding on us that takes us beyond television's narrative frame. Perhaps then we can argue overall as Gamson's (1998) lesbian and gay respondents do about these shows, that white trash on trash television shows sometimes has the power to put dominant cultural narratives in question, often through miscegenatory strategies like the ones Piper talks about.

Black citizenship

Talk shows also produce some destabilisations of dominant cultural narratives when they allow the simple *coexistence* of apparently universal, but implicitly socially specific contents – as for instance when a universalising narrative about what children need and deserve is heard on *Bertice Berry* alongside the displayed image of a visually “different” child. Such parallel narratives can at times have a useful if limited effect, allowing a degree of universality of speaking and listening across racialised and class divisions that is fairly rare in US and many other societies, without ignoring these divisions. Sometimes the universalised story of self-improvement that is heard so loudly on the shows and that so annoys many critics – though it is an integral element of US cultural history – is prescriptive, telling people they must feel anger or how to express closeness. But it is also a democratising story in some respects (Livingstone & Lunt 1993), the sound, the shows like to say, of a kind of virtual town meeting in progress. This story is at times the sound of the socially excluded, women and men, white and black, talking back, bent on class mobility in a cultural climate determined to silence them. Going public like this is, as Patricia Boling (1996) says at the end of her nuanced discussion of the role of privacy in contemporary western societies, one way people can “translate private need into public claim” (p. 160). Though it is not always the best or most effective way, it may be the most accessible.

As in the example from *Ricki* examined at the beginning of this paper, it is often the voice of an African American woman or man on the shows that articulates the cultural “master narrative” of citizenship. When talking about talk shows' white trash narratives, we must also recognise these narratives of non-whiteness against which stories of white trash are now posed. These newly normalised stories of black citizenship are increasingly the exemplar held up to and against white trash stories of social exclusion.

Oprah Winfrey has become perhaps the exemplary citizen, not just in the US, since although her citizenly activities – bill drafting, raising awareness of abuse, literacy campaigns and reading groups – centre there, the show airs worldwide, and it is most generally through the stories she directs and tells on the show that her norm of liberal democratic yet expressive, activist and black-identified citizenship is purveyed. Through this show's stories, Winfrey has become an Eleanor Roosevelt figure, a millennial Miss Liberty.

Maybe it is more valuable, though, to understand such narratives of citizenship when they are at work in a more everyday manner on the shows. In the *Ricki* episode considered earlier, for instance, subsequent audience contributors, predominantly African American, continued to co-construct the episode's story, by questioning and evaluating the white guests' conflicting tales. An African American man endorsed fathers' access rights as equal parents; another told of obtaining child custody from an unfit mother; a white man centred the dispute on the interests of the child; an African American man argued for support checks to be paid to the actual carer (in many cases, a grandmother); an African American woman suggested the male guests must have something in common with the women they were now insulting, since they had once been with them ("Where did you meet her?"); a white woman called on all guests to realise they are hurting primarily their children; finally an African American woman argued that paying child support is not the same as parenting, that in general women do not deny paternal access and that these particular cases were a "sad situation – I'm sorry for the children. God bless the children" (audience applause). This story of an equitable citizenship of parenting was challenged only implicitly by the episode's expert, a white female family lawyer, instrumentally analysing who in each case could and did provide economically and emotionally for the child.

The verbally unmarked entirely implicit racialisation of the visually explicitly racialised civic story told in this episode perhaps leaves open the possibility that the story's colour will be ignored, but I think such ignorance is very hard to maintain, visually or conceptually. Even if as here the story is of a presumed universality around family, that story takes on a very different character within popular media when it is articulated by black men and women, historically figures on the edge of dominant narratives of citizenship and particularly of parenting, and politically even now figures alternately courted and castigated by those narratives, than when it is articulated by white woman or men (Gilroy 1993). This coexistence of conventional, implicitly racialised words – in this case, about family – with resistant, differently raced images, turns the story itself into something different and oppositional. This is not the diverse counter-

narrative of parenting described by Andrews (this volume). It is closer perhaps, as a strategy, to the appropriation of dominant medical narratives to explain treatment failure by the women in Karen Throsby's study (also in this volume). In this case, though, a much more general narrative is being appropriated. A universalising narrative about parenting here becomes a counter-narrative, a kind of alternative theory of parenting and citizenship. In this performance, the story resists the racist history and present that it can have in other contexts.³ Dominant narratives are always less stable and unified than they appear, more susceptible to fracture and subversion, and it is on these fault lines that such stories of citizenship work.

As with the excesses of trailer-park whiteness, these counter-narratives of black citizenship may also prove ineffective if their universalism becomes colourless, rather than colouring. Yet sometimes, counter-narratives offer, on daytime talk shows, a public version of that telling, starting from autobiography, of the historical narrative unconscious which Freeman (this volume) considers. They present us with the possibility of a new form of civil society, within which women and men of colour set out a revised citizenly agenda that is enabled, not restricted, by its beginnings in narratives of struggles against personal and social disempowerment.

Notes

1. I am drawing here on Labov & Waletzky's (1967) broad but useful categorisations of narrative, as well as on Todorov (1990). For more on the importance of historical and social contexts of discourse – and by extension narrative – in assessing language patterns, see Ahmed (2000).
2. Even when such representational miscegenation is visually and verbally absent, as in the *Geraldo* example, the shows' careful targetting of poor whites', but not blacks', dysfunctionality, can I think connote, by its tonal exclusivity, such racist associations.
3. Bhabha (1994) characterises what he calls "hybridity" in this way, as an active and change-producing engagement, not – as conventional readings of the term might suggest – as a simple concatenation, on equal terms.

References

- Abt, V., & Mustazza, L. (1997). *Coming after Oprah: Cultural fallout in the age of the TV talk show*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

- Ahmed, B. (2000). Constructing racism: Discourse, culture and subjectivity. In C. Squire (Ed.), *Culture in psychology* (pp. 73–84). London: Routledge.
- Andrews, M., Day Sclater, S., Squire, C., & Treacher, A. (Eds.). (2000). *Lines of narrative: Psychosocial perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Barthes, R. (1974). *S/Z*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bertice Berry (1994, July 18). My daughter's sleeping with a jerk. New York: Bertice Berry Show/Fox Center Productions and Burrelle's Information Service.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Blackman, L., & Walkerdine, V. (2001). *Mass hysteria*. London: Routledge.
- Boling, P. (1996). *Privacy and the politics of intimate life*. Ithaca, NY: University of Cornell Press.
- Bruner, J. (1992). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carbaugh, D. (1986). *Talking American: Cultural discourses on Donahue*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.
- Derrida, J. (1979). *Writing and difference*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Douglas, A. (1977). *The feminisation of American culture*. New York: Knopf.
- Dyer, R. (1993). *The matter of images: Essays on representations*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1967). *Madness and civilisation*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Fussell, P. (1991) *BAD, or the dumbing of America*. New York: Simon and Shuster.
- Gamson, J. (1998). *Freaks talk back: Tabloid talk shows and sexual nonconformity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Geraldo (1994, July 18). I have a terrible secret: Women confront their past. New York: Investigative News Group and Burrelle's Information Service.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *Small acts*. London: Serpent's Tail.
- Harris, A., Carney, S., & Fine, M. (2001). Counter work: Introduction to 'Under the covers: Theorising the politics of counter stories.' *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 4, 6–18.
- Jacobs, R. (2000). Narrative, civil society and public culture. In M. Andrews, S. Day Sclater, C. Squire, & A. Treacher (Eds.), *Lines of narrative* (pp. 18–35). London: Routledge.
- Kristeva, J. (1984). *Powers of horror*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Labov, W., & Waletzky (1967). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In J. Helm (Ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts* (pp. 12–44). Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Livingstone, S., & Lunt, P. (1993). *Talk on television*. London: Routledge.
- Masciarotte, G-J. (1991). C'mon girl: Oprah Winfrey and the discourse of feminine talk. *Genders*, 11, 81–110.
- Mishler, E. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Morrison, T. (1992). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mullan, J. (1988). *Sentiment and sentimentality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Piper, A. (1991). Flying. In A. Piper (Ed.), *you/know*. Birmingham and Manchester: Icon Gallery and Corner House.
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories*. London: Routledge.
- Riessman, C. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. London: Sage.

- Ricki (2001, February 20). Quit spending the child support money on yourself. London: Channel 4.
- Schweder, R. (1991). *Thinking through cultures*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Shattuc, J. (1997). *The talking cure: TV talk shows and women*. New York: Routledge.
- Squire, C. (1994). Empowering women? The *Oprah Winfrey Show*. *Feminism and Psychology*, 4 (1), 63–79.
- Squire, C. (1997). Who's white? Television talk shows and representations of whiteness. In M. Fine, L. Weis, L. Powell, & L. M. Wong (Eds.), *Off white* (pp. 242–250). New York: Routledge.
- Talbot, J., Bibace, R., Bokhur, B., & Bamberg, M. (1996). Affirmation and resistance of dominant discourses: The rhetorical construction of pregnancy. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 6, 225–251.
- Todorov, T. (1990). *Genres in discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walters, S. (2000). Wedding bells and baby carriages: Heterosexuals imagine gay families, gay families imagine themselves. In M. Andrews, S. Day Sclater, C. Squire, & A. Treacher (Eds.), *Lines of narrative* (pp. 48–63). London: Routledge.
- Whitaker, C. (1992, August). The browning of White America. *Ebony*, August, 25–26.

COMMENTARIES

Social identity work in storytelling: Methodological remarks

Heiko Hausendorf

Institute for Linguistics, Vienna University

The following comments originate from a (certain) sociolinguist's point of view which does not measure up to the background of 'cultural studies' the article itself draws upon. Most of the questions I had with Squire's article might accordingly be caused by the different methodological starting points. In order to win a broader scope of readers (beyond those already attracted to the type of work represented by Squire's article), the article could have been more explicit in spelling out its basic assumptions. This, in a nutshell, is the impression that has motivated the following comments. To begin with, I will briefly sketch out my understanding of the main issues from within the article. I will then pick out a few basic concepts that are implied and will pose some mainly methodological questions with regard to these concepts. I then will conclude with a few remarks as to how these concepts (narrative/narration; social categorization/identity work) are dealt with in an ethnomethodological tradition – which is the background my comments refer to.

Main issues

The article deals with “narrative representations of ‘race’ and “gender/sexuality” (and citizenship and class), both audible and visible, in a certain mass media genre: daytime television talk shows. It therefore bears on concepts of *narration/narrative*, of *genres* in a domain of mass media and of *social categorizations/social identities* with regard to sets as ‘race’ and gender, class and citizenship. Daytime television narratives are dealt with as “popular-culture narratives”, a certain genre of narration that is opposed to “personal narratives” and at the same time said to share important features with these “personal narratives.” As an aside, I would like to take into consideration why the author does not discuss the different media that come into play when we turn to narratives

in the world of ‘secondary orality.’ For instance, the impact that narratives in TV in principle bear on a characteristic sort of recipient design: The participants are well aware of being noticed and observed by third parties and there is a whole talk show culture to arrange and to stage this kind of secondary orality, to say only what is striking. As far as the various relationships between every day narratives and television narratives are concerned, the concept of ‘intertextuality’ would nicely fit here – especially since the author explicitly refers to the work of R. Barthes.

Squire’s article aims to argue against a clear-cut distinction between ‘serious issues’ shows on the one hand, and pure ‘entertainment-oriented sensationalist’ shows on the other hand. In addition, it claims to put special emphasis on the role of women as story-tellers and story subjects. Both types of shows are said to “produce counternarratives that are a form of theory” – and the author seemingly wants to have this argument understood as a kind of evaluative assessment that goes beyond ‘pure’ description in favor of indicating what critical bystanders might make of these media events. But there is still the general assumption in her article that one can (and has to?) distinguish between “dominant” and “counter-narratives”, although there is no introduction of this distinction or any clarification of what exactly it refers to. One can, of course, imagine what could lie behind this concept, but there are important implications (for instance, a certain idea of power and its <asymmetric> distribution within society) that should be made clear instead of presupposed as factually given.

The methodological and theoretical background is provided by “social-scientific and cultural-studies research”. And most of the given hypotheses and interpretations bear upon this background, which is sketched out in the second section of the paper, and are also referred to particularly toward the end of the article. Not being familiar with this background, it is not easy to follow the course of the arguments. There are a lot of assumptions as to what the daytime television shows are and as to their social functions (including the staging of identities around the mentioned category sets and the dominance of certain identity sets as well as the assessment of these mass media events in terms of being socially ‘dominant’ or ‘counter-...’ ones). And there are many more assumptions in play than the ones introduced in the abstract of the paper. In addition, one might miss the empirical demonstration, i.e., a fine-grained reconstruction from the data themselves relating to what is stated in her article. The article is full of far ranging and, I would add, really fascinating interpretations concerning what the show stories are about – but these interpretations are obviously not data driven.

The data themselves stem from two groups of US talk shows. But only “a few examples” are taken into account and only a few and rather short fragments from three talk shows were documented within the paper, in a rough way – not transcribed, but written according to literacy standards; some nonverbal aspects (like, for instance, the participants’ colour of skin and gender/sex) are reported. The first extract (“Geraldo”) is to demonstrate a sort of story that is said to manifest “white trash femininity” (see chapter “Women are trash”) while the other ones (from “Ricky” and “Bertice Berry”) are said to be connected with a demonstration of ‘black citizenship’.

Basic concepts and methodological questions

There is the notion of “narratives of ‘race’, gender and citizenship” which is an obviously central one. But what exactly is the connection between a certain type of discourse (narration) and certain sets of social categories implied by these notions? Is it assumed that these narratives explicitly deal with these social categories at the level of content, that they, to put it differently, by their very nature, contribute to the identity work in interaction? As is well-known from the approach of ‘critical discourse analysis’ by Fairclough, Wodak, van Dijk and others, there are, for instance, almost canonical stories about members of social groups told and re-told to establish and to maintain a certain image of this group and its members. And these stories are certainly “narratives of ‘race’, gender, citizenship” (or whatever social category might be at stake).

Or is it assumed that storyteller(s) and listener(s) (including the commenting bystanders and the moderator) can be assigned to these social groups: that they serve as representatives for a particular social group (no matter what exactly they are talking about) and that it first of all matters who told the story to whom (presupposing the participants’ social identity as some kind of independent variable the analyst brings in)? Anyway, the author’s approach does not seem to lead towards the reconstruction of structures of story telling, but to focus on the question of *what* is told by *whom* and how these roles (of storyteller, listener and ‘neutral’ bystander) can be related to the participants’ social identity – while the latter is identified by the author who claims what aspect of identity is relevant (from her own point of view). There is no empirical evidence given that ‘ordinary’ spectators should make the same social categorizations as the author does, nor why they should do so. Take, for instance, the introduction of speakers in the data fragments: The social categories used within these ‘descriptions’ are treated as given facts – and not as social categorizations

and social constructions (to be made by the participants themselves: for instance, the spectators). What I am missing here is indeed partly demonstrated when the author describes the Bertice Berry episode, finely commenting that (and how) “trailer park whiteness” is set on stage – verbally as well as non-verbally – and becomes as such expectable and accountable (for participants <here: spectators> *and* analysts).

Another question arises as to the category sets that are said to be in play: Which are the dominant sets? On the one hand, gender appears to be the central concern (at least for the author?); on the other hand, the stories told in the shows are referred to as “stories of whiteness”, “North American white trash” (“trailer park white”) vs. “ghetto blacks”. The latter obviously refers to a mixture of class and ‘race’ and it is not made clear if, and how, these different sets emerge in the background or in the foreground of the staging. Or is it a question of different analytic foci rather than an empirical question?

Moreover, there is the “staging of conflicts alongside and around gender, ‘race’ and class”: Does this mean that the author is going to consider the (counter-)narratives as acts of staging identities? Or is the staging of such conflicts something besides the narratives? Furthermore, how are these acts of identity, that are said to be at stake, intertwined with the “social pathologies” (“psychological dysfunction”) that are told within the stories?

Not only is the notion of ‘counter-narratives’ rather vague, but so is the underlying concept of narration in general: It is not clear (at least to me), whether the author is dealing with narratives in the (narrow) sense of a certain social genre in terms of discourse units (as it is usually the case within the linguistic tradition, see below) or in the broad sense of a universal way of defining and constructing realities. The references the author gives are not clarifying in this regard. Taking into account what the author takes as the “story” when commenting on the data from the first extract, she obviously draws upon a broad sense of storytelling and narrating, including nearly all what is staged and presented during the entire show (with the director as the narrator, so to speak?) no matter whether there are narrative structures (in the narrow sense) or rather explanatory and/or reasoning structures. Take for instance the “white female expert’s” contribution in the first data extract that is considered a “counter-narrative intervention” but seems to be an explanatory and reasoning contribution rather than a narrative one (in the strict sense). The same holds true for the commercial breaks that are also dealt with as (counter-)narratives. In other words, the entire genre is taken to be narrative – which makes sense if one understands narrating in the broad sense of presenting pictures, character, actions and images (which of course holds true for all mass media events). It is,

however, misleading if one is looking for narratives as a certain type of verbal activities with more or less well defined macro- and micro-structures.

An ethnomethodological perspective

The given comments become perhaps more transparent when their methodological and methodic background is spelled out instead of being noticeable only from between the lines. Let me therefore add a few remarks to my own understanding of narrative and story-telling on the one hand, and social categorization and social identity on the other.

My notion of narrative and storytelling is basically a linguistic one (influenced by the 'classical' approach of Labov & Waletzky – by the way, it is cited as well in the article!) which is why I had some problems with the rather broad concept of narration as a way of constructing the social world. From my point of view, 'narrative representations' of social identities have to be considered as very particular manifestations of social identities, that bear on the reconstruction of something in the past that has to be shown as 'reportable'. It is typically realized in terms of a 'discourse unit' the boundaries of which are explicitly marked at the surface level of discourse. And it implies a typical division of conversational work between the participants that is usually manifested by the concepts of 'storyteller(s)' and 'listener(s)'. Although there is much more that could be added with respect to this special kind of discourse unit (as opposed to explanatory discourse units, for instance), it will do to imagine that the analytic focus will be a much more fine-grained one if such a notion of 'narrative representation' could be applied.

My understanding of social identity work in interaction is first of all an ethnomethodological one developed, for instance, by the early work on 'membership categorization devices' by H. Sacks. One of the methodological maxims crucial for this approach is a constructivist one: social identities have to be reconstructed 'from within', so to speak, as communicative (or interactive) achievements at the surface level of what is made audible and visible in discourse. The analyst has accordingly to look for the occasionally very inconspicuous contextualization cues by means of which a certain aspect of the participants' social identity is made a communicatively relevant one. From this point of view, there is no given identity that we as analysts can refer to unless we can demonstrate *that and how* just this social category that we have picked out has become interactively relevant *in* the data themselves. To be sure, this does not mean that it always needs an explicit verbal device or a clarification sequence.

A lot of essential social categories can assumed to be interactively reproduced just by means of the physical perceptibility of, for instance, 'male' or 'female' voices, colour of skin, or other visual or audible indicators. But it holds also true that identity work that purely depends on the (perceiving of) perceptibilities in many contexts does not suffice. This is especially relevant to the mass media that, in principle, cannot use that interactive mutuality of simultaneous sending *and* receiving, thus having to depend on the 'expectability' and accountability of manifested social identities which is why there is a real TV culture of staging identities. The actors in those shows have to become recognizable as belonging to certain social groups (that are said to be at stake) and secondary orality in the mass media obviously provides a lot of different media specific means to realize and to stylize such 'recognitionals' of social belonging. This is, what I call the staging of identity. And it is the empirical reconstruction of these 'recognitionals' and their media specific use that provides empirical evidence for the sort of assumptions that are made in the article.

There might be a very interesting connection between the narrative structures in the stories the 'guests' (or 'ordinary' people) tell and the visual arrangement of story tellers and listeners and bystanders on the stage, i.e., in terms of what is audible and visible for the spectators. And I presume Squire's article is heading just for this connection – something, however, that could have been spelled out in more detail.

Talking and acting: Making change and doing development

Jaan Valsiner

Frances L. Hiatt School of Psychology, Clark University

Squire's analysis of talk shows leads to a wider issue – the need to consider the functions of “doing the talking” in the wider context – that of social channeling of both talking and acting within a society. It is claimed that there are three ways of setting up the discursive domains within a society's space of narrativity: NO-TALK, MAYBE-TALK, and HYPER-TALK. These three ways of organizing discourse make up the SEMIOTIC DEMAND SETTING (SDS), which also entails expectations for N-VOCALITY. The N ranges from 0-vocality of the NO-TALK domain, through monovocality in case of a social consensus of a group, or a single privileged “voice” in a totalitarian society, to plurivocality of a grand bazaar. Contemporary talk shows analyzed by Squire are examples of HYPER-TALK. Any form of talk can occur in two forms in relation to action domains – connected and disconnected. Talk shows can become disconnected HYPER-TALK forms, in which case their role in a society becomes neutralized and autonomous – talking for the sake of talking. If that is the case, talk shows are idioadaptations within the dynamic processes in a society, and have no developmental (aromorphotic) role. (*Functions of Talking, Action, Silence, Cultural Censorship, Semiotics, Talk Shows*)

Squire's main point – the impending colorlessness of narratives and counter-narratives in race- and gender-based story telling in contemporary mass media – calls for further analysis. Indeed, the proliferation of television in every corner of the world creates a situation where (mostly silent) viewers are exposed to an overdose of talk. In the midst of such availability of talk, some basic questions become lost.

What are the reasons for talking in the first place? Is it a social substitute for thinking – an effort to un-privatize the intimacies of personal uniqueness and bring it out to public control? The example of socially scrutinized personal diaries in the upbringing of Chinese adolescents (Eberhard 1982) would certainly testify to that. Or is it a vehicle for social guidance of otherwise uncontrollable intra-psychological development? The “guided practice” of catechisms (Sommerville 1983) in the history of European education seems to indicate that. Or maybe there is no question necessary – maybe talking is as multi-functional (and thus – without one single function) as psychologists' beloved notion of

‘behavior’ is (cf. Watson 1913)? Everything – and therefore nothing – becomes “behavior” – or “talk”? There is some truth to the claim that “practice makes perfect” (e.g., Handke 1967). But who does the practice, and why?

Language use – and language user – in the “doing of talking”

It seems that in most of contemporary social sciences it is accepted that language use – including talking – is the given. Within the socio-cultural discourse we hear proud statements about the powers of language, inadequacy of the “dualisms” between thinking and speaking, and the like. At times it seems that the well-known ideological tradition of psychology of reducing all complex psychological functions to behavior is being replaced by a cloned relative – reduction of these psychological complexities to language – what it affords by its structure, and how it is being used in social practices. The role of the agent – the *person who feels and thinks* may become lost behind the roles such as “research participant” who *behaves* (or *talks*). Reductionism of either kind – “down” to behavior or “up” to language – may be a temporary fascination as it seems to solve the old problem of making sense of human subjectivity. Yet that is an illusory solution.

Language use is central for making sense of complex social and psychological phenomena precisely because there are users – active persons who position themselves in a universe of the many stories that one can tell, or in that of many “voices” one can create (Hermans 2001). Language use is a cultural means for the user – applied for the sake of some goals. It is the goal – or goal orientation – that leads the persons to use language in particular ways – which include different strategies of non-use (neglect, avoidance). Undoubtedly story-telling is a central feature of human development – historically and ontogenetically – yet many aspects of human experience are not turned into stories, and some are made into explicitly talking-disallowed domains (Ohnuki-Tierney 1994; Orlandi 1995).

These domains are not just closed for talking, but vehemently maintained as such – through internalized affective regulators (Valsiner 2001a, 2001b). Try to ask another person, in the course of casual conversation, “by the way, I meant to ask you – how satisfied are you with your masturbation in the recent weeks? I have been worried about you.” – and you will probably find such expression of care of the health of the other impossible to put into practice.

Uttering caring comments like this is blocked in two ways – intrapsychologically (the speaker not being able to make such comment), and –

even if the speaker manages to force oneself to cross the boundary of the self-blocking (i.e., overcoming the “how improper!” idea in one’s private thought) – inter-psychologically. The addressee can be expected to be utterly surprised to hear of such caring intention – in ways that the addresser knows are not positive. The addressee may leave the field, directly or indirectly, and possibly with rather detrimental (for the speaker) a counter-action.

None of these problems emerge in the over-trained and socially prescribed use of “How are you?” – “Fine, thank you” sequences of culturally prescribed politeness in encounters. Here the manifest content – which could be described as caring for the other – is lost by way of turning the talking into a highly repetitive routine.

The choice of two contrasting themes here is not coincidental – one is selected from a realm that is not only socially allowed but prescribed, the other – from among the strictly socially forbidden. The whole history of Western concept of “masturbatory insanity” since the beginning of the 18th Century (Hall 1992; Hare 1962) and its socio-moral canalization function (Laqueur 1990, pp. 227–230) remains the guiding force behind an individual person’s internalized horrible avoidance of such topics. A little less extreme parallel to the admittedly artificial “masturbation question” above would be the real-life phenomenon of the difficulties parents experience in giving their “birds and bees” talk to their sexually maturing adolescents. “Open education” efforts just cannot work in a field of narrativity that is structured through socially shared and personally powerful cultural boundaries.

And then arrives Oprah Winfrey – with the result that in the context of television talk shows many of the culturally blocked topics become not only available for talking, but even excessively highlighted. The audiences are fascinated by such reversal of the social world – they keep watching the shows and being hesitant of talking on most of the themes themselves. Or maybe they now accept the move of the themes from socially hyper-silenced to those of potentially mentionable (by them) and scandalously public (on talk-shows)? Scandals undo silences – yet what is the function of such change? Where would “Oprification” (see Squire, this issue) of people’s interpersonal talk lead the functions of talking? What are the relations between the vicariously experienced (talk-show) and really lived-through talking?

Talking, acting, talking about acting, and just talking

Talking is a derivative of acting. It is a form of acting that can begin to regulate the acting in ontogeny (Gupta & Valsiner 1999). It can progress further and become a quasi-autonomous activity – talking for the sake of talking. It is in that case that talking becomes disconnected from acting – and can displace acting. When that happens, the goals for talking become located in the act of talking itself – whatever it is that is talked about becomes immaterial. Likewise, it becomes irrelevant whether the topics are “serious” or “sensationist” (cf. Squire’s point of these two becoming a ‘continuum’). The distinction becomes eliminated as in both cases the crucial issue is disconnectedness from the reality of action.

Media talk shows can be seen as “vicarious pacifiers” – by creating a situated activity setting (talk-show) the participants in the setting (as well as its audiences in the comfort of their own living rooms) become actively engaged in the issues (“serious” or “sensational”, alike), do the talking about these issues – and leave the issues as those were in their reality. Previously, these topics could not be talked about – now they not only can be, but even should be. Previously the social world was “closed” to the discussion, now it is fully “open”. There seems to be a big difference – but is there, really?

The closed nature of openness

The example of talk shows leads us to the general issue – how the move from one opposite to another may actually be no change at all. What was previously socially regulated by complete “closedness” of a particular topic may now be achieved by its extreme opposite – extreme “openness”. Maybe one extreme is merely a displacement of the other – rather than a truly new form of organization?

Doing the talking can function in two ways – when it leads to acting, and when it does not. Social discourse can be institutionally channeled so that some previously “taboo” topics are not only turned into ones which can be spoken of, but which *must be* talked about. In other terms – one opposite (of enforced silence) becomes the other (enforces “talking through”). Whoever determines the transition from “may not” to “must be” has the fate control over the active inactivity of the doers – if it is made certain that the new openness (talk) does not threaten the existing social order. This latter method of social regulation of discourse is widely utilized in the so-called “open societies” – which, by show-

ing off openness to the public talk about sensitive matters, actually close these matters from the domain of action.

Bureaucracies that govern social institutions are habitual generators of exaggerated talk. The talk about the need to not adversely affect participants in psychological investigations has led – in the U.S. context over the last twenty years – to the impossibility to probe psychological issues that may be of central relevance for the persons – very private, and hence in need for “protection” of the persons who participate. Researchers talk actively about ethics of different research procedures from their and their subjects’ perspectives (and complain about the limits set on research), while “*institutional* review boards” effectively cut out any potentially sensitive question from the research methods (Ceci, Peters, & Plotkin 1985). It is the institutions that become protected – by not letting “sensitive” topics be explored, and by keeping the researchers talking about the need of protection of the research participants. Since the researchers’ activity is involved (but displaced), the ones who “do the talking” do not interfere with the others (who “do the acting”).

Doing talking about some facets of a particular practice can also accentuate that practice. For example, the United States Reduction of Paperwork Act requires all government agencies to indicate on each form the average amount of time people take to fill in the form. This constitutes a symbolic attention pointing to a detail in the bigger picture of dealing with forms. It leads to more paperwork, rather than its rhetorically claimed reduction (Herzfeld 1992, p. 121). Yet the reader of this extra declaration (e.g., that on the average, this particular form takes X minutes to fill in) can accept the comfort that somebody in the institution has bothered to do extra work to find out how much “load” the form has – and it is done for the purposes of *reduction* of the “load”. What is de-emphasized by such highlighting is the question why the particular form is needed at all.

What is at stake here? By making explicit the “doubtability” of the current part of the whole (e.g., time spent on the form) the “doubtability” of the whole itself is removed further away from consideration. We have the freedom to criticize the government for too many forms to fill out, then notice that somebody tries to reduce that, and continue to fill out even more forms. Our attention is directed towards discussion of a sub-part of the whole, while the practices of the whole remain secure. A social institution will survive when everybody in it is busy discussing some peripheral issue – designated as a “problem” by the institution – and thus keeping the talking by the participants away from other issues.

In general – the “field of talk” becomes defined as dis-united from the “field of action” by prescribing active exploration of a sub-part of the whole through talking – and moving the whole into the state of a given, axiomatically accepted, reality. By asking people to provide publicly their opinions about some partial issue (e.g., use of “performance-enhancing drugs” in sports), the whole is left out of focus. A part is made to be “an issue” through active communicative highlighting (and legal meaning-making) the focus of discursive attention is moved away from the whole. Knowledge about the given object (e.g., sports) as a whole is displaced – as that of scandals about it replace it. We know about recent “drug scandals” concerning specific athletes, but not about their highly skilled performance – nor about the life-time efforts and hardships that have led to the exceptional results.

Semiotic Demand Settings (SDS)

Human psychological development proceeds through negotiation between the perception and action through the affordances that unite the actor and context, and the suggestions for feeling, thinking and acting that are proliferated through communication. For human beings, the world of objects is available immediately under limits upon action (e.g., need to act under time pressure, etc), yet otherwise the environment is mediated through meanings.

These structured environments are Semiotic Demand Settings (SDS) – human-made structures of everyday life settings where the properties of the objects are co-determined by perceptual-actional and cultural-meanings’ based possibilities and expectations (Valsiner 2000, p. 125). It is based on the theoretical triplet of three interdependent “zones” that channel human development – the ZPA (“Zone of Promoted Action”), ZFM (“Zone of Freedom of Movement”) and ZPD (“Zone of Proximal Development”) – transposed from their original context (Valsiner 1987) to shed light upon the narrative practices in a society.

Any domain of human personal experience can become culturally guided by some socio-institutional focusing of the person’s attention to it in three ways. First, there is the realm of NO-TALK – the sub-field of personal experiences that are excluded from the realm of talk-based access. Some of that exclusion is guaranteed by social norms, other – specifically protected by their being of “zero signifiers” (Ohnuki-Tierney 1994). The rest of the field is the “zone of free movement” of talking – the MAYBE-TALK. Experiences within that field can be talked about – but ordinarily are not, as long as there is no

special goal that makes that talking necessary. Most of human experiences belong to MAYBE-TALK. I do not need to talk about the feeling of having my wallet in my pocket all the time, but would talk about that one occasion when I felt it disappearing from its regular place through the skillful action of the pickpocket.

The third domain of talking – the HYPER-TALK – is what Squire’s analysis of talk shows is about. HYPER-TALK is the socially (and personally) highlighted part of MAYBE-TALK that is turned from a state of talkability to that of obsessive talking. Here is the key to “Oprification” of the narrative space in a society – by forceful bringing of themes from the NO-TALK zone to the HYPER-TALK domain through media exposure, “Oprification” may entail re-situating these themes in the MAYBE-TALK domain in ordinary life. Yet that transfer is only possible – not guaranteed.

How is the HYPER-TALK domain created? It starts from the social marking of the highlighted zone. The suggested focus (see 1, below) can operate in two ways. First, it guides the person to reflect upon the focused experience – the zone of “promoted talking”. Secondly, it provides the blueprint for talking in socially legitimized ways (Discourse ways marked by numbers 1 and 2, leading

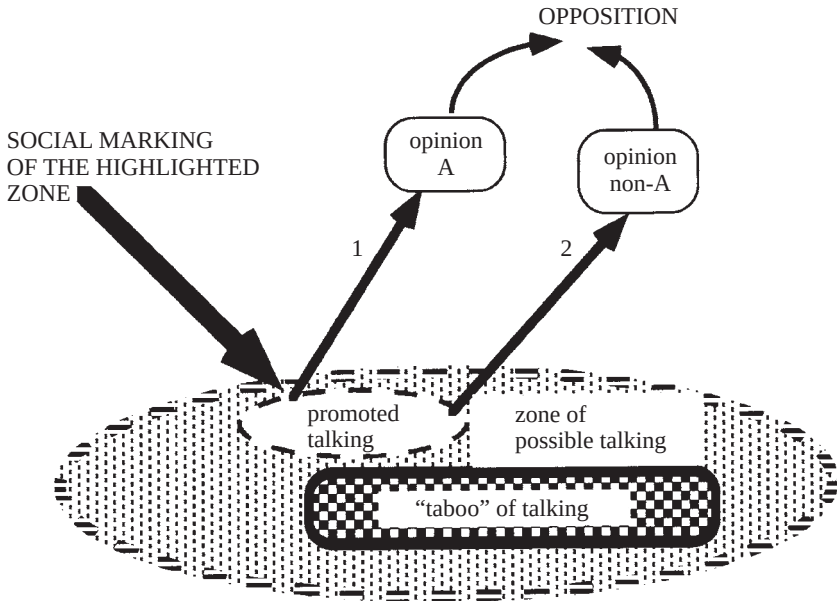


Figure 1. Semiotic Demand Setting

to Opinion A and Opinion non-A, respectively). The acceptability (or non-acceptability) of opposition is thus enabled.

In this respect, we can speak of N -vocality of the acts of talking in general, where N is the number of different discourse ways that the social channeling system allows. N varies from 0 (e.g., this is the case of the area of “talking taboo” – see 1) to some large number. If $N = 1$, the uni-voicedness (monologicality) of talking is socially promoted. Examples of such monologicality can be found in social group dynamics (conformity of the minority to “majority opinion”) and in U.S. electoral system (e.g., the narrow winner of higher number of real votes gets all of the electoral college votes of the particular state). That result is similar to externally enforced monologicality (as in case of totalitarian social systems). If $N = 2$, two – opposing or not – ways of talking become prescribed. In addition, the relationship between them – that of opposition, or mutual neutrality – may be defined. 1 describes a case of $N = 2$ with the relation between the two opinions being that of opposition. This is merely one form of such relationships, which can take a multitude of forms (Valsiner 2002). In principle, N can be a large number – a case of plurivocality.

Connectedness and disconnectedness

As is obvious from above, there can – but also need not be – more than one legitimate way of talking. At times oppositional ways of talking are encouraged – people with “opposing opinions” are invited to make their views public in a talk show. Yet all these different discourse ways – as well as forms of their opposition – are socially legitimate.

The links of talking and acting can be variable. Having fierce oppositions between political positions in a talk show is legitimate as well as expected – yet within limits. If the opponents in a talk show – after expressing their opposite views in talk – move towards acting (i.e., physical violence towards each other), the legitimacy of the move from “doing the talking” to “doing the acting” ends. A talk show is a “boxing match” in words, and not in deeds. This exemplifies the notion of disconnectedness of the talking and acting – a crucial regulator in the social world.

In a similar vein, the U.S. political power system has never experienced a takeover of the presidency through military force – either by generals, or by any of the presidential candidates. Yet such practices have recurred in many other countries. Instead, U.S. presidential candidates become engaged in different public debates (a form of HYPER-TALK) which is disconnected from

the action realm. If it were connected, one would see the debate growing into a fist-fight, or into an actual assassination attempt of the opponent. Instead, what one sees are efforts of “character assassination”, not more.

To summarize – I would claim that each of the three discursive domains – NO-TALK, MAYBE-TALK, and HYPER-TALK – are in parallel qualifiable as either connected or disconnected with the action domain. The NO-TALK domain is most likely to remain connected with action domain even if the MAYBE-TALK and HYPER-TALK are disconnected. An example of that case may be a society where individuals “step in” to “correct” – by action – anybody’s violation of the NO-TALK zone boundaries. The very same persons may, in parallel, enjoy the carnivalized transfer of topics from the NO-TALK to HYPER-TALK domains by an Oprah – and keeping the same topics disconnected from action domain in the latter. The state of disconnection from action makes these topics open for talk – as the reality of ordinary living is not threatened by it.

In contrast, let us consider a hypothetical society where HYPER-TALK is connected with the action domain, while NO-TALK zone is not. Here we see a “hush-hush” orientation supported on both sides – the NO-TALK cover protects the realm of actions that correspond with it (i.e., since we do not talk about X, there is no connection between talking about X and doing X that has any consequence, we can do it as we please). In parallel, the transfer of any theme into the HYPER-TALK zone will be guarded with extreme caution – if that transfer were to happen, it can lead to a revolution. In the context of the former Soviet Union, where freedom of speech was limited, the eagerness to listen to partial information (gossip, reading “between the lines”) was notable. Once this situation becomes changed to its opposite – everybody is free to say anything one wants (with no action consequences for talking, nor of talking) – and almost nobody listens. Thus, “Oprification” of mass media may be an effort by social institutions to force the audiences to listen.

In the context of evolutionary thought, Severtsov introduced the contrast between innovations that have no longevity beyond their adaptational function under the present circumstances (idioadaptations), and others that are turned into permanent transitional forms in the progressive development of the species (aromorphoses – see Sewertzoff 1929). This contrastive terminology may be useful here to situate the roles different ways of talking may play in social development. Like biological evolution, the development of human societies is profoundly conservative process, where only few of the innovations become integrated into the core of the species/society. The transfer of some theme from NO-TALK to HYPER-TALK zone is certainly a phenomenon of

idioadaptational kind. We may be carried away by its “sensation” appearance – behind which may be a well-protected situation that disallows the HYPER-talk to modify actions. It may modify the MAYBE-talk zone – but also there the crucial issue for any social innovation to become aromorphotic depends upon the condition of action connectedness. In other terms – it is not immediately clear from analyzing new forms of media events, such as talk shows, whether or how they participate in the actual development of a given society. That they change the society at the given time is clear, at least in the immediately visible domains. Whether – or how – such changes participate in development of the society is not immediately known from the colorful (or colorless), sensationist (or mundane) or any other character of the described phenomena.

Conclusion: Looking for a general model

The contrast of the two societies described above is not so hypothetical, after all – it shows how the so-called “open” and “closed” societies can be described by a very simple profile consisting of three talk forms and two linkage types with the action domain. It indicates the possibility for a general theory that accounts for different forms of talking (and acting) in a context where active human beings set their goals, create social institutions, talk about relevant issues – as well as not bother to talk about ordinary ones – and, last but not least – act in some ways. The question of how that complex is organized, and how it matters (or does not) for the development of persons and societies is the goal of science. Mere description of the forms of talk, and even of their immediate contexts, is not sufficient. Oprah Winfrey – and her society – is a neutral object of investigation for a science, while remaining an ideologized actor in the realm of social life.

My commentary is an effort to undo the excesses of research traditions of recent decades that have been linked with ideologies – feminist, Marxist, post-structuralist, post-modern, and any other of the kind. What we have seen over recent decades is the appropriation of most intriguing qualitative phenomena – of discursive or narrative kind – into a new form of theory-phobic (yet socio-politically alert) “dust-bowl empiricism.” This is fortified with the shared belief that the “era for grand theories is over” and that generalization is not possible – especially in the social sciences – anyway. The post-modernist assumption of the fragmented nature of knowledge – due to its context-dependency – leads researchers away from highlighting the ways in which generalized knowledge could be created.

Making sense of complex phenomena such as television talk-shows would require a theory of social order that at first explains how such semiotic demand settings as “talk-shows” could emerge in the first place, and then analyze the positionings of different talkers – colorful or colorless as the may be – within those. In other terms – narrative analysis needs to include narrative politics as an object of investigation, rather than as a position from which talking – of the researcher – takes place. Otherwise social sciences become parts of that politics – and when that happens – personal decision by a scientist to opt for silence becomes a reasonable way to make sense of the world.

References

- Ceci, S. J., Peters, D., & Plotkin, J. (1985). Human subjects review, personal values, and the regulation of social science research. *American Psychologist*, 40 (9), 994–1002.
- Eberhard, W. (1982). *Life and thought of ordinary Chinese*. Taipei: The Orient Cultural Service.
- Gupta, S., & Valsiner, J. (1999). Coordination of speaking and acting in the second year of life. *Mind, Culture & Activity*, 6 (2), 143–159.
- Hall, L. A. (1992). Forbidden by God, despised by men: masturbation, medical warnings, moral panic, and manhood in Great Britain, 1850–1950. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2 (3), 365–387.
- Handke, P. (1967). *Kaspar*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Hare, E. H. (1962). Masturbatory insanity: the history of an idea. *Journal of Mental Science*, 108 (452), 2–23.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2001). The dialogical self: toward a theory of personal and cultural positioning. *Culture & Psychology*, 7 (3), 243–281.
- Herzfeld, M. (1992). *The social production of indifference: Exploring the symbolic roots of Western bureaucracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Laqueur, T. (1990). *Making sex: Body and gender from Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (1994). The power of absence: zero signifiers and their transgressions. *L'Homme*, 34 (2) (Whole No. 130), 59–76.
- Orlandi, E. P. (1995). *As formas do silêncio*. Campinas, SP: Editora da UNICAMP.
- Sewertzoff, A. N. (1929). Direction of evolution. *Acta Zoologica*, 10, 59–141.
- Sommerville, C. J. (1983). The distinction between indoctrination and education in England, 1549–1719. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44, 387–406.
- Valsiner, J. (1987). *Culture and the development of children's action*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Valsiner, J. (2000). *Culture and human development*. London: Sage.
- Valsiner, J. (2001a). Process structure of semiotic mediation in human development. *Human Development*, 44, 84–97.

- Valsiner, J. (2001b, September). Cultural developmental psychology of affective processes. Paper presented at the 15. Tagung der Fachgruppe Entwicklungspsychologie der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Psychologie, Potsdam.
- Valsiner, J. (2002). Forms of dialogical relations and semiotic autoregulation of the self. *Theory & Psychology*, 12 (2), 251–265.
- Watson, J. (1913). Psychology as the behaviorist views it. *Psychological Review*, 20, 158–177.

The context of race in reading narratives on daytime talk shows

Fern L. Johnson
Clark University

Squire's analysis of "White trash pride and the exemplary Black citizen" provides a valuable perspective on the potential of television discourse to disrupt culturally dominant narratives and ideological codes. Her analysis of daytime talk shows could be enhanced by considering theory and research on media impact and by examining the context of race more fully in reading texts for their counter-narrative possibilities. (*Context, Counter-narrative, Ideological codes; Media impact, Race, Television discourse*)

Protests to the contrary, most people have some familiarity with the day-time talk show genre. Regular viewers cut across all walks of life, and even those who carefully define themselves as non-viewers sneak a peak and a listen now and then, see the promos for the programs, or engage in conversations about the genre. Plenty of references to this popular culture fare can be heard at parties, at preludes to meetings, at beauty and barber shops, at sporting events – just about anywhere. In a survey I regularly administer to students in my introductory "Communication and Culture" course, all but a few indicate that they know the major programs in this genre and have a pretty good idea what the usual fare is; moreover, their familiarity discriminates programs such as "Oprah" which are considered higher class from the more sizzle-oriented spectacles seen on programs such as "Jerry Springer."

The fascination with what is often defined as trash TV ranges from voyeurism to lust – voyeurism from those who love to "laugh down" at the underclass and "lust up" from those who yearn for their own tele fame moment, regardless of what personal disclosures may be involved. The broad range of viewer profiles and motivations for viewer selections within the daytime talk-show genre lead, of course, to variable readings of what transpires in these 30

minute narrative-packed programs. Corinne Squire adds a useful perspective on the type of readings that are possible outside the fairly mundane parse of these programs as repetitive social class, gender, and race codes that degrade the powerless in society. Exploring the “narrative possibilities opened up” (p. 223) by daytime talk shows, she sets out to show how “these shows can at times provide the ground for some interesting stagings of conflicts around gender, ‘race’ and class” (p. 223). More specifically, she examines possible counter-narrative readings of the conflicts around identities evident in the text to show that more than a “white trash” narrative is at work. Using several examples, Squire develops textual justification for a narrative more complicated than the “white trash story”: a narrative revealing racial shading that twists the dominant ideology at least slightly because the stories told position the racially identified participants to be read with certain social value not stereotypically part of underclass ideology. The purpose of the examination appears to be mainly to explicate how counter-narratives might arise in these programs because of the ways in which ideologically significant identities become defined relative to the narrative development.

Several aspects of Squire’s article are of particular interest, and I would like to comment on these as a way of both pointing to the value of her work and suggesting additional ways in which the cultural texts she deals with might be read with respect to ideology. These points relate to (1) contextualizing the study within broader inquiry in both narrative and mass media impact and (2) the possibility that Squire’s account leads to a counter-counter-narrative that reproduces the vary ideological codes that the counter-narrative contests.

Squire’s research study fits well within the growing interest in both the importance of narrative discourse in popular culture and the expanded modes of inquiry into mass media impacts. She provides a useful overview of television talk shows and focuses her project within “a well-developed body of work in cultural studies that explores the strength and direction of relations between popular culture and lived, everyday culture” (p. 223). There is, however, greater grounding than she discusses for understanding talk show narratives as media phenomena.

Squire casts a somewhat overly polarized view of media studies by limiting her purview to a “social science” perspective on popular culture. The assertion for example that, “for social scientists, popular culture still seems the soft feminine underbelly of the cultural world . . .” (p. 223) strikes me as both overly-reductive of current social science research and overly narrow in the context of ever-expanding inquiry focused on media impact (see overviews in Burton

2000; Bryant & Zillmann 1994) and, more specifically, media culture (see Dines & Humez 2002; Fiske 1987, 1996).

Several approaches to understanding media impact offer good opportunities for bolstering the analysis of televisual narrative and counter-narrative. The Cultural Indicators and Cultivation Perspective developed over the past 30 years by George Gerbner and associates (for an overview see Bryant & Zillman 1994: Chapter 2) would be helpful for discussing the importance of popular culture narratives to the world view of their consumers. Squire states that “we often treat popular-cultural narratives as inferior to personal stories”; the Gerbner tradition establishes sound, long-term scholarship to counter that belief. The Uses and Gratifications approach to media effects also provides a nice framework in which to develop ideas about reader-response in general and the construction of televisual narrative and counter-narrative possibilities in specific. This approach places diversity in selection, use, and interpretation of media content as the central feature of media impact analysis (McQuail 2000: Part 5), thus providing an overlay related to motives for use and audience satisfactions sought and obtained (Rayburn & Palmgreen 1984) from media selection and exposure that would be useful to organizing different narrative readings.

The study of media culture, too, offers fruitful connections for Squire’s study. John Fiske’s (1996) “multidiscursivity” approach includes analysis of a range of whiteness issues in media discourse and explores specific case studies in which media events put “whiteness into crisis.” Within the field of media culture studies, narrative analysis has gained prominence in recent years, and Squire’s work could be articulated with this line of scholarship. Sara Kozloff’s (1992) model of participants in television discourse emphasizes the relationships between those participants *inside the televisual text* (*implied author* and point of view from which the narrative is being told; *narrator*, or teller of the story; *narratee*, or hearer of the story, and *implied viewer*) and those participants *outside the televisual text* (the *real author* of the televisual text – producer, creator, director – and the *real viewer*, who can take up the implied viewer narrative from the point of view of the implied author or develop a counter or resistive narrative). In talk shows, for example, part of the televisual text is the presentation of participants and their stories within that text as though they were outside of that text, and this narrative aspect is one with which the outside-the-televisual-text-interpreter can become complicit or resist as the audience member enters into the narrative. Graeme Burton (2000) emphasizes that audience positioning is a conceptual operation, but we are enculturated to believe it is empirical, that is, one that places a firm boundary

between inside and outside. Thus, in the case of talk shows, a viewer positions him/herself in relation to in-text participants of the narrative but can also position her/himself in relation to the narrative possibilities of out-of-text participants involved in the program, the genre, the industry, and the audience.

My second point is prompted by Squire's interesting analysis of counter-narrative themes: "White trash pride" and "Black exemplary citizen" scenarios. Surfacing the position of the Black women in the programs examined as spokespeople for family and parental responsibility and of White under-class women as voicing non-racist sentiments counters, in Squire's words, "that there's anything interesting around 'race' going on in these shows beyond the pathologising stereotyping, in an almost gladiatorial 'spectacle' . . . of poor whites and blacks" (p. 227). The narratives that unfold in these talk-show formats complexify rather than simplify ideological codes of race and identity (and gender because of its embeddedness in these texts). If "white trash" includes bi-racial, and the black voice includes articulating "the cultural 'master narrative' of citizenship," then the cemented, ideological codes for race are destabilized.

I found the comments about the role of black women especially significant because of the long tradition of African American women's roles as parents. In the context of middle-class history in the U.S., for example, black women have always carried the burden of what has been called the "second shift" – a work life of familial, domestic responsibility in addition to the wage-earning work life. The dual role, in the context of racism, has established a legacy of deep commitment to preparing children to function in a complexly racist society while at the same time valuing economic self-sufficiency. Speaking of the mother-daughter relationship in particular, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) characterizes the responsibilities of the Black mother in teaching her Black daughter how to both survive and thrive: "In order to develop these skills in their daughters, mothers demonstrate varying combinations of behaviors devoted to ensuring their daughters' survival – such as providing them with basic necessities and protecting them in dangerous environments – to helping their daughters go further than mothers themselves were allowed to go" (p. 124). The overarching goal to "git ovah" [defined by Geneva Smitherman (1994) as originating in the black church to designate "making it over to the spiritual side of life, having struggled and overcome sin" and "by extension, to overcome racism, oppression, or any obstacle in the way of your goal" (p. 124) has become a central cultural value for African Americans, and is especially solidified as a Black middle-class commitment to responsibly rearing children (class here may be a somewhat misleading concept because of its fluidity in U.S. culture and espe-

cially in African American culture where the association is with self-sufficiency and education more than with income, *per se*).

As compelling as Squire's analysis of counter-narratives may be, there remains a broader context in which these narratives must be understood, and that context diminishes the rhetorical force of both "White trash pride" and "the exemplary Black citizen." The daytime television talk show genre is rarely accorded respectability even within the popular culture domain; in other words, its prestige value is very low. Even though academics find virtues in the programs for the reasons that Squire cites in the section on the history of the talk show phenomenon, the virtues are always contextualized by a larger cultural narrative that dismisses the importance and worth of the genre. From inside the television industry, these shows are the cheapest to produce and are known for the toll they exact on the few people responsible for getting guests identified and booked and managing the logistics of the programs (Munson 1995). From the larger cultural perspective, viewers must combat the commonplace opinion of the genre as a low form of popular culture. They do so by often dismissing the motivation for their viewing as just passing time or getting a good laugh or by carefully maintaining a "closet viewer" status in which they never reveal (or even lie about) how much they watch.

Given the cultural context in which any narrative developed on daytime television talk shows unfolds, the position of a Black person or a "lower class" person on a program within the genre will be overly defined by race, gender, and class in some way. Granted (as Squire notes), African Americans are only rarely featured on daytime talk-shows in stories of disadvantage, degradation, and dysfunction, but the reason for that likely arises out of sensitivity to certain types of overt-racism. In U.S. society, to explicitly and purposefully expose negative stories of African American life would be too likely to lead to the allegation of racism or – more practically – would be more likely to make program sponsors reluctant to buy advertising time because of the possible negative association with racism.

Yet, if a Black or African American person discursively performs as an exemplary citizen on a daytime talk show, she (or he) does so with television's other narrative representations of race looming in the background, or possibly explicit in the foreground through the connection of proximal programming elements: the afternoon newsbreak might portray Blacks as victims or villains; the commercial breaks disrupting the narrative likely contain no Blacks, or if they do, present them championing products such as Pine Sol household cleaner.

From the few examples that Squire provides (more examples would have strengthened the project), there is also an issue regarding the particular nature of the stories and participants through which and in relation to which Black citizens are supposedly elevated in these talk shows. In the *Ricki* example from the show titled, "Stop spending child support on yourself!", there seems to be a contest going on related to color and trash. If the term "white trash" implies, through its explicit statement of race as the adjectival modifier of trash, that trash is usually not white, then the Black citizen audience member is essentially being positioned as a Black not like other Blacks who are implied by the "white trash" signification of the talk show guest but, rather, as an exception to blackness. Moreover, when the frame for the narrative is opened contextually, the Black audience member identified by Squire must also be seen as gaining her exemplary citizen status by being morally above the very lowest of "trash." This may be a positive counter-narrative with a positive function at one level, but at another level, it is but a token; the Black audience member is granted the privilege by the "real author" (to use Kozloff's model of discourse) of presenting from the position of active "narratee" a counter-narrative role vis-à-vis "white trash"; and this privilege is granted on the most disregarded genre of television. The dynamics here operate similarly to what Bucholtz (1999) demonstrates with the role positioning of callers to the Shopping Channel as that positioning serves discursively to shape the meaning of gender and class.

Even for a cultural icon such as Oprah Winfrey, the genre of her success defines the limits of her respectability and status, and the exceptional nature of her prominence as an African American woman is contextualized by larger narratives of gender and race. Unlike television celebrities (even women) in other more respected genres such as news and early morning news and talk programs (exemplified in such mainstays as NBC's "Today"), Oprah is known not only for her ratings and financial assets but also for her perpetual weight control problems and romantic complications with "her man"; in other words, she is genderized through identity markers related to eating and romance and racialized through a complicated imposition of both (a) the weight narrative of white women and (b) the black-woman-without-a stable-heterosexual-relationship narrative. The effect of this extra-professional identification is to destabilize Oprah by giving the "real viewer" (and anyone in the larger society) several stories to reduce her to a mere black, female person.

In the context of cultural codes about race, class, and gender and of the role of daytime talk-shows within the television industry, the narrative structures in question in Squire's article do not so much "destabilise culturally dominant narratives of social conflict on the shows" as they constrain the limits of

such destabilization, thereby either iterating the dominant narratives or countering the appearance of the counter-narratives. The Uses and Gratifications approach to media impact might clarify the multiplicity of motives for viewing and the gratifications or benefits derived from viewing, but these are personal rather than institutional. If the stories told and created through talk shows magnify the codes supporting racism, sexism, and class-oriented prejudice, the counter narratives will need to be frequent and be supported in other media contexts for there to be any significant impact at the institutional and societal levels.

As the first program format in a larger genre now designated “reality TV,” the day-time talk show presents as entertainment what are positioned as “real” people disclosing their “real” life stories which are often commented upon by “real” people in the audience or “real” experts positioned to provide credible interpretation of what has transpired. Squire’s analysis shows how the discursive constructions within these shows have the potential to disrupt the dominant narratives that the shows seem to reinforce. This potential, however, must be understood within the larger *con*-texts of dominant ideology that prevail in both the television industry and society. If we take *con*-text seriously in the analysis of discourse, then we must probe that which pushes against the text; the text can lead to different and often contradictory meanings depending on where the *con*-textual boundaries are drawn.

Having commented on Squire’s analysis of narratives related to gender, race, and class in daytime television talk shows and suggested several different directions that her analysis might have taken, I must add that I was pleased to encounter a language-oriented analysis of television programming. Too rarely do we read serious discourse analyses of mass media. Squire’s article is a welcome addition to what is a minimal literature but one with considerable importance and growing recognition.

References

- Bryant, J., & Zillman, D. (Eds.). (1994). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bucholtz, M. (1999). Purchasing power: The gender and class imaginary on the Shopping Channel. In M. Bucholtz, A. C. Liang, & L. A. Sutton (Eds.), *Reinventing identities: The gendered self in discourse* (pp. 348–368). New York: Oxford.
- Burton, G. (2000). *Talking television: An introduction to the study of television*. London: Arnold.

- Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Dines, G., & Humez, J. M. (Eds.). (2002). *Gender, race and class in media: A text-reader* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fiske, J. (1996). *Media matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fiske, J. (1987). *Television culture*. London: Methune.
- Kozloff, S. (1992). Narrative theory and television. In R. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of discourse reassembled* (pp. 67–100). Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- McQuail, D. (2000). *Mass communication theory: An introduction* (4th ed.). London: Sage.
- Munson, W. (1995). Constellations of voices: How talk shows work. In G. Dines & J. M. Humez, (Eds.), *Gender, race and class in media: A text-reader* (pp. 367–376). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rayburn, J. D., & Palmgreen, P. (1984). Merging uses and gratifications and expectancy-value theory. *Communication Research*, II, 537–562.
- Smitherman, G. (1994). *Black talk: Words and phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Day-time talk shows as a forum for social critique

Aneta Pavlenko
Temple University

The first goal of this essay is to comment on the contributions of Squire's study of construction of counter-narratives on day-time TV talk shows. The second is to outline some productive future directions in examination of ways in which oppressed individuals, in the present case African-American women, may display authoritative oppositional stances which validate and legitimize particular counter-discourses. (*African-American women, Counter-narratives, Day-time talk shows*)

The key goal of Squire's article is to undermine the implicit dichotomy between 'public' and 'personal' personal narratives and to validate personal stories offered on day-time talk shows as a vehicle of social resistance and as a subject of sociological and narrative inquiry. The author offers three arguments in support of her position which I will evaluate in turn. Squire begins by pointing out the discrepancy in the status of personal narratives elicited or documented by social researchers and those produced in the popular culture. While the former have by now gained a legitimate status in a variety of fields, from history and sociology to social psychology and linguistics, the latter narratives are often dismissed as 'tainted evidence,' influenced by the medium, shallow,

and offering limited representational possibilities. They have gained increasing stature however in the field of cultural studies which views 'personal' and 'public' personal narratives as inextricably linked and explores connections between the two suggesting that personal narratives invariably emerge against the backdrop of public discourses. The counter-narratives enable individuals to counteract hegemonic and oppressive storylines, to reframe particular events and phenomena, and to reposition themselves with regard to them. It is from this perspective that Squire views entertainment talk shows as a public forum for the affective staging of social conflicts, where dominant master narratives of race, gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship may be promoted, challenged, and rewritten.

Squire's compelling argument on the importance of public forums in production of individual lifestories squares well with poststructuralist thinking on the imaginative production of identity. Anderson (1983), Bhabha (1990), and Hall (1990) underscore the critical role imagination plays in the process of creation of new identity options, reminding us that representational possibilities are as often imagined for individuals as they are imagined by them. In this view, visual art, advertisement, fiction, cyberspace, media – and yes, day-time talk shows – converge in creating new practices of self-representation and thus new 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983) for individual consumption. The recognition of the emerging nature of identity, and of identity fragmentation, de-centering, and shifts, led poststructuralist philosophers to posit the notion of *hybridity* as the 'third space' which enables, as Squire points out, active and change-producing engagement, and, eventually, appearance of new and alternative identity narratives (Bhabha 1990). These narratives serve to resolve the tension between multiple and shifting identities, to (re)construct the links between past, present, and future, and to impose coherence where there was none (Hall 1990). Squire's work offers an important contribution to this line of thought in identifying and examining a concrete site of imaginative production of identity that is accessible to – and frequented by – numerous individuals around the world.

Ironically, Squire notes, the fact that daytime shows are replete with stories may also be responsible for the genre's critical and academic neglect, despite its ever-increasing popularity in the US and other western countries. Consequently, her second argument aims to explicate how the narrative structure of these shows enables emergence of counter-narratives and, in the process, to erase the distinctions commonly made between serious and entertainment talk shows. The author fully succeeds in convincing the reader that the two types of shows represent a continuum, with entertainment shows offering perhaps even

more opportunities to the socially excluded to be heard and thus engaging with issues of social inequality, albeit in a quirky fashion. With regard to narrative structure, Squire suggests that it is the way in which day-time shows tell the stories that offers multiple opportunities for contestation of meanings of gender, race, sexuality, and class and for destabilization of culturally dominant narratives of social conflict. Unfortunately, however, rich possibilities offered by the analysis of the shows' narrative structure are not fully explored in the article (perhaps understandably so, in view of the fact that the article deals with a number of different topics).

To begin with, Squire demonstrates that all talk shows take advantage of two parallel narratives, verbal and visual, which complement each other and produce counter-narratives in similar ways. Intriguingly, the two do not always work in tandem, with the visual narrative illustrating and complementing the verbal interaction. In one example in the article, the image of a biracial girl is shown precisely to contradict the color-blindness of the verbal narrative. This tension between the two narrative lines as a resource in narrative production could be richly mined in future examination of instances where visual narratives serve to undermine, challenge, or ridicule the verbal ones, and of the impact such mismatch has on the viewers' emerging stories and positions. Another intriguing observation in the article involves the role of commercial breaks in the talk show genre. Once again, here one would like to see a more in-depth examination of ways in which the breaks assist in creating postmodern narratives of incoherence and disruption.

Most importantly, the article misses an opportunity to explore the key aspect of narrative structure, the evaluation component, which on day-time talk shows is co-constructed and revised jointly with the show producers, show hosts, guest experts, and participating studio audiences. Rather, we are invited to witness the validation or opposition of particular narratives by African-American women hosting or participating in the shows and to celebrate the multivocality of the forum. This stance obscures the fact that for a counter-narrative to be successful it needs to be compelling (and taken up by others) and not just presented (and conveniently forgotten). As a consequence, the article does not examine the ongoing struggle for the right to offer the definitive interpretation, to legitimize or devalue particular narratives, or, in Bourdieu's (1977, p. 648) immortal words, for 'the power to impose reception.' Since day-time talk shows constitute a par excellence example of a co-constructed narrative, they also give us a unique opportunity to explore the negotiation of multiple meanings of such narratives and the ways in which some storytellers manage to construct more authoritative stances than others and thus impose

their own interpretations. How do different parties enact their power? What strategies are used by the guests to defend their interpretation of particular events or phenomena? What sources of authority do talk show hosts appeal to? What happens when the audience disagrees with the host or the expert? And, finally, which narratives appear particularly compelling to different segments of the day-time talk show viewers?

The third argument is perhaps the most important contribution of the article. This argument builds on the fact that entertainment talk shows often focus on stories of trailer park whites with African-American and Latino members in the audience providing ongoing commentary. Squire perceptively notes that while superficially the shows appear to be about the psychological dysfunction of social class, in reality they are about race and the fury directed at whites in liminal position is in fact racism by proxy. Her analysis of several case studies demonstrates that the focus on social pathology invites oppositional identity construction and that the opportunity to construct such a narrative is most often either taken up by African-American women who host the shows or offered to African-American women and men in the audience. These, commonly silenced and socially excluded, minority members are invited to voice the emergent narrative norms of citizenship, most often with regard to family and responsibility for the children. Considering that family values are at the center of discourses on race and gender, it is quite plausible that, at least for some segments of the population, day-time shows play an important role in challenging conventional narratives of parenting and bringing to the foreground new norms of expressive, activist, minority-identified citizenship.

The reason that I consider this argument to be the most important contribution of the article is that while we have numerous theoretical musings on how hybridity encourages contestation and re-imagining of master narratives, there aren't still enough scholarly accounts which illuminate the day-to-day functioning of public forums that allow for this revision and change (for some successful examples see Andrews & Talbot 2000). Squire's examination of how day-time shows allow African-Americans to gain authoritative voices and to revise dominant narratives is reminiscent of an earlier time in the US history when another population, namely European immigrants, strove to be imagined as legitimate, and perhaps even exemplary, citizens. One of the ways in which immigrants managed to 'write themselves into' American national identity narrative was through a newly created genre of immigrant autobiography which appealed to two dominant tropes of the time (Pavlenko, *in press*). The opposition between the Old and the New World allowed the authors to contest the Anglo-Saxonization of the American national identity and to argue for

new approaches to Americanness which would be closer to the forefathers' vision. In turn, the rhetoric of individual achievement allowed them to position themselves and fellow immigrants as legitimate Americans who achieved this status by 'luck and pluck'. As time went by, narratives of successful assimilation created by Jakob Riis, Mary Antin, and Edward Bok became the cornerstone of 'the immigrant canon,' the immigrants themselves were hailed as exemplary American citizens (not unlike Oprah Winfrey), and images of voluntary and enthusiastic Americanization displaced other, more problematic and ambivalent, narratives that depicted Americanization as an enforced and coercive process. They also obscured racial inequities in American identity politics and the fact that the immigrant myth applied only to Europeans.

In a similar fashion the present discussion seems to obfuscate the fact that the narratives most successfully challenged on the shows are those of race and not of gender. Squire reminds the reader that *Oprah* in particular allowed for black women's voices to be heard and for new forms of black intellectualism and feminism to be articulated. The evidence that we see speaks however more to legitimization of the voices of minority members than it does to contestation of particular femininities. The fact that it is mainly African-American women who evaluate and validate particular accounts and contest others is taken as evidence of negotiation of gender and the authority wielded by these women is attributed to their identities as powerful African-American women. What remains unclear, however, as already pointed out earlier, is how exactly these women, who are most of the time subject to double bias on the grounds of race and gender, manage to construct authoritative and powerful identities and to impose reception. The only glimpse we get is Bertice Berry's appeal to irony which is described as an important attribute in African-American narratives of resistance. In fact, the most successful device commonly used by the show hosts and guests alike is neither irony nor emotion per se but appeal to personal experience. Oprah, for instance, continuously appeals to this device, and her comments are peppered with formulations, such as *I know, to me, I think, I don't understand* (Lippi-Green 1997). This display of personal involvement resonates with feminist thought (cf. Cameron 2000) and in particular with Black feminist thought (cf. Collins 1990) which values concrete experience as a source of knowledge at least as highly as that of the scholar or the expert. Another successful strategy used to legitimize particular interpretations is an appeal to common sense and knowledge, seen in constructions such as *you must know, don't you know, if you don't know, everyone knows*, also frequently used by Oprah, other talk show hosts, and their guests. Yet another is

the deployment of rhetorical devices of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), also common in the speech of Oprah and her guests.

The above is not to say that gender is not negotiated on day-time talk shows. In fact, this and other forms of entertainment comprise a popular 'self-help' genre which, in Cameron's (2000) view, is presently the key locus of popular engagement with ideas about gender and selfhood. Rather, in this commentator's opinion, future inquiry into creation of oppositional narratives by African-American women would benefit from closer attention to linguistic means used by these women to impose interpretations and manufacture consensus. Fortunately, by now the field of linguistics has accumulated a wealth of sources which highlight an array of linguistic devices used by African-American women to construct authoritative stances (Bucholtz 1996; Etter-Lewis 1991; Etter-Lewis & Foster 1996; Foster 1995; Morgan 1991, 1999; Nelson 1990). These and other studies identify a wide range of strategies deployed by the women to challenge hegemonic discourses and to display authority. Among these strategies are code-switching and contrastive uses of AAVE and Standard English (Bucholtz 1996; Foster 1995; Morgan 1999; Nelson 1990), conversational signifying (Morgan 1999), as well as a variety of questions, assessments, deixis, and backchanneling (Bucholtz 1996). Of particular interest to the present study is Morgan's (1999) suggestion that in the process of socialization African-American women are encouraged to attach importance both to the speaker's right to represent their own experience and to the audience's right to determine intentionality: "Women learned the crucial role of the audience when, as teenagers, they went to elaborate lengths to determine what someone said and how others responded to rumors" (Morgan 1999, p. 37). This description echoes Collins' (1990) Black feminist epistemology which privileges the dialogic evaluation of narratives, interpretations, and claims in which consensus is arrived through discussion with others. It is possible then that in their participation on the day-time talk shows some African-American women may be drawing on time-honored and culturally-sanctioned linguistic resources and dialogic styles which serve to subvert hegemonic narratives and to offer and validate viable alternatives. It is up to future inquiry to determine what these resources may be and how they are deployed and thus to add to the body of knowledge on creation of counter-discourses and counter-narratives by oppressed and marginalized individuals.

References

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities*. London: Verso.
- Andrews, M., & Talbot, M. (2000). *All the world and her husband. Women in twentieth-century consumer culture*. London/New York: Cassell.
- Bhabha, H. (1990). The third space: Interview with Homi Bhabha. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 207–221). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). The economics of linguistic exchanges. *Social Science Information*, 16, 645–668.
- Bucholtz, M. (1996). Black feminist theory and African-American women's linguistic practice. In V. Bergvall, J. Bing, & A. Freed (Eds.), *Rethinking language and gender research: Theory and practice* (pp. 267–290). London/New York: Longman.
- Cameron, D. (2000). A self off the shelf? Consuming women's empowerment. In M. Andrews & M. Talbot (Eds.), *All the world and her husband. Women in twentieth-century consumer culture* (pp. 210–223). London/New York: Cassell.
- Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Etter-Lewis, G. (1991). Standing up and speaking out: African-American women's narrative legacy. *Discourse and Society*, 2 (4), 425–437.
- Etter-Lewis, G., & Foster, M. (Eds.). (1996). *Unrelated kin: Race and gender in women's personal narratives*. London: Routledge.
- Foster, M. (1995). Are you with me? Power and solidarity in the discourse of African-American women. In K. Hall & M. Bucholz (Eds.), *Gender articulated: Language and the socially constructed self* (pp. 329–350). New York: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. London: Routledge.
- Morgan, M. (1991). Indirectness and interpretation in African-American women's discourse. *Pragmatics*, 1 (4), 421–451.
- Morgan, M. (1999). No woman, no cry: African American women's place. In M. Bucholz, A. C. Liang, & L. Sutton (Eds.), *Reinventing identities: The gendered self in discourse* (pp. 27–45). New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nelson, L. (1990). Code-switching in the oral life narratives of African-American women: Challenges to linguistic hegemony. *Journal of Education*, 172 (3), 142–155.
- Pavlenko, A. (in press). "The making of an American": Negotiation of identities at the turn of the twentieth century. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Meta-narratives of cultural experience: Race, class, gender

Joanna Thornborrow

Centre for Language and Communication Research,
Cardiff University, Wales, UK

This response to Corinne Squire's article addresses the relationship between the meta-narratives of cultural experience, and the story as a conversational object, as approached through the lens of discourse and conversation analysis. I make an attempt to establish a link between Squire's position and other recent work in media discourse analysis which focuses on the situated production of talk show talk as 'performance'. (*Stories, Meta-narrative, Talk shows, Performance, Discourse, Conversation analysis*)

In her article Corinne Squire offers a cogent discussion of the emergence of cultural counter-narratives in TV talk shows. She suggests that in these shows, the representations of gender, colour and class identities which are often presented through the staging of social conflicts, destabilise some of the culturally dominant narratives around parenting and citizenship in America. The counter-narrating of such "stories" is, she argues, articulated predominantly by black women who, albeit in the context of trash TV and in opposition to trailer park whites, have been given a space and a voice to tell a different version of black citizenship from the one that predominates in many other media contexts.

The focus here is on the cultural meta-narratives of race, class and gender; issues that are never far from the surface of the more serious talk show genres, as well as being made verbally, visually and often physically explicit in the staged conflicts of the more sensationalist shows. Indeed, they form the cultural raw materials through which individual stories and conflicts are constructed and played out. Squire argues that along the continuum from the serious to the sensationalist sub-genres of talk shows, we can find a diversity of race and gender identities that does not exist in any other media form. Whether this diversity emerges in more serious shows like "Oprah", where the voices of black feminism are given their narrative space, or in the reaction to stories of white trailer park trash in shows like "Jerry Springer" at the more sensationalist end of the spectrum, the cultural counter-narratives of family responsibility and citizenship are often being voiced by black women.

Squire also compares the relative stability of narratives of masculinity, where the "bad" male can redeem himself through the predictable channels

of work and self-improvement, with the instability and marginality of female narratives. The cultural position of women is inherently unstable, she argues, and this instability is expressed in TV talk shows on three levels: firstly in the structure of the shows themselves, cut by commercial breaks which also form breaks in the telling of the story; secondly in the incoherence of the topics and development of the stories, and thirdly, in the representations of women in the stories. As an example, Squire gives the story of the young white mother who is “turned black” by her biracial child and teen motherhood – women are precariously perched on the edges of social discourse, and yet they are at the centre of counter-narratives that are challenging the stable, predictable and well-defined categories of culturally dominant narratives. She concludes that talks shows may well provide an important site for the development of civil values based on black women’s narratives of personal struggle against social disempowerment.

The central place occupied by TV talk shows in current popular television programming has generated a substantial amount of interest and debate in media discourse analysis for some time now. Recent examples of work in this field, and of the related debates surrounding the controversial talk show genre, can be found in Tolson (2001). Such work has focused on talk shows as broadcast events where the expression and validation of lay experience is foregrounded, but most crucially, on talk shows as occasions for the production of talk as a particular form of mediated performance. It is within this disciplinary approach that we can find a counter-balance to what Squire sees as the relative neglect of the talk show as a popular cultural form by the social sciences. From this perspective, although Squire accurately describes the genre as being “loaded with told stories” and sets out to look at “the way they [talk shows] tell the *stories* for which they are so notorious” (p. 224), what is perhaps most striking is the absence of empirical “stories” in her account. This absence leaves some important questions unanswered, and I attempt to address some of those questions here.

What Squire presents us with in this article are, for the sociolinguist or the discourse analyst, fragments of narrative discourse rather than stories as such. In the transcripts we are given as data events in the on-going production of a “story” which have then to be understood in the broad context of cultural meta-narratives, rather than in the immediate context of where, when and how they get told: their situated “telling” (Blum-Kulka 1997). Every talk show has its host, its studio audience, frequently its “experts”, and always its array of lay participants, those narrative “performers” who are most often ordinary members of the public. How the stories get told, then, is crucially a matter of locally-

produced interactions between these different participants. What is missing from a theoretically-angled account such as Squire's, is a coherent framework for analysing the dynamics of story-telling in talk shows, and the discursive resources that all participants draw on in the course of such narrative activity. In other words, a description of the mediated interactional context within which stories are produced and understood.

A discourse analytic approach to the production of talk show narratives can provide such a framework by describing how lay participants' stories are elicited and "framed" (Goffman 1974) as well as how they are "performed" and made to be "dramatic" (Myers 2001; Thornborrow 2001). For instance, the importance of the structure of talk shows is touched on by Squire, but not systematically developed. Greg Myers analyses precisely those structural elements of an episode of the "Jerry Springer" show that make personal stories into "issues", pointing out that stories have to be made controversial, and the controversy they contain has to be enacted, in order to "carry clear signals of good and evil to a baying audience, an audience that can be relied on to share a clear moral code" (2001, p. 190). The controversy and drama emerge in the moment-to-moment articulation of different frames in the show, which Myers' analysis tracks from stage, to studio, to broadcast; from the onstage action, to the interaction with the studio audience, and to the show as a broadcast event as evidenced by Springer's "final thoughts".

The "moral code" is of course, a fundamental part of the discourse of dominant cultural narratives, and it is often to be found in the evaluative components of a story. The expression of moral codes of behaviour and attitudes to such conduct is also, as Labov (1972) noted, an integral part of the structure of oral narratives. Story evaluations let you know how to take a story, they are what makes it intrinsically "tellable". In the context of mediated, public narratives of private experience, this is equally the case (Montgomery 1991). Stories are told in different ways for different audiences, and as an example of how a particular story gets to be elicited by a talk show host, and produced within a narrative trope which depends upon a particular moral code, let's take a short extract from "Montel" (1997). Here, the meta-narratives of bad teenage-girl behaviour and good, responsible parenting are locally articulated in the interactional production of this story, and made dramatic by the actions of the host, Montel Williams, rather than just by Angel, the story-teller.

The Break In//Montel//8.97

1. MW: what did your mother do to you
2. Ang: .hhh well (.) she kicked me outa the house
3. because she took away my keys (.)

4. n'so I had to break in to get clothes out of my house (.)
5. while they were out of town .hhh=
6. MW: =while your Mum
7. and Dad were outa town (.) you broke in to their house
8. Ang: [huh - wu- (xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]
9. MW: [and to get some things and you said well]
10. so now I (already) broke up may as well have a coupla
11. friends over
12. Aud: ((laughter))

“What did your mother do to you”? With this question, Montel invites Angel to tell her individual story as one in a series of others along the same theme: teens who have been kicked out of home by their long-suffering parents. There is the meta-narrative. But in this particular case Montel's interventions in the telling of this story not only serve to dramatize it, but also to make it highly problematic for the teller. The story is a co-production between the host and Angel, and the moral stance evoked crucially depends on what the host is doing in his turns. First in the turn (lines 6–7) where he reproduces Angel's story in a tone that produces a clear evaluation of exaggerated incredulity, and then from line 9, where he takes on the “voice” of Angel and tells the story for her, stepping into her shoes as the narrator and becoming the “I” of the story. This produces a response of laughter from the audience in line 12. We recognise the “story” and from the way Montel tells it, we know what kind of thing is coming up next.

Here then is a talk show story which gets told in a certain way, and gets a particular kind of response from the audience. The organisation of such a story, the actions of the story tellers, and how they produce it as tellable in its context here, can be analysed in attending to the interactional detail of the talk. It is a story which depends on a particular set of cultural discourses of common sense, on the shared understandings on the part of the host and the studio audience of what constitutes recognisably bad teenage behaviour. Evidence of these shared understandings emerge at moments where the story is evaluated and made dramatic by the host through his role as co-teller. It is precisely at this point, where the cultural meta-narrative meets the micro-analysis of a particular story-telling, that we can begin to draw together a richer understanding of how culturally-determined narrative tropes find their substance in the detailed interactional framework of talk show discourse.

However, narrative discourse in talk shows is not always just about the public dramatisation of private experience. In these shows narratives are multi-functional and in the more serious, debate-oriented shows particularly, partic-

ipants use stories to make points and take up positions in the debate. What people do with their stories, and how they tell them, varies from show to show but it is regularly the evaluative components of such stories that serve as discursive resources for constructing opinions (Thornborrow 1997). In a recent study of the construction of personal identities in episodes of the British talk show “Kilroy”, Nuria Lorenzo-Dus (2000) also describes how lay participants’ stories serve a therapeutic function, performing what she terms “emotional DIY” in which a range of different “selves” are constructed by the story tellers and the host. These typically are stories of critical moments in the life of a participant, moments that are overcome by the story teller taking up the self-presentational role of “fighter/survivor” or in some cases, a role of “humanitarian/ordinary self” in relation to the events being narrated.

There are currently many forms of narrative analysis being undertaken in many different fields for a variety of purposes. Many of these would benefit from more systematic and explicit cross-disciplinary links where the common themes can be explored and pushed onwards. Talk show discourse in particular is one area where work in media and cultural studies does not always intersect with work in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis – yet we draw our materials from the same source. Whereas many cultural studies and feminist theorists of the talk show have tended to engage with a critique of the genre as good or bad television, particularly in relation to the “moral panic” debate (Thompson 1998), as political action or personal therapy (Livingstone & Lunt 1994), or often, as Squire points out, in terms of a divide between the serious and structured orientation of the debate shows to the postmodern fragmentation and burlesque of trash TV, Tolson (2001) argues for a rather different approach to the popularity and success of talk shows as a media phenomenon. It is, he suggests, through an analysis of the melodramatic performance of talk we can begin to describe the discursive dynamics of talk shows, in which the production and performance of narratives play such a central part. In so doing, we can begin to examine how people make sense of experience, and how this experience gets produced as broadcast talk: talk which is produced by ordinary people as drama, always “‘doubly-articulated’ both to the immediate situation and to the overhearing audience” (Tolson 2001, p. 30). The empirical methods of discourse and conversation analysis, with their focus on narrative production as a situated, conversational activity offer an alternative to the meta-narrative “gloss” of more theoretically-based accounts. In providing a theory of talk as action, we can then begin to explore in analytic detail how narratives come to be told, how stories are articulated between protagonists, hosts and audiences, how conflicts are dramatized, and how marginalised groups come to carve out,

in practical terms, a space to talk from within the discursive sphere of television talk shows.

References

- Blum-Kulka, S. (1997). *Dinner talk: Cultural patterns of sociability and socialisation in family discourse*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English vernacular*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Livingstone, S., & Lunt, P. (1994). *Talk on television: Audience participation and public debate*. London: Routledge.
- Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2000). The discursive co-construction of participants' identities in the television talk show *Kilroy*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Cardiff University, Wales, UK.
- Montgomery, M. (1991). "Our tune": A study of a discourse genre. In P. Scannell (Ed.), *Broadcast talk* (pp. 138–177). London: Sage.
- Myers, G. (2001). "I'm out of it: You guys argue": Making an issue out of it on *The Jerry Springer Show*. In A. Tolson (Ed.), *Television talk shows: Discourse, performance, spectacle* (pp. 173–191). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Thompson, K. (1998). *Moral panics*. London: Routledge.
- Thornborrow, J. (1997). Having their say: The function of stories in talk show discourse. *Text*, 17 (2), 241–262.
- Thornborrow, J. (2001). "Has it ever happened to you?" Talk show stories as mediated performance. In A. Tolson (Ed.), *Television talk shows: Discourse, performance, spectacle* (pp. 117–137). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Tolson, A. (Ed.). (2001). *Television talk shows: Discourse, performance, spectacle*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

RESPONSE

to commentaries on “White trash pride and the exemplary black citizen”

by Corinne Squire

Reading is the real art form of insult. . . If you get in a smart crack, and everyone laughs. . . because you've found a flaw and exaggerated it, then you've got a good read going.
(Dorian Corey, *Paris is Burning*, 1991)

Facing four perspicacious readings of their article, a respondent encounters several dilemmas. First, every suggestion seems to be a good and just one. Why *didn't* I include that useful piece of data, follow that fascinating line of analysis, adopt that illuminating conceptual framework, clarify such an important underlying supposition? One finds oneself reaching for that stalwart old phrase, ‘space did not permit me. . .’ Only space itself would, however, permit me, or the commentators, the infinite call-and-response of commentary on commentary that an article’s readings can generate: a second dilemma.

Yet the fact is, we do not read and comment forever. At some equally dilemmatic point, we stop. And one commentary, or part of a commentary, is not equal to another. Some comments add to a thesis, extending or augmenting it; in this case, Fern Johnson’s commentary perhaps takes this approach most strongly, although Heiko Hausendorf’s and Joanna Thornborrow’s adopt it at times. (Indeed, I must thank Thornborrow for beginning her commentary with an exemplary 3-paragraph recapitulation of the article). Some comments, on the other hand, subtract from or negate their object, as indeed all the commentaries here also do at times. At times, a commentary may even seem to be in a different conceptual universe from the article to which it responds – a sense I had occasionally when reading Jaan Valsiner’s piece. However, it must share at least one coordinate in order for us to recognise such difference. A ‘reading’ always throws a little critical shade, as the introductory quote implies; but to do this it has to be speaking my language. I am going to look at elements of the commentaries that fit easily with the article, and those that seem incommensurable with it, before including them all, somewhat ill-assorted and jumbled perhaps, within a broad pragmatics of narrative.

I want to start from the apparently rather basic point made by Hausendorf, that the article's interpretations are 'obviously not data driven' (p. 240). There is more empirical material implicated in the article than is perhaps obvious. Due partly to the theme of the issue and partly to classic 'space constraints,' this material appears in references rather than in the article itself (see Squire 1994, 1997). However, the 'hidden' status of the empirical material relates also, I think, to Hausendorf's acute note (p. 239) that the article is written from a cultural studies perspective, whose assumptions, when, as here, they are not made explicit, provoke criticism and perhaps resistance within other traditions. I work and was trained within psychology, but Hausendorf is talking about stance rather than professional affiliation here. Often, empirical work in cultural studies operates with different rules, and those rules are frequently less concrete and detailed than in the social sciences – a kind of rule in itself.

More generally, I think the article's 'cultural-studies' stance is key to understanding the relation of the Hausendorf, Valsiner and Thornborrow commentaries to it. The issue of the article's place of origin arises again, for instance, when Hausendorf considers the form of the article's data. The data are 'not transcribed, but written according to literacy (sic) standards' (Hausendorf, p. 241). The implied question about how television can be turned into data by transcription sheds some light on the divergence between my 'cultural-studies' approach and the broadly 'sociolinguistic' approaches of Hausendorf, Valsiner and Thornborrow, because it leads us to the issue of what is considered 'narrative.' To get there, we need to look, following Hausendorf's pointer, at the form of the data.

In the case of US television talk shows, there are often copyright transcriptions available. To avoid disclosure of words that were included in the transmission but that do not appear in the written transcripts, I used the copyright versions as much as possible, and changed them only in the case of omissions of for instance whole phrases. The printed versions are not research transcriptions, and errors as well as edits occur. However, without consent from show participants, who can be very difficult to track down, I did not want to recast broadcast material as research data by doing my own transcriptions. Television is visual, too. Again, I did not 'transcribe' talk show episodes' visual components in detail, or even compose *post hoc* 'screenplays.' I merely used descriptors of scenes, shots and characters, which I kept at the level of the programmes' own and TV-industry depictions ('white female,' 'family therapist,' 'audience reaction shot'), which we might expect to have a degree of contemporary cultural familiarity and acceptance. Such forms of verbal and visual transcription are of course not incontrovertible. There are many debates within the social

sciences about transcription that could be applied to them, and Valsiner's remarks on exaggerated bureaucratic talk about ethics in the second commentary (p. 249) might also relevantly be considered. However, more fine-grained transcriptions would have had less cultural currency, would have raised ethical problems, and crucially, were not required for my purpose, which was to track narratives across a show or shows.

Mention of this purpose brings me to Hausendorf's and Thornborrow's problem with the article's notion of 'narrative.' This problem can, again, be linked to Hausendorf's claim that the article comes from somewhere else – cultural studies – and that it makes assumptions rooted in this undeclared location. The critical assumption here, in both senses of the word 'critical', is about the nature of 'narrative.' For Hausendorf, 'narratives' are sociolinguistic, 'verbal activities with more or less well-defined micro- and macro-structures,' rather than a 'genre' (p. 243). But my article is, as Thornborrow puts it (again from the perspective of 'the sociolinguist or the discourse analyst'), addressing 'fragments of narrative discourse rather than stories as such' (p. 271). Valsiner's broader criticism memorably imputes a 'theory-phobic (yet socio-politically alert) "dust-bowl empiricism"' to my and similar approaches to stories. He calls for 'a theory of social order' to explain the coming into existence of talk shows, combined with a (lower-level) sociolinguistic analysis of 'the positionings of different talkers' (p. 254). But I think Hausendorf's first – and Thornborrow's and Valsiner's second – kinds of narrative, all contribute to, and express synecdochally, the other, 'cultural' kind. Narrative in this article is indeed assumed to be 'a way of constructing the social world' (Hausendorf, p. 243). This assumption operates with no apparent need for justification in much cultural studies work – on television talk shows, for example (Masciarotte 1991). The assumption is also broadly deployed within sociology, to indicate 'a pervasive feature of social life...including acts of consumption' and the 'narrative' ordering of objects (Seale 2000, p. 37). Todorov (1990) provides some useable criteria for identifying genres, and claims too that if you are dealing with a genre of contemporary and local cultural currency, you'll recognise it when you see it (or misrecognise it, as Derrida 1992, would add). 'Dominant' and 'counter' narratives, then, are indeed assumed in this article to be more or less current, definable and recognisable social genres – an assumption that might well have been spelled out for this journal's readers, as Hausendorf suggests (p. 240).

My feeling is that Hausendorf and Thornborrow would accept this argument, but would still argue for a distinction between these broader, generic, cultural stories, and personal, oral stories. The absence of this distinction in my article renders its concept of narrative 'rather vague' (Hausendorf, p. 242) for

them. This is a distinction I would want to question on two grounds. First, let's consider the 'cultural-studies' ground of narrative as media-specific. Narrative for Hausendorf is primarily about personal speech, and is integrally bound up with identity work. Thornborrow, similarly, emphasises the 'mediated interactional context' of stories as the aspect of talkshow narrative that my piece crucially omits (p. 272). In Valsiner's commentary, narrative analysis's remit is extended further, to include 'making sense of human subjectivity' (p. 246). To avoid linguistic reductionism, language is positioned as a tool used actively by subjects in pursuit of specific goals. Hausendorf's commentary suggests that there could be interesting possible extensions to conventional narrative work in analyses of the interaction of verbal with visual elements and of the intertextual nature of talk show narratives. Carbaugh (1986), Livingstone and Lunt (1993) Gamson (1998) and Priest (1995) have indeed addressed such concerns, but Hausendorf's perspective (pp. 243–244) on how they might be elaborated is a helpful one. Thornborrow, in her commentary, provides a valuable account of a story from *Montel*, coconstructed between the host, the guest and the studio audience. She uses a Labovian analysis of narrative that demonstrates well how the verbal moral dramas of talkshows work (pp. 272–273).

However, these concerns remain, in Hausendorf's and Thornborrow's accounts, confessedly sociolinguistic matters. They are never really, for instance, matters that concern the broadcast audience. The audience that Thornborrow considers in detail is the studio audience, and so the meaning of 'narrative' in her commentary remains interpersonal. She is not really concerned with television itself, or even with the 'overhearing audience' that, quoting Tolson, she mentions at one point. Fern Johnson's commentary, written from a more cultural-studies perspective, departs markedly from the others in this respect, and her account of work on audience positionings around television narrative is I think very useful (pp. 260–262), and points to many areas which my article could with benefit have developed. (Television's own shaping of the shows is also interestingly explored in Laura Grindstaff's recent book, *The Money Shot*, 2002).

The issue of media-specific narrative arises more particularly when Hausendorf wonders whether I am interested in cultural, 'canonical stories' (p. 241) or in social identity stories about 'what is told by whom' (p. 241, emphasis in original). My article, however, focuses on *US televisual* narrative, which has its own specific form, within which the 'race' of the speaker and the story are, I would argue, highly salient. As Henry Louis Gates describes it (1989), growing up in the 1950s, his mother would call the whole family to the television set whenever a black person appeared - and the interest, and disappointments, have not

abated. 'What is told by *whom*' is *part* of the 'canonical story,' a story which can never be dissociated from its tellers, audiences and specific content. The wider criticism of the discourse-analytic tendency to dissociate discourse, or 'narrative,' from its producers and audience is also relevant here (see for instance Ahmed 2000). There is, too, considerable integration even across specific cultural fora of narrative forms, not at the level of personal story structure but, as Todorov notes, in terms of cultural genre (Jacobs 2000). Johnson makes exactly the connections between talk show narratives and African American cultural narratives of survival and improvement that the article had, somewhere, in mind, and does not view those connections as necessarily problematic.

Hausendorf describes television talk shows as 'secondary orality' (p. 240). However nonpejorative that adjective, I would want to recast the phrase as '*televisual* orality,' not in order to reify media forms, but to grant them relative autonomy, and also to undo their subservience to speech. The particular adjective chosen is not irrelevant; Hausendorf's, Thornborrow's and Valsiner's commentaries do seem to view talk shows as derivative of or parasitic on personal speech, 'vicariously experienced' rather than 'really lived-through talking' (Valsiner, p. 247). Johnson rightly points to some social-science perspectives on media that do not perform this hierarchisation, but the other three commentaries here seem explicitly or implicitly to subscribe to it. Derrida's (1979) analysis of the relation between speech and other forms of textuality comprehensively undoes this primacy of speech. It is also no accident that Derrida's analysis takes apart the work that lies behind Hausendorf's, Valsiner's and Thornborrow's emphasis on speech as action, language's functionality, and narrative as identity 'work,' that is, speech act theory. 'Talking is a derivative of acting,' Valsiner declares (p. 248) Yet speech is not only social action, any more than speech in individual development -though of course it may regulate action (Valsiner, p. 248) - is simply internalised action. To ask what a narrative 'does' is interesting, but it is never a completely answerable question, or a question that accounts fully for language. Even a recognition that narratives are 'multi-functional' (Thornborrow, p. 273) does not solve the problem. Elements of narrative, including talk show narrative, always escape such functionalism. What Valsiner calls 'obsessive talking' we might also say is an element in all talking: the element that is not just dissociated from action, but that fails even to get communicated, since meaning is, notoriously and tritely, such a slippery thing. This is the element that Lacanians might call 'desire in language.'

The second ground for my doubt about the distinction between sociolinguistic and cultural narrative is that the definition used within the 'sociolinguistic' commentaries seems too narrow to include all the relevant phenomena

even within the 'interpersonal' realm. The Labovian framework Hausendorf and Thornborrow, in particular, deploy is, I would claim, useful, but fraught with problems at the sociolinguistic as well as at the cultural level of analysis. For example, the temporal succession on which a 'narrative clause,' and thus a minimal narrative, for Labov, depends, is often hard to identify in material that nevertheless seems to be a 'story,' because it is implicated with causality or simply, contingency. Labovian 'evaluation' is key to our understandings of 'story,' but not to Labov's minimal definition. The full Labovian definition, on the other hand, can be applied to many skilled pieces of language-making that are not, in Labovian terms, 'stories': 'stories' that are split up for instance in their telling, told by several story-tellers, or told about a general rather than a particular object or event. Labovian specifications may also exclude language-making that fits broader 'story' criteria, such as the verbal and visual language found within and across a television talk show.

In particular, the Labovian 'evaluative' component of stories blurs the boundaries between story and explanation; for evaluations offer a kind of minor theory of narrated events. Hausendorf says my article deals not with stories, but with explanations. Yet 'narrative' derives, after all, from the Latin 'narre,' 'to make known.' I would argue that a story is often a form of knowledge or even theory in itself, albeit a partial, specific and relatively poorly validated one. A consequence of this argument is that the article is, in fact, beset by the opposite of the theory-phobia Valsiner perceives, since it is looking out for theory about poorly-understood phenomena – representations of 'race' in the US – in unlikely places – television talk show narratives. The fact that the theories written into and through such narratives are complex and sometimes obscure is unfortunate but, as Charcot said, 'ça n'empêche d'exister.'

Valsiner proposes a much stronger 'theory' of talk shows, which I think can, like Labov's formalism, be very instructive- but which is so distant conceptually from my article that my response here almost inevitably becomes a commentary in itself. Valsiner postulates three forms of talk -No-Talk, Maybe-Talk and Hyper-Talk – and a continuum of links between talk and action ranging from nonexistent to strong, operating within all Semiotic Demand Settings (human-made structures of perception, action and meaning within everyday life) (p. 250). Using these categories, he says, gives us a general theory to describe societies and the significance of different kinds of talk within them. What does emerge of importance here, I think, is the question of the social effects of talk shows: where and what they are, their long-term significance, and whether different kinds of shows have different effects (pp. 250, 253–254). This is also a question taken up, at a different level, by Johnson, who wonders whether rep-

representations in weak media such as talk shows can really make much difference to dominant cultural narratives of 'race,' particularly when the figures on which those representations depend have at best ambiguous social meanings (p. 267).

Certainly there is some work on the links between talk shows and social action, in the writing of Priest (1995), Gamson (1998) and Shattuc (1997), for instance. It would, too, be good to know more about long term effects, in particular. I am doubtful, however, that the parallels Valsiner draws between biological evolution and social change in order to argue for the shows' social conservatism and likely low effectivity, have much validity here. Social evolution does not follow biological evolution's laws too closely, and the notion of 'adaptation' does not translate exactly or perhaps at all from physiology to social life. Moreover, Valsiner's idea that talk shows are, in addition to being ideological actors, 'neutral objects for scientific investigation' (p. 254), is tendentious. Can the effects of *Oprah* really be researched with anything like the reliability attainable in the natural sciences, given the vast numbers of interacting variables involved, that famously stymie much work on media effects? We might at best see suggestive correlations, as for instance with behaviour change programmes that use popular media in the developing world (Galavotti, Pappas-DeLuca, & Lansley 2001).

In South Africa, talk radio and talk television have presented a vast volume of HIV talk over the past two years, a time during which individuals' talk and behaviour about HIV – around other-blaming and seeking treatment for instance – has also changed significantly (Andrews, Sclater, Squire, & Tamboukou 2004; Joffe 1997). Of course, this change may also be related to the inescapability of the condition in increasing numbers of people's everyday lives, and we are unlikely to separate the two by empirical investigation. But people in South Africa frequently make the connection themselves, saying for example that HIV should be dealt with openly, 'like on *Ricki*.' Such an attitude is, again, unlikely to relate straightforwardly to, for instance, amount of talkshow viewing, and *Ricki* and her sister shows are in any case hardly panaceas. But it is probable, I think, that such an increase in broadcast talk about HIV will affect cultural resources, when previous social norms around the condition centred on silence and inaction (Andrews et al. 2004). In contrast to Johnson's scepticism, then, I think talk shows may contribute to at least short term changes in cultural and perhaps some behavioural repertoires. This may be especially so when the talk is about topics of high emotional valency such as HIV, or, in the case of US talk shows, 'race,' and when, consequently, talk itself has, like the silence that preceded it, the status of social action.

Aside from Valsiner's focus on the effects of talk shows, what is the value of his quite formalistic approach? Without espousing relativism, it seems reasonable to argue that it is hard to do science with stories. Scientific method works better with material that can more easily be put into exclusive categories. Of course such categories are ideals, and ideals have value, even when it is clear that reality breaches them, as when we say a point has no dimensions and a line has one, something not true in the material world. I would suggest, however, that the loss of information involved in Valsiner's formalism outweighs the formalism's contribution.

Let's look first at the categories invoked in the theory. Is there really a fully neutral, objective way of deciding the discourse set in a Semiotic Demand System – itself something of a moveable feast? Is there ever a zone of zero talk, where the number of discourses allowed by the 'social channeling system' (p. 252), or $N = 0$? Doesn't N quickly $\rightarrow \infty$ once we really start adding up gradations of talk? And isn't it already well recognised that, as Valsiner says, extreme talk is often a way of *not* talking about something? Foucault's work and applications of it spring readily to mind here (1970; Heath 1982). It might be useful at times to identify certain talk channels rather than others and to limit the identified set, but to postulate a number system this fixed seems like formalism for the rhetorical value of it, certainly without the hope of empirical verification or even testing on which the model depends. Writing the categories in capitals, NO-TALK and so on, seems, similarly, done to connote a kind of programmable rigour. And simply asserting that 'Oprah Winfrey – and her society – is a neutral object of investigation for a science' does not make it so. Social science is not and cannot be separate from 'narrative politics,' as Valsiner wishes it to be. That does not mean the two are identical. However, the intersection between them should not be frightening enough to lead us to erase it.

If the model in Valsiner's commentary is rhetoric as much as 'science,' what does its rhetoric achieve? It does, I think, present powerful warnings about the dangers of talk shows, which it presents as falling into a Hyper-Talk zone, dissociated from action, static in regard to social development. Certainly, this is a powerful way of characterising the shows' dangers. I am, however, wary of measuring the shows against 'social development,' a category with an implicit teleology that begs the obvious questions, 'whose development?' and 'development for whom?' The unstated judgementality of the 'social development' category emerges when Valsiner describes my article's 'main point' as 'the impending colorlessness of narrative and counter-narratives in race- and gender-based story telling in contemporary mass media' (p. 245), a characterisation I would

want to turn around 180° to read, 'the impending *colorfulness*. . .' For Valsiner, such a reversal would be, I think, meaningless. Color to excess would be like talk to excess: Obsessive, functionless, non-developmental, with signifiers replacing reality. These judgements on what Valsiner would call 'hyper-talk' in general, and 'race' 'hyper-talk' in particular, seem to need arguing. They are not as transparently obvious as the commentary assumes (p. 251).

Finally, in Valsiner's account, language turns out to be not so much a form of action in itself, as a *correlate*, of varying strength, of social action, whose value is directly related to the strength of this relation. Thus language's value is defined solely through its role in social development. Talk is not a good in itself, even as a form of action; instead, 'good' talk is talk that is strongly connected to action. Language thus disappears as an autonomous factor in this account, becoming simply a necessary means to social development. The agentic subject who performs this development is, as we have said, important in Valsiner's account, but makes no appearance within his theory – an absence that characterises many attempts to formalise the social relations of language while still maintaining a strong sense of agent-driven social change.

As an example of Maybe-Talk, Valsiner cites talk about a wallet's disappearance from its customarily undiscussed place in your pocket (p. 251). If politically engaged research – of, for instance, the kind Hausendorf identifies with cultural studies – is perceived by Valsiner, as seems likely, as pickpocketing social research out of No-Talk and into the Maybe-Talk realm, then his own comments seem aimed at preventing it sliding into a disconnected, Hyper-Talk realm, and perhaps even at returning it to No-Talk. 'My commentary is an effort to undo the excesses of research traditions in recent decades that have been linked with ideologies' (p. 254). Valsiner's final comment on silence as a scientific response to such unscientific work makes sense within his argument (p. 255), but is, I have suggested, contestable. Rigour and reliability can be aimed for in narrative analysis (Mishler 1986) without denying the differences of such analysis from natural science methods, and its inevitable and valuable political engagements. Valsiner's sense that talk shows are going nowhere is itself an example of such engagement, and possibly a defensible one.

In this response I have been arguing that narratives are themselves a kind of practical theory. In trying to understand narratives' field, then, it might be useful to develop theories that are themselves practical and pragmatic. Such a pragmatics of narrative might include 'sociolinguistic' analysis of the interpersonal, in-studio narratives on which Hausendorf and Thornborrow focus, alongside work in the broader 'cultural' realm identified by Johnson and in a different way Valsiner. For me in this article, the latter realm was the most

salient, given the symbiosis in the US between media stories, popular talk, and policies about 'race,' and it was thus the pragmatic choice of focus. Such pragmatic 'theory' (Squire 1995) has to include a strong sense of its own provisionality and partiality. Perhaps the ambiguous concept of 'performance' that Thornborrow proposes could be useful for such pragmatism, if it is understood with some complexity as involving not just multiple stages, screens, personas and audiences, but also something that works to the extent that it *cannot* be read (Butler 1993, p. 129). In talk shows there are always some excessive, unreadable elements (Squire 1993, 1997) which, when recognised, act as indicators of the utopian moment within pragmatism (West 1989), and which point us towards the inadequacies of narrative and other theories, and the phenomena that continue to escape them.

Notes

1. The term is also the title of an early Kristeva (1982) reader.

References

- Ahmed, B. (2000). Constructing racism: Discourse, culture and subjectivity. In C. Squire (Ed.), *Culture in psychology* (pp. 73–84). London: Psychology Press.
- Andrews, M., Sclater, S. D., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (2004). Narrative research. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 109–124). London: Sage.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter*. London: Routledge.
- Carbaugh, D. (1986). *Talking American: Cultural discourse on Donahue*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Derrida, J. (1979). *Writing and difference*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Derrida, J. (1992). The law of genre. In A. Attridge (Ed.), *Acts of literature* (pp. 221–252). New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1970). *History of sexuality* (Vol. 1). London: Allen Lane.
- Galavotti, C., Pappas-DeLuca, K., & Lansley, A. (2001). Modeling and reinforcement to combat HIV: The MARCH approach to behavior change. *American Journal of Public Health* 91 (10), 1602–1607.
- Gamson, J. (1998). *Freaks talk back: Tabloid talk shows and sexual nonconformity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gates, H. L. (1989, November 12). TV's black world turns – but stays unreal. *New York Times* [reprinted in M.L.Andersen & P. H. Collins (Eds), *Race, class, and gender* (pp. 310–316). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995].
- Grindstaff, L. (2002). *The money shot*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Heath, S. (1982). *The sexual fix*. London: Macmillan.

- Jacobs, R. (2000). Narrative, civil society and public culture. In M. Andrews, S. Day Sclater, C. Squire, & A. Treacher (Eds.), *Lines of narrative* (pp. 18–35). London: Routledge.
- Joffe, H. (1997). The relationship between representational and materialist perspectives: AIDS and ‘the other.’ In L. Yardley (Ed.), *Material discourses of health and illness* (pp. 132–149). London: Routledge.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Desire in language*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Livingstone, S., & Lunt, P. (1993). *Talk on television*. London: Routledge.
- Masciarotte, G-J. (1991). C’mon girl: Oprah Winfrey and the discourse of feminine talk. *Genders*, 11, 81–110.
- Mishler, E. (1986). *Research interviewing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Priest, P. J. (1995). *Public intimacies: Talk show participants and tell all TV*. New York: Hampton Press.
- Seale, C. (2000). Resurrective practice and narrative. In M. Andrews, S. Day Sclater, C. Squire, & A. Treacher (Eds.), *Lines of narrative* (pp. 36–47). London: Routledge.
- Shattuc, J. (1997). *The talking cure: TV talk shows and women*. London: Routledge.
- Squire, C. (1993). Empowering women? The Oprah Winfrey Show. *Feminism and Psychology* 4 (1), 63–79.
- Squire, C. (1995). Pragmatism, extravagance and feminist discourse analysis. In C. Kitzinger & S. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Feminism and discourse* (pp. 145–164). London: Sage.
- Squire, C. (1997). Who’s white? Television talk shows and the production of a white subject. In M. Fine, L. Powell, L. Weis, & M. Wong (Eds.), *Off white* (pp. 242–250). New York: Routledge.
- Todorov, T. (1990). *Genres in discourse*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- West, C. (1989). *The American evasion of philosophy*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan.

Charting the narrative unconscious

Cultural memory and the challenge of autobiography

Mark Freeman

College of the Holy Cross

This essay explores the cultural dimension of autobiographical narrative, focusing especially on the way in which cultural texts and “textures” become woven into the fabric of memory. This process is one of which people are often unaware, resulting in regions of history that may be all but unknown. The “narrative unconscious,” therefore, refers not so much to that which has been dynamically repressed as to that which has been lived but which remains unthought and hence untold, i.e., to those culturally-rooted aspects of one’s history that have not yet become part of one’s story. An important challenge for those fashioning autobiographies is thus to move beyond personal life, into those largely uncharted regions of history that find their origins in the shared life of culture. From this perspective, autobiography is not only a matter of representing a life from (sometime after) birth until (sometime before) death; it is a matter of discerning the multiple sources, both proximate and distant, that give rise to the self.

In the present essay, I shall explore the process by which cultural texts and “textures” become woven, often unconsciously, into the fabric of memory. In speaking of the “narrative unconscious,” however, I refer not so much to that more private, secretive dimension of the unconscious posited by psychoanalysis as to the cultural dimension itself – specifically, to those culturally-rooted aspects of one’s history that remain uncharted and that, consequently, have yet to be incorporated into one’s story. An important, if somewhat paradoxical, challenge thus arises for those fashioning autobiographical narratives: insofar as the narrative unconscious is operative in one’s history, there is the need to move *beyond* personal life in telling one’s own story, into the shared life of culture. By making the narrative unconscious conscious through the work of

autobiography, there also exists the opportunity to discern the relationship between those manifest narratives that are often told and those more disruptive counter-narratives that sometimes surge into reflection, infusing one's history with new meaning, complexity, and depth.

Let me begin by drawing on a series of personal experiences that have come to inform my thinking about the issues in question (see Freeman 2001). Back in 1997, I had the opportunity to visit Berlin for the first time. From the very start, I found it to be an extraordinarily interesting city, by virtue of its music and art and architecture, its colorful street culture, and, of course, its history. It was quite unlike any other city I had ever visited. But I found myself unprepared for a couple of things that came to characterize my stay. The first was what seemed to be a ceaseless, and painfully difficult, process of collective reflection on the crimes of the past, both in the media and in everyday talk. I do not mean to suggest that this was the *only* thing people talked about; plenty of other issues were in the air at the time. But it was striking just how "present," indeed *omnipresent*, this set of concerns seemed to be in the minds and hearts of many of the people of Berlin. It is only fitting that there be some reference to Freud here: it was as if the social body was still "working through" the earlier situation, the therapeutic aim being twofold: "Descriptively speaking," Freud (1914/1958) writes (in "Remembering, repeating, and working-through"), "it is to fill in gaps in memory; dynamically speaking, it is to overcome resistances due to repression" (pp. 147–148).

How successful this process of working-through has been remains open to question. "At this very moment," Michael Geyer and Miriam Hansen (1994) noted less than a decade ago, "memories pour forth." This "belated triumph," however, was most appropriately seen as a "media-mediated event" which, in their estimation, had all but replaced the process of coming to terms with the past. Post-war youth, in particular, encountered the Nazi period through image and narrative. And this recovery of the past, "though a moment of genuine contrition and moral politics," was finally founded on "*external memories*," as they put it, "expressive acts of a 'spectacular' imagination combining with technology to organize everyday experience. A civil society arose based on an imaged-filled collective consciousness that relieved individuals of their internal worlds" (p. 187).

Geoffrey Hartman (1994), drawing on Walter Benjamin's work, raises a similar issue. "The reproducibility of art – and, by extension, of the newsworthy event," he writes, "brings us closer to it yet also creates a further distance: a world in which presence is increasingly displaced by representation" (p. 11), perhaps even leading to a kind of "anti-memory" (p. 14). Saul Friedlander

(1994) states his own fear in this context quite plainly. "The Shoah carries an *excess*," as he puts it. "At the individual level," therefore, "a redemptive closure (comforting or healing in effect), desirable as it would be, seems largely impossible. On the collective level, however, ... there can hardly be any doubt that the passage of time will erase the 'excess'" (p. 262).

At issue, then, is what exactly is being done in this collective process of working-through: whether it is in the interest of *remembering* and somehow coming to terms with the past or whether it is something else altogether, something more "external." If Freud is right – and, of course, if his ideas are applicable to this situation – time will tell. Remembering, he says, will ultimately yield some measure of therapeutic gain. If, on the other hand, there remains significant resistance, we can expect repetition, the acting out of the same ritualized and collectivized processes. And, "The greater the resistance," Freud writes, "the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering" (1914/1958, p. 151). The long and short of this brief discussion, in any case, is that recollective processes of the sort most often tied to individuals, to *selves*, coming to terms with their own personal histories, were also taking place on the plane of *culture*. Never before that visit to Berlin had I had such an acute sense of an entire social body, or at least a significant portion of it, being engaged in recollective – and reconstructive – work.

On one level, this idea of group reflection is a familiar one. As David Carr (1986) has put the matter, "the group achieves a kind of self-reflexive awareness as a 'subject'" analogous to what is found in the individual (p. 156). Taking this idea one step farther, he notes that "a community exists wherever a narrative account exists of a *we* which has continuous existence through its experiences and activities" (p. 163). Indeed, Carr goes on to suggest, communities, like individuals, are constantly in the process of composing and recomposing their own autobiographies. Michael Lambek (1996) brings this issue closer to memory by noting that

The practice of memory operates in partly similar ways for individual and collective subjects. In each case we narrate and represent our identity, and then reproduce these representations, by means of the public idioms and tools at our disposal. ... Not only does the constitution of the collective subject work analogously to the constitution of the individual one in general, but particular self experiences and discourses of the self provide idioms for narrating collective experience and identity. (pp. 244–245)

But what exactly are we to make of this analogy between the individual and the collective, between self and culture? What are the legitimate boundaries of

this analogy? Can we in fact speak, cogently, about resistance and repression, denial and splitting off, in effect positing a kind of *cultural* unconscious, an unworked-through region of deep cultural memory? Can we speak of “therapeutic gain,” as I put it earlier, operating on the assumption that the collective subject is somehow capable of healing itself, getting it together through rewriting its past and its present identity as a community? And assuming it *is* legitimate, on some level, to do this sort of thing, what happens when new generations come along – after survivors, for instance, have died off – and only have at their disposal secondhand renditions of the past? What kind of “memory” is left? Is memory the appropriate word here? I will not try to answer all of these questions in the present essay. Perhaps raising them, however, will be of some value in thinking through some of the issues at hand.

Narrative and counter-narrative

The second thing that characterized my stay in Berlin is, in some sense, more personal. Although I approached visiting Berlin with some measure of uncertainty over how I would respond to being there – given my own Jewish background, the books I had read, the movies I had seen, and so on – I didn’t experience any particular intensity about the prospect. For one, the first few days were to be spent at an academic conference, where the topics had little to do with Germany and its past. For another, I would be with friends who lived in Berlin and who were eager to show me around, share some food and drink, and have a good time. As it turned out, the conference was in fact uneventful as were the first couple of days touring the city. We saw lots of sights, we shared food and drink, and, in the face of all the cranes dotting the landscape, we talked a good deal about the challenges the city faced as it sought to rebuild itself, literally and figuratively. It was all fascinating to me, but in a somewhat distanced way. There were emotions, to be sure, but they were blunted and rather generic: “How terrible it must have been.” “It’s all so hard to imagine.” “It’s incredible how fresh the wounds still seem to be, all those buildings, pieces ripped out of them by shells, the commemorative plaques, the armed guards in front of synagogues, even now.” And so forth and so on.

But then something strange, and utterly unexpected, happened. It was in the course of a bus ride through the city and, to be honest, I still don’t know quite how to make sense of it. For lack of a better way of putting it, it was if everything that had been at a distance had suddenly come near: the cranes, the buildings, the gardens, the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag. Everything that

had been a fascinating or disturbing monument, an object to be beheld, taken in – as when one takes in the sights of the city – had become a kind of living, breathing presence. When I initially tried to explain this to someone, I said that I had never had such an intense experience of *history* as I'd had then, during those moments.

As for my response to this sudden transformation from object to presence – from *monument* to *memory* – it was something like a deep grief, a mixture of sorrow and horror, all rolled into one. I was either weeping or on the verge of it for a good amount of time afterward. It was very strange and very powerful. Lest this episode be construed as an index of my emotional stability, I will simply say that, generally speaking, I am not given to this sort of thing. There was, in other words, something truly extra-ordinary about the entire set of experiences. It was extremely disturbing.

The question I eventually had to raise, of course, was: How might I begin to understand what had happened? I have to admit that my first impulse led me down an almost mystical path. As I said to someone later in the day, after the storm had passed, it was as if death was in the air somehow, and everything else – the buildings, the gardens, and so on – somehow saturated in it. Phenomenologically, in other words, everything that I suddenly found menacing or sorrowful was wholly Other, wholly outside of me. Odd though it was to consider it, I couldn't help but wonder whether it was possible for the events of the past – terrible ones, in particular – to somehow leave traces, in the form of disturbed energy fields or some such thing. I'm not talking here about material traces, concrete reminders of events past, which were of course everywhere, but non-material ones. Recall in this context some of those fabled stories where family after family moves into their beautiful new suburban home only to find that there's something in one of the rooms – a creaking noise, a crying child, a muffled scream – that keeps them awake at night. They also talk about how strange the room is, how different it is from all the others. At some point they race off to the local library and scan through old newspapers only to find that a violent crime had taken place there, years ago ... Without going quite this far, I did in fact find myself entertaining the idea that the past could somehow become inscribed in the present, that in some fundamental way it remained alive and operative. I still wonder whether this is possible. Would someone who stumbled upon a piece of land where a concentration camp once stood, without knowing where he or she was, feel anything different? Would there be traces or echoes, even *ghosts* of a sort? It's possible. But the modern mind – including my own – finds it difficult to move into regions like these, intriguing though they are.

A less mystical version of all this might simply speak of *absence* – or, better still, the presence of what is missing (Freeman 2002). Whatever was *there* existed in relation to what was not. As I scrawled down later on in some notes, it was as if there was a great hole in the middle of history. A part of us was missing from humanity. And a part of humanity was missing from us.

But then, of course, I had to pull back a bit. Again, how might I make sense of what had happened? Somehow or other, I had to presume, I must have “brought” things with me that set in motion the experiences of the day. That is to say, I must have been hermeneutically “prepared” in some way, hermeneutically ready, to experience all those things in the way I did. But how? What exactly was it that had been brought there?

As George Allan (1993) has pointed out, a portion of the understandings and practices we employ as we navigate through the world are “implicit and unthematized, habits of the heart or mind or muscles that serve me without having to be thought about” (p. 24). For Allan, these understandings and practices are to be considered non-conscious elements of *tradition*. “The most fundamental of these habits,” he continues, “these unreflective ways of taking things and interacting with them, constitute my cultural horizon” (p. 24; see also Gadamer 1982; Jauss 1989). As Allan goes on to suggest, “we make ourselves by how we use what is provided for us. . . . Individual selves,” in other words, are made “by giving concrete shape to possibilities made available by their traditions within the exigencies of present experience” (p. 37). This non-conscious dimension of tradition as applied to self, therefore, has to do with the personal imprint or signature that is fashioned out of the givens of culture. I brought a *world* to that trip to Berlin, a cultural horizon, which surely contributed to the experiences of the day.

Second, there was undoubtedly a good deal of knowledge brought there, from books and movies and photographs and any number of other such things. I should note that I am not especially knowledgeable about Berlin; it’s not as if I had a working road map in my mind that would allow me to say, “Oh, this is where this happened, that is where that happened.” But presumably, I had carried with me a significant enough store of common knowledge and common imagery as to activate the undercurrents of some of the things being witnessed. “Memory,” in this context, becomes a curious amalgam of fact and fiction, experiences and texts, documentary footage, dramatizations, movies, plays, television shows, fantasies, and more.

Third, there is little doubt but that my Jewish background entered the picture as well – though quite honestly, it’s difficult to say exactly how. I am not a deeply religious person. Nor do I have much direct knowledge of family mem-

bers who suffered at the hands of the Nazis. So it's not as if I brought along a well-articulated set of prejudices, a set of codified anticipations and expectations about what I would find. Nevertheless, it was quite clear that my own religious and cultural identity as a Jew had played a significant role in how I had responded. The following morning, in fact, I went on a kind of pilgrimage to a synagogue in the city. It didn't have to be a specific synagogue and it didn't have to be the site of some horrific crime. It simply had to be a synagogue, a place where "my people" had been. In speaking of "my people," I do so with full acknowledgment – which isn't to say full understanding – of the complexities involved. The fact is, I hadn't been all that connected, at least not directly, to "my people," the Jewish people. And so, as I reflect back on the experience and try to make sense of it, I need to figure this fact into the equation. Why, given my own ambivalences and uncertainties and hesitations, had there been such a powerful encounter? Was it *despite* all these things? Was it *because* of them? Was it due to there being an admixture of identification and non-identification, approach and avoidance, connection and dis-connection? I do not know.

It should be reiterated that engaging in this sort of proto-analytic autobiographical venture is very risky. Mainly, it is risky because of the element of self-disclosure involved. More than this, however, the venture is risky because it is filled with speculations – that is, with interpretive hypotheses, formulated at a distance from the events in question, that seek to make sense of them. On some level, of course, this is true of virtually all autobiographical endeavors. What makes this particular autobiographical endeavor so risky is the suddenness of the experience under examination and the opaqueness that surrounds it, even now. The fact is, it could be that my own emotional outpouring had nothing whatsoever to do with Berlin's history or my own; I could have been overtired or delusional or the victim of a bad lunch. A bit less skeptically, it could be that this outpouring had more to do with the plight of humanity, forever at odds with itself, than with the plight of "my people." My own gut feeling at the time, in fact, was that humanity *was* the primary category. The point, in any case, is that the suddenness and opaqueness of the experience are correlative with the highly speculative nature of the interpretive process.

What is also suggested by the experience is that there are in fact *unconscious* elements at work in our own encounters with things. Again, I use the word "unconscious" here not so much in the Freudian sense (relevant though it may be, given some of my own ambivalences and anxieties) but in a more explicitly *cultural* sense, having to do with those largely unrecognized and in turn uncognized aspects of our own histories that have been bequeathed to us by virtue of our status as historical beings of a specific sort. Hence the idea

of the *narrative unconscious*, which we become aware of precisely during those moments when our own historical and cultural situatedness comes into view. Hence, in addition, the idea that alongside the manifest narrative of one's life there exists some form or other of counter-narrative, one that indeed "comes up against" those ordinary understandings that conceal even as they reveal. At this point, it should be noted, my own "auto-biography" is much less about my *self*, about the vagaries and idiosyncracies of my personal experience, than it is about my *world*, my existence as a social and cultural subject.

Hayden White (1999) has some interesting and relevant things to say about these issues in his reflections on the problematic nature of modern "events." "Issues such as these," he writes,

arise within the context of the experience, memory, or awareness of events that not only could not possibly have occurred before the twentieth century but whose nature, scope, and implications no prior age could have even imagined. Some of these events – such as the two world wars, a growth in world population hitherto unimaginable, poverty and hunger on a scale never before experienced, pollution of the ecosphere by nuclear explosions and the indiscriminate disposal of contaminants, programs of genocide undertaken by societies utilizing scientific technology and rationalized procedures of governance and warfare (of which the German genocide of six million European Jews is paradigmatic) – function in the consciousness of certain social groups exactly as infantile traumas are conceived to function in the psyche of neurotic individuals. This means that they cannot simply be forgotten or put out of mind or, conversely, adequately remembered, which is to say, clearly and unambiguously identified as to their meaning and contextualized in the group memory in such a way as to reduce the shadow they cast over the group's capacities to go into its present and envision a future free of their debilitating effects. (p. 69)

As White goes on to argue "the anomalous nature of modernist events – their resistance to inherited categories and conventions for assigning meanings to events – that undermine not only the status of facts in relation to events but also the status of the event in general" (p. 70). It is under the strange spell of such an "event," or *constellation* of events, or constellation of *imagined* events, that I experienced Berlin.

Whether this occurred in the manner of an "infantile trauma" as a function of my belonging to a "certain social group," as White puts it, is open to question. So too is his assertion regarding the allegedly unprecedented, "anomalous" nature of modernist events. Without in any way wishing to diminish the profound significance of the events of which he speaks, it is unclear whether

they deserve the unique status he gives them. Finally, there is also reason to question whether “consciousness” is the home of these psychic goings-on. As I have suggested, events of the sort White discusses, inscribed not only in discrete texts like books and movies but in *textures* of experience, may be borne within us – bodily, psychically, and spiritually – in ways that are all but unknown. That haunted suburban home mentioned earlier comes to mind once again: In a sense, it is as if *we ourselves* are haunted, inhabited by histories that can seize us and take us unawares. Hence, again, the idea of the narrative unconscious, which may bear within it counter-narratives that, by being brought to consciousness, can shed new light on the supra-personal dimensions of self-formation.

The distant origins of the self

As MacIntyre (1981) has noted in his own reflections on the supra-personal dimensions of self-formation, “I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity” (p. 205). As MacIntyre goes on to suggest,

This thought is likely to appear alien and even surprising from the standpoint of modern individualism. From the standpoint of individualism I am what I myself choose to be. I can always, if I wish to, put in question what are taken to be the merely contingent social features of my existence. I may biologically be my father’s son; but I cannot be held responsible for what he did unless I choose implicitly or explicitly to assume such responsibility. I may legally be a citizen of a certain country; but I cannot be held responsible for what my country does or has done unless I choose implicitly or explicitly to assume such responsibility. (p. 205)

We are here considering an attitude, MacIntyre explains, “according to which the self is detachable from its social and historical roles and statuses” (p. 205).

But this attitude is cast radically into question by experiences of the sort recounted herein. To refer to MacIntyre once more:

[T]he story of my life is always embedded in those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide ... What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past

that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognise it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition. (pp. 205–206)

It is the phrase “whether I recognise it or not” that is, again, of central importance. Many aspects of my historical inheritance are either conscious or preconscious, i.e., available to consciousness, able to be brought to mind given the right circumstances. But some, again, are *unconscious*, which is to say, they refer to those deep strata of history of which I am largely, if not entirely, unaware. We might therefore think of the narrative unconscious in reference to those culturally-rooted aspects of one’s *history* that have not yet become part of one’s *story*. They are hidden, not in the sense of that which has been buried through the force-ful work of repression but that which remains unthought and is thus not yet a part of my own story.

I would suggest further that this “hiddenness” is one of the legacies of modernity, or at least that aspect of it that, through the fashioning of the sovereign individual, ostensibly free to choose his or her own way, effectively erases from view those historical and cultural moorings that are the very ground of identity. Taking this idea one step farther, it might be said that the modern self, for all of its countless memoirs and autobiographies, is a self that is in large measure unconscious of its own historical formation. Indeed, it is perhaps the very widening and deepening of the narrative unconscious that is the precondition of the modern autobiographical project, predicated as it is on the presumption that it is the unique and unrepeatable characteristics of one’s life that are most worthy of being recounted.

As Edward Shils (1981) has written, “Every human action and belief has a career behind it; it is the momentary end-state of a sequence of transmissions and modifications and their adaptation to current circumstances. Although everyone bears a great deal of past achievement in his” – or her – “belief and conduct, there are many persons who fail to see this” (p. 43). Putting a bit more of a positive spin on these issues than MacIntyre, Shils acknowledges that,

It was a great achievement of moral and political philosophy to postulate the existence of a self-contained human being as a self-determining moral entity free from original sin and from the toils of a dark inheritance. The ideal was to expunge from human beings all that came from the past and hindered their complete self-regulation and expression ... Much progress has been made in this regard. But it has its limits. There are undoubtedly many persons who regard their pasts as beginning only with their own birth. They believe that it lies within their powers to order entirely their own existence by their ‘own’ decisions and those of their contemporaries. (pp. 43–44)

These are individuals “whose ‘organ’ or sense of the past is wholly empty,” Shils argues, “and they are wrong as well” (p. 44). If Shils is right, the modern autobiographical subject, whose past appears limited to his or her own life, is something of a *mistake*.

What is important to emphasize is that Shils (1981) actually seems to be talking about *memory* in this context. “The individual as he perceives himself includes things which are not bounded by his own experiences” (p. 50). The fabric of memory, he goes on to say, “is furnished not only from the recollections of events which the individual has himself experienced but from the memories of others ... From their accounts of their own experiences, which frequently antedate his own, and from written works at various removes, his image of his ‘larger self’ is brought to include events which occurred both recently and earlier outside his own experiences” (p. 51). Following Shils, we might also speak of a larger *past*, a larger *history*, and, again, a larger region of *memory*.

But in what sense can we, in what sense *should* we, speak here of memory? In essence, what Shils seems to be suggesting is that history, in all of its variousness as it operates within the individual, is itself a *part* of memory. The notion that it must be confined to one’s life-span is therefore being challenged, radically. One significant implication, then, is that perhaps we need to think about memory in a new way.

I do not wish to suggest that this is an entirely new idea. As Gadamer (1982), for instance, wrote some time ago, “It is time to rescue the phenomenon of memory from being regarded merely as a psychological faculty and to see it as an essential element of the finite historical being of man” (p. 16). Now, Gadamer – not unlike MacIntyre and Shils in some ways – is critical of both the modern autobiographical subject and the modern autobiographical enterprise. “Self-reflection and autobiography,” he maintains, “are not primary and are not an adequate basis for the hermeneutical problem, because through them history is made private once more. In fact,” he continues, “history does not belong to us, but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity,” Gadamer maintains, “is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life” (p. 245). As Gadamer goes on to note, “Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. It is present only in the multifariousness of such voices” (pp. 252–253). It therefore “always includes more than it acknowledges of itself” (p. 255). There is a *surplus*, we

might say, within historical consciousness. Memory exceeds what we can know of it.

The implication of this set of ideas is significant as well. Not only might we need to think of memory differently, but also we might need to think differently about autobiographical reflection and indeed the autobiographical project itself. To put this in the form of a set of questions: Is the narration of the self possible *without* the privatization of which Gadamer speaks? Are different forms of autobiographical reflection and autobiographical writing possible, ones that better accommodate those dimensions of the past that go *beyond* one's personal life? Is it possible to somehow explicate and express this surplus that exists within historical consciousness?

Rethinking autobiography

In order to address these questions, it may be useful to consider two autobiographical works that bring us in the direction being considered. The first is Jill Ker Conway's (1989) memoir *The Road from Coorain*, a story that recounts Conway growing up in the Australian bush, coming to terms with her own identity as a woman and an Australian, and, eventually, leaving her homeland, to carry forward her own projects and plans. In large measure, Conway's narrative is a traditional one, in the sense of being about her own unique, personal circumstances. In addition, however, it is about her own formation as a social being and especially about her own process of coming-to-consciousness about certain elements of this formation that had remained occluded, hidden from view. Upon meeting a teacher who had been "impatient with Australian bourgeois culture," she eventually came to understand that she herself was being formed educationally in such a way as to minimize, even erase, the influences of her own country. "We might have been in Sussex," she writes, "for all the attention we paid to Australian poetry and prose." Conway and her classmates would memorize Keats and Shelley, for instance, their vivid descriptions of nature, which had given them "the impression that great poetry and fiction were written by and about people and places far distant from Australia" (p. 99). What this had also done, Conway recognized, was give them the impression that their own natural world, which deviated greatly from these poetic descriptions, was somehow inferior, second-rate.

As for Australia itself, it had its own share of problems – some of which, Conway had discovered, lay beneath her very feet. Her family had owned a large expanse of land, and she had always taken it to be theirs alone. But "Who,"

she eventually had to ask, "were the rightful owners and users of the land I had always thought to belong to us?" (p. 170). Among other things, she remembers having stumbled across aboriginal ovens and strange stones, which she herself had "heedlessly trodden upon" throughout much of her life. She hadn't really given these things a thought, her assumption being that they had merely been abandoned, by choice. Her lack of awareness, which came into view as she gazed backward upon her past, proved to be extremely disturbing and humbling. It was as if she had been shaken awake from her slumber.

Later on, when she was rejected for a job for which she had been qualified because she was a woman, Conway had been shaken awake yet again, her past becoming transformed once more. "I could not credit that merit could not win me a place in an endeavor I wanted to undertake, that decisions about my eligibility were made on the mere fact of my being female instead of on my talents ... It was prejudice, blind prejudice" (p. 191). From this point, she writes, "I could never remember the image of my parents resting in the evening, sitting on the front veranda step at Coorain, quite the same again" (p. 191). Conway's narrative had thus been immeasurably complicated by her discoveries. She had been an actor in a history she did not know, or that she knew only partially and incompletely. And when this *history* became part of her *story*, her life itself took on new and more complex dimensions. To put the matter somewhat differently, what Conway had come to articulate through these experiences, among others, was precisely a series of counter-narratives, which in turn required that she rewrite not only her past but her very self (Freeman 1993). These counter-narratives, she realized, had to be integrated into her evolving sense of identity. Without them, there would only be a superficial and incomplete rendition of the past, one that mistook the manifest order of things for the whole story.

The second book I want to consider is *Native Realm*, by the poet Czeslaw Milosz (1981), which is subtitled *A Search for Self-Definition*. At the very outset of the book, Milosz writes: "I am beginning a quest, a voyage into the heart of my own, yet not only my own, past" (p. 3). The past he wishes to talk about, in other words, will not be strictly personal but will instead move beyond the boundaries of his own life and world. "The vision of a small patch on the globe to which I owe everything," he continues, "suggests where I should draw the line". A three-year old's love for his aunt or jealousy toward his father take up so much room in autobiographical writings because everything else, for instance the history of a country or a national group, is treated as something 'normal' and, therefore, of little interest to the narrator. But another method "is possible" (p. 5), Milosz suggests:

Instead of thrusting the individual into the foreground, one can focus attention on the background, looking upon oneself as a sociological phenomenon. Inner experience, as it preserved in the memory, will then be evaluated in the perspective of the changes one's milieu has undergone. The passing over of certain periods important for oneself, but requiring too personal an explanation, will be a token of respect for those undergrounds that exist in all of us and are better left in peace. (pp. 5–6)

Milosz, therefore, will attend to different “undergrounds” in his search for self-definition, ones that will allow him to see some of the fundamental texts and textures that have become woven into the fabric of his memory and his life. I am not sure whether “looking upon oneself as a sociological phenomenon” is the most appropriate way to frame the methodological questions at hand. In fact, I am not sure it is what Milosz's own autobiographical project is about. His most basic challenge is rather to look at his own personal world in dialogue with the wider world in order to see how its broad currents had been operative. “The awareness of one's origins,” he goes on to note, “is like an anchor plunged into the deep, keeping one within a certain range. Without it, historical intuition is virtually impossible” (p. 20).

As Milosz also notes, “Knowledge does not have to be conscious. It is incredible how much of the aura of a country can penetrate to a child. Stronger than thought is an image – of dry leaves on a path, of twilight, of a heavy sky. In the park, revolutionary patrols whistled back and forth to each other. The Volga was the color of black lead. I carried away forever the impression of concealed terror, of inexpressible dialogues confided in a whisper or a wink of the eye” (p. 45). Just as Milosz speaks about un-conscious knowledge, the images and stories of his childhood having become part of the very fabric of his life, so too does he speak about his self and its formation:

In a certain sense I consider myself a typical Eastern European. It seems to be true that his *differentia specifica* can be boiled down to a lack of form – both inner and outer. His good qualities – intellectual avidity, fervor in discussion, a sense of irony, freshness of feeling, spatial (or geographical) fantasy – derive from a basic weakness: he always remains an adolescent, governed by a sudden ebb or flow of inner chaos. Form is achieved in stable societies. My own case is enough to verify how much of an effort it takes to absorb contradictory traditions, norms, and an overabundance of impressions, and to put them into some kind of order. The things that surround us in childhood need no justification, they are self-evident. If, however, they whirl about like particles in a kaleidoscope, ceaselessly changing position, it takes no small amount of energy simply to plant one's feet on solid ground without falling. (p. 67)

It may be useful to briefly discuss a specific incident Milosz recounts that, in an important sense, is about the workings of the narrative unconscious. It also ties in well, albeit obliquely, with some of what was discussed earlier regarding my own strange encounter with Berlin. He writes as follows:

I have the scene before me now: spring sun shining into our classroom windows, sparrows chirping, the first of May. Our French teacher . . . looks at me suspiciously. He beckons me to him with his finger. I go up to his table, my hair is unkempt, I am twelve years old. "What do you have there?" Sticking out of my pocket are the forks of a slingshot. "What are you going to do with that?" I try to give my voice a hard, masculine ring. "Beat Jews." He narrows his eyes in a cold reflex as if he were looking at an animal. I feel hot, I feel as if I had turned beet-red. He confiscates the weapon.

Had I really meant to use the slingshot against Sashka and Sonka (two Jewish children from his neighborhood)? No concrete man was my adversary. I carried within myself an abstraction, a creature without a face, a fusion of concepts bearing a minus sign. What is more, I was aware of it not as my own, not something inborn, but as alien. And during my run-in with the teacher, the shame I felt was made all the more painful by a sudden illumination that revealed the real instigator. It was one of my relatives, whom I despised. I suddenly saw the connection between my attitude and his political harangues at the dinner table, when I seemed not to be but was listening. From that moment on, every nationalist slogan was to remind me of his pitiful person. (p. 96)

Compelling though this story is, I must admit I am not entirely sure what to make of it. I certainly do not doubt the incident itself; it is of the sort that can get emblazoned in one's memory, standing as a kind of mythical monument. But the interpretation Milosz goes on to offer – which is actually a kind of quasi-causal explanation – is curious and worth questioning. It was all his relative's fault, he tells us; there was a concrete origin, an event, that turned him into a boy possessed of hurtful abstractions, which had happened his way as if by alien force. But here, it seems to me, Milosz may well be hunting in the wrong territory to make sense of things. It is certainly possible that there was a concrete origin of the sort he posits; in this case, he will have functioned like a detective, who finally finds the missing piece to the puzzle at hand. I cannot help but wonder, however, whether the attitude with which he had carried his slingshot doesn't go deeper, beyond events and incidents, into the very texture of things.

On some level, perhaps, it doesn't matter. What is most important, one might argue, is the fact that the behavior has been identified, named. But

whether or not the origin lies in his despised relative or in his polluted world matters a great deal to his own, and our own, understanding. One interpretation brings us an essentially psychological account of a bad bit of behavior. The other brings us into the heart of history. Given Milosz's stated aims, the account he has given us is somewhat anomalous; he seems to have done what he told us he would try to refrain from doing. But this itself, I would suggest, bespeaks his own formation as a modern autobiographical subject, trying, against difficult odds, to move beyond the confines of the monadic self to tell a different kind of story.

Autobiography and *poiesis*

As Patricia Hampl (1999) has noted in an essay on Milosz's work, Milosz has crafted a method "which allows the self to function not as a source or a subject" – or not *only* a source or subject – "but as an instrument for rendering the world (p. 86) ... We embody, if unwittingly and partially, our history, even our prehistory. The past courses through our veins. The self is the instrument which allows us not only to live this truth but to contemplate it" (p. 97).

As Hampl goes on to note, this form of remembering, of the sort exemplified in Milosz's autobiography, is, perhaps,

closer to poetry than to fiction, in spite of the apparent narrative affinity of the novel and autobiography, and in spite of the autobiographical nature of much modern fiction. In the lyric poem and the memoir, a self speaks, renders the world, or is recast in its image. In both lyric poetry and the memoir the real subject is consciousness in the light of history. The ability to transit the impulses of the age, the immediacy of a human life moving through the changing world, is common to both genres. To be personal and impersonal all at once is the goal of both. (p. 100)

From the perspective outlined in this essay, autobiography is no longer a matter – or no longer *exclusively* a matter – of representing a life, from birth until death. Instead, it is a matter of discerning, as best one can, the multiple sources, both near and far, that give rise to the self. This does not eliminate the place of the "I" in telling the self's story. The project at hand – whether it takes place intentionally, as in the writing of an autobiography, or unintentionally, as in the course of living – is one of *poiesis*, of fashioning an identity in and through these multiple sources (see Freeman 1999). But this very dimension of *poiesis*

is itself a part of history, as are the genres and storylines that are employed in the task.

In much of my recent work, I have tried to show that narrative, rather than being imposed on life from without, is woven into the very fabric of experience (e.g., Freeman 1997a, 1997b). In line with this aim, part of what I have tried to show through the present essay is that there are narrative “reserves,” untold and unwritten stories, cultural as well as personal, that are in important respects constitutive of experience. Narratives are with us in ways we don’t quite know; they are part of our deep memory, which is itself comprised, in part, of sedimented layers of history. By recognizing this, we open ourselves to the possibility of exploring new and different forms of making sense of personal life.

Acknowledgement

The present article is a revised and expanded version of an earlier essay entitled “Tradition und Erinnerung des Selbst und der Kultur,” in H. Welzer (Ed.), *Das soziale Gedächtnis: Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001. Special thanks go to Harald Welzer and Karoline Tschuggnall, for inspiring me to expand my own exploration of memory, and to Molly Andrews, Shelley Day Sclater, and Corinne Squire, for their support of the present project and their tireless efforts on behalf of the Centre for Narrative Research.

References

- Allan, G. (1993). Traditions and transitions. In P. Cook (Ed.), *Philosophical imagination and cultural memory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Carr, D. (1986). *Time, narrative, and history*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana U. Press.
- Conway, J. K. (1989). *The road from Coorain*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Freeman, M. (1993). *Rewriting the self: History, memory, narrative*. London: Routledge.
- Freeman, M. (1997a). Mythical time, historical time, and the narrative fabric of the self. *Narrative Inquiry*, 8, 27–50.
- Freeman, M. (1997b). Death, narrative integrity, and the radical challenge of self-understanding: A reading of Tolstoy’s *Death of Ivan Ilych*. *Ageing and Society*, 17, 373–398.
- Freeman, M. (1999). Culture, narrative, and the poetic construction of selfhood. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 12, 99–116.
- Freeman, M. (2001). Tradition und Erinnerung des Selbst und der Kultur. In H. Welzer (Ed.), *Das soziale Gedächtnis* (pp. 25–40). Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.

- Freeman, M. (2002). The presence of what is missing: Memory, poetry, and the ride home. In R. J. Pellegrini & T. R. Sarbin (Eds.), *Between fathers and sons: Critical incident narratives in the development of men's lives*. New York: Haworth Clinical Practice Press.
- Freud, S. (1958). Remembering, repeating, and working-through. *Standard Edition*, 12, 147–156. (Original work published 1914.)
- Friedlander, S. (1994). Trauma, memory, and transference. In G. H. Hartman (Ed.), *Holocaust remembrance: The shapes of memory* (pp. 252–262). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1982). *Truth and method*. New York: Crossroad.
- Geyer, M., & Hansen, M. (1994). German-Jewish memory and national consciousness. In G. H. Hartman (Ed.), *Holocaust remembrance: The shapes of memory* (pp. 175–190). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Hampl, P. (1999). *I could tell you stories: Sojourns in the land of memory*. New York: W. W. Horton & Company.
- Hartman, G. H. (1994). Introduction: Darkness visible. In G. H. Hartman (Ed.), *Holocaust remembrance: The shapes of memory* (pp. 1–22). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Jauss, H. R. (1989). *Question and answer: Forms of dialogic understanding*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lambek, M. (1996). The past imperfect: Remembering as moral practice. In P. Antze & M. Lambek (Eds.), *Tense past: Cultural essays in trauma and memory* (pp. 235–254). New York: Routledge.
- MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After virtue*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame.
- Milosz, C. (1981). *Native realm: A search for self-definition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Shils, E. A. (1981). *Tradition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- White, Hayden (1999). *Figural realism: Studies in the mimesis effect*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

COMMENTARIES

Discussing nonconscious processes involved in autobiography

James C. Mancuso

University at Albany, State University of New York

Early in life, most persons successfully acquire socially shared psychollages (constructions) that are accessed by the term *well-formed story*. The remembering processes involved in creating non-verbalized, self-guiding anticipatory narratives mirror the remembering processes involved in verbally recounting the tale of an episode in the life of the story teller. The level of success in matching the outcome slot in the self-guiding anticipatory narrative with the inputs that follow the actor's course of action determine the level of motivation for the person's attempt at revision of his/her self-guiding narrative. Under conditions of high match (low motivation for revision of narrative), much of the memory processing takes place "off awareness." To develop a strong theory of the place of narrative in person functioning, a theorist must develop useful formulations to describe "nonconscious" narrative-building processes.

Introduction

I begin to bake an apple pie. I have made several thousand apple pies during my lifetime; most during my earlier career as a pastry chef.

After eating my apple pie, my dinner guests ask, "Where did you learn to make an apple pie?" I respond by composing and telling the story of having worked with a taskmaster who had earned his master pastry chef status through the post-World War I German apprentice system.

As a psychologist who promotes the constructivist position that humans constantly create and engage in action that is scripted by self-guiding narratives, such incidents prompt me to cogitate on the question: "Which of these actions – the making of the pie and the telling of how I was instructed in apple pie-making – represents 'autobiography?'" Then, I might ask, "How would a psychollage (construction, concept) such as *unconscious* prove to be useful as

I attempt to tell stories about how narrative structure functions in a person's psychological processes?"

Constructing self-guiding narratives

I would begin my cogitation from the proposition that self-guiding narratives are involved in both the actual baking of the apple pie and in the telling of the story of my early instruction in the baking of apple pies.

In a previous publications (Mancuso 1986, 1996) I elaborated on propositions about the ways in which humans acquire the ability to use and then do use narrative structure. I prompted the view that early in life most humans can use a well-developed psychollage¹ by which they can categorize text as *story*. One can identify in such stories the elements which researchers (e.g., Stein & Glenn 1979) have outlined as "story grammar." One can think of a well-formed story as containing the grammar elements (1) the setting, (2) an initiating event, (3) internal states (including a goal and emotions), (4) an attempt, (5) consequences [outcomes], and (6) reactions (including emotions and actions). Or, one could analyze stories in terms of a story schema in which parts of the story are categorized as *exposition*, *complication*, and *resolution*. (See van Dijk & Kintsch 1983, pp. 554–559, for an informative review of "superstructure" in story text.)

I would attempt to advance the claim that the term *story* references a psychollage that is continuously evoked to treat with sensory inputs and actions, particularly those inputs and actions which one counts as inputs from his/her *self*. When the *story* psychollage has been activated there is also activated the surrounding hierarchically ordered net of constructs. Given the standard social psychollage of the event-related inputs which are conveniently construed by the psychollage *story*, one can be led to speak of *features* of a story – the canonical "grammar" of a story. I caution against thinking of a story's *features*, lest one focus on "out-there" events, rather than on the construct system used to construe inputs and outputs while a person creates self-defining texts. Thus, when a person construes a text as *story*, the psychollages used to construe inputs from that text must fit appropriately into the canonical grammar slots of a narrative episode – *setting*, *initiating events*, *consequences*, etc. Otherwise, the text cannot be construed as *story* by self and others involved in the interaction. By reference to the motive principles which we have outlined in other publications (Mancuso 1977; Mancuso & Hunter 1983; Mascolo & Mancuso 1990), the inability to formulate immediately a text that can be categorized as *story*

would, itself, channelize the person's psychological activity toward creating a text that could be classified as a well-formed story. That is, the person would become highly motivated to engage in the effort to "author" a self-defining anticipatory narrative that would guide his/her action.

Making an apple pie as autobiography As I had set up my work place to begin to make my apple pie, I would have authored a well-formed, but un verbalized, narrative that would have guided my actions.² I would have engaged in memory processes to compose a "mini-autobiography" of a part of my life – an anticipatory narrative that would guide my actions as I made the pie. My story would have contained all the elements (see above) of a canonically well-formed narrative episode.

In enacting my self-guiding narrative, as in all self-guiding narratives, the outcome slot would stand as the most salient slot in the narrative (see G. Kelly 1991/1955, p. 32 fundamental postulate). If there had been little match between the inputs that are associated with the object (the finished apple pie) that I had anticipated to be the outcome (even golden brown, flaked appearance, etc.) of the actions guided by my self-narrative, I would have reviewed my narrative in order to evaluate which part of the narrative needed revision – what part of the narrative would have been "untrue" or "false."

Telling of how I was instructed in pie making as autobiography As I recounted the narrative about how I had been instructed in pie baking, I would claim, I would have engaged in psychological processes which parallel the processes in which I had engaged when I created the narrative that had guided my actual making of the apple pie. My overt story-telling would have been guided by the self-narrative within which I had framed my self as the teller of a story. The narrative that guided my story telling would have included (1) a setting; (2) a justification for initiating my recounting of my "mini-autobiography"; (3) my motives for acting; (4) a description of my forthcoming attempts; (5) the anticipated outcome; and (6) the anticipated reactions to my story.

The attempt slot of my self-guiding narrative would also reflect my use of memory processes through which I had authored a canonically correct story. My verbalized account would reflect my having filled the "grammar" slots of a well-formed story: (1) The setting – my exposure to the tutelage of the chef; (2) the cause for the instruction; (3) my motivation for subjecting myself to that tyrant; (4) my fumbling attempts to follow the chef's instructions; (5) the outcomes of my attempts, (6) the satisfied (or dissatisfied) audience reactions to the outcomes.

Suppose that when I had finished telling my story, one of my guests had said, “You certainly play out a negative stereotype of a German pastry chef.”

That outcome would have been discrepant with the contents of the outcome slot of my self-guiding narrative, and I would have been forced into something of an arousal state. If I could not succeed, thereupon, in authoring a story that would produce the outcomes I had anticipated, I would remain in a state of arousal – a state that most persons would construe as *discomfort*.

With these considerations and propositions as background I return to the question: “How would a psychollage (construction, concept) such as *unconscious* prove to be useful as I attempt to tell stories about how narrative structure functions in a person’s psychological processes?”

Can a constructivist/narrativist utilize a psychollage signified by the term *unconscious*?

Though I would strongly advocate the utility of the proposition that *all* human behavior involves the use of self-guiding narratives, I would not expect that the person-in-the-street (and many psychologists) would immediately agree with that proposition. Persons, I expect, are “not aware” of their use of narrative structure. They do not engage in a process of creating auditory/verbal/visual inner representations of the process of creating self-guiding narrative.

Memory and autobiography In previous publications (Mancuso & Ceely 1980; Mancuso & Sarbin 1983) we presented our views of the memory processes involved in self-authoring. To author a self a person must engage a memory process through which he/she builds the psychollages that he/she will use in the immediate self-guiding narrative.

For example, a person can author the following short anticipatory narrative. “I will make a nice apple pie in order to please my dinner guests.” Each term in this narrative episode signifies a psychollage. The self-defining psychollages derive from the ways in which the self-as-narrator of the self story has ranged the object – self-as-actor – on salient two-poled judgment dimensions (constructs). The psychollage designated by the term *I* signifies a complex psychollage identified by use of a very elaborate set of constructs – *artless/skillful, clumsy/agile, short/tall*, etc. The term *nice*, as used in the apple pie psychollage, incorporates the constructs *pale/golden, soggy/crisp, insipid/tasty*, etc. The psychollage signified by the term *please*, used in filling the consequence

slot of the narrative, is constructed by ranging the guests on the constructs *apathetic/enthusiastic, demeaning/complimenting, glum/smiling, etc.*

I assume that a psychologist must discuss the memory processes instigated during the creating of self narratives so that colleagues will affirm the psychollages that the theory builder uses. To do so, the psychologist must invent a psychollage that would be useful as he/she tries to explain the “lack of awareness” shown by the person as he/she engages in the memory processes involved in creating the elaborate psychollages that will fit into his/her self-guiding narratives.

Note well that I have persistently used the term *process* in conjunction with the term *memory*. I have done this because I cannot construe RE-membering as something other than a complex *process*. RE-membering, I would claim, entails a process of constructing psychollages for each self narrative that one authors. For many reasons, I find it most useful to create psychollages that allow a behavior analyst to tell stories that describe a person somehow accessing personal constructs from a complex, hierarchically ordered system of constructs that he/she has invented and has available for use in creating psychollages. By accessing that system of constructs, the person can construe the myriad of objects and events that are assumed to be associated with the sensory inputs that enter his/her psychological system.

In light of the approach to memory processes that I would propound, I see no utility in attempting to use a psychollage for RE-membering by which one views that process as a reaching into a “place” called *memory* or *unconscious* to retrieve a wholly made “video-tape” of the anticipatory narratives that the person will create. Nevertheless, I would see high utility in discussing “non-conscious” or “off awareness” processing, I would agree to discussing the ways in which a person’s psychological processes can become highly automated, so that he/she has no need to force those processes into verbal/visual/auditory inner representations (verbally/visually/auditorially represented psychollages). The processing of psychollages through visual/verbal/auditory representations most probably occurs, I would claim, when an automatically applicable psychollage is not immediately available. Otherwise, the process of building narratives into which one inserts the immediately created psychollages occurs “off awareness.”

Construing the psychollages used in Freeman's article

As I read the abstract and first paragraph of Mark Freeman's essay, I created a self narrative regarding my reading of that essay. In that self narrative, I inserted into the outcome slot my self as *satisfied, enlightened, affirmed*. When I finished my first reading of the essay, that outcome slot of my anticipatory narrative had been decidedly invalidated.

What psychollage is referenced by the term unconscious? Phrases such as "By making the narrative unconscious conscious through the work of autobiography" could not be fit into my narratives about narrative making.

The foregoing phrase, like other phrases in Freeman's narrative, suggests that the "narrative unconscious" would be viewed as an "entity." Additionally, though he does so cautiously, Freeman references the psychollage that Freud would have his readers use during discussions of unconscious functioning, and those citations suggest that the unconscious is a "place" in which "memories" are locked by "repression" and prevented from escaping by "resistance."

I would want to discuss a "narrative nonconscious *process*." Then, I would believe that every person would function more adequately if he/she were able to construe all of his/her actions in terms of creation of self guiding narratives that can be created "off awareness."

Thus, in that I would speak of constant, millisecond-by-millisecond non-conscious processing, I cannot usefully process the phrase suggesting that the narrative unconscious would become conscious through the work of autobiography. As persons, I have noted, we constantly RE-member our selves as we create self-guiding narratives. That constantly reiterated process serves to automate further the process, and further assures that the process will remain off awareness.

What elements are involved in the psychological work that implicates unconscious function? Freeman makes a series of statements such as the following: "There are in fact *unconscious* elements at work in our own encounters with things?" "... we might therefore think of the narrative unconscious in reference to those culturally-rooted aspects of one's *history* that have not yet become part of one's *story*." "But some [aspects of my historical inheritance] are *unconscious*, which is to say, they refer to those deep strata of history of which I am largely, if not entirely, unaware."

I would need to have a shareable psychollage that we may discuss using the terms *elements* and *aspects*.

Memory processes and off awareness psychological functioning in narrative making

As I try to build more useful narratives by which to tell tales about human psychological functioning I conclude that I need to have some way to speak of what a person might carry from situation to situation so that he/she can build self-guiding narratives. In cruder terms, I need psychollages by which I can discuss “what is stored.” Thus, when I read phrases, such as those cited above, from Freeman’s essay, I would appreciate a clarification of the psychollage that he intends to access when he uses terms such as *elements* or *aspects*; for I am willing to agree that we might usefully describe elements that are “stored.” And, I would agree to propositions about retrieving those stored elements during the exercise of a “nonconscious” process.

As suggested in the text, above, I would find it useful to discuss “storage” in terms of a complex, hierarchically ordered system of two-poled judgment dimensions – constructs.

Further, I would readily agree to speaking of very rapid, nonconscious retrieval of a congeries of such constructs, along which a person ranges objects and events as he/she builds the role-defining psychollages that he/she uses to fill the grammar slots of the self-guiding narratives that he/she authors.

I would also agree that it would be useful to discuss the acquisition and assembling of a complex personal construct system in terms of “off awareness” processes. When discussing such acquisition, I would find it very useful to use psychollages by which to describe the role of social groups in transmitting useful constructs and psychollages.

I certainly would agree with the thrust of Freeman’s statement: “Again, I use the word ‘unconscious’ . . . in a more explicitly *cultural* sense, having to do with those largely unrecognized and in turn uncognized aspects of our own histories that have been bequeathed to us by virtue of our status as historical beings of a specific sort.”

Having been reared in a social milieu, all humans have been prompted to incorporate socially adapted constructs into their personal construct systems. Additionally, the social ecology prompts persons to build psychollages that the community finds useful, and the learner will gain validation for use of those psychollages as he incorporates them into autobiographical, self-guiding narratives that he enacts. For example, a community might encourage its male children to use the construct *calm/angry* to build self-describing psychollages. Members of that community probably will affirm a young adolescent’s enactment of the self-guiding narrative, “He made me angry, so I hit him.”

I would attribute another important function to the social ecology. The social ecology's affirmation or invalidation of a self-guiding story frequently acts to prompt the person to create narratives through use of verbal/visual/auditory inner representations of psychollages. Under the high arousal associated with social invalidations, the person is more likely to bring the story-making process on to awareness.

Explaining the assembling of an "uncharacteristic" autobiography

Many times during the course of a person's life, he/she encounters situations in which the psychollages used in the outcome slot of the anticipatory narrative are not matched by the continued flow of sensory inputs. Many times, the person, despite day-after-day effort, cannot assemble a validatable anticipatory narrative. The level of physiological activity that accompanies these episodes of discrepancy can reach levels that the person finds to be intolerable. Most persons reared in the traditions of European cultures will use the psychollage similar to that signified by the term *anxiety* to construe viscerally located inputs associated with those high levels of physiological activity.

To reduce the arousal-related inputs, a person will be inclined to assemble an "uncharacteristic" self narrative, and then to attempt to enact that narrative.

Under such conditions – usually following distinct invalidation by the social ecology – the actor will utter, sentences such as, "Why did I do that? What made me do that? That was so unlike me."

I would explain such occurrences by noting that our construct systems are, as Freeman might note when he quoted Shils, "furnished not only from the recollections of events which the individual has himself experienced but from the memories of others . . . and from written works at various removes" (Shils 1981). Though the person would use and reuse self-defining psychollages that repeatedly have been validated, in times of failure to assemble a suitable self-narrative, the person can – during off awareness processing – access constructs from which to create a metaphoric self. Many times such metaphoric selves will suitably fit roles in self-defining narratives. And, of course, at other times, such metaphoric selves will lead to further invalidation.

Freeman draws a telling example from the autobiographical account rendered by Czeslaw Milosz. Milosz tells of his teacher detecting that the youthful Milosz had a slingshot in his pocket. The teacher demands an explanation. How can the boy create a narrative that the teacher will validate? His psychological processes being accelerated by high physiological activity, his memory

processes allow access to the constructs that will allow him to build a psychollage of his self as a Jew-hater – a psychollage that will allow him to cast himself into that role as he tells the story to account for his possession of the sling-shot. The outcome of the story that he created will produce the outcome of his avoiding sharp reprimand by the teacher.

But, as Milosz later RE-membered his narrative-guided action, he could anticipate only unacceptable outcomes from enacting the role of a Jew-hater. His having used culturally developed constructs to build the self-defining psychollage *Jew hater* could not lead to outcomes that would fit into self stories that he would characteristically author in order to gain social validation. He realized that those psychollages and constructs were acquired through his having listened to the political harangues of a despised relative!!!

Anticipated outcome

Like Milosz, all persons engage in constant and almost instantaneous creation of “mini-autobiographies.” Such autobiographies – restructurings of self-guiding narratives – require the simultaneous nonconscious construction of self-defining psychollages. Such self-defining psychollages script the role that self will enact in the anticipatory self narratives.

Behavior scientists, as they strive to build useful narratives about human narrative making, will consider the possibility that there would be utility in building psychollages that would be referenced by terms such as *memory processes*, *off-awareness processing*, *culturally transmitted constructs*, and so forth.

Like Freeman, any behavior scientist would need to explore the ways in which those psychollages would be assembled. In doing so, one must explain the place of culture in the processes involved in the creation of “autobiographies.” Certainly, like Freeman, behavior scientists would need to consider the possibility of radically revising, or even abandoning, the psychollages that traditionally have been signified by terms such as *autobiography*, *memory processes*, *unconscious*, *culturally transmitted knowledge*, and so forth.

Formal considerations of those possibilities will prompt us to author ever-changing narratives about narrative functioning. And, we can predict, we will continuously apply “truth tests” based on affirming the match between our achievement of the outcome of the anticipatory narratives that we build about narratives.

Notes

1. In another piece (Mancuso 2000) I have advocated replacing terms such as *construction*, *module*, *schema*, *concept*, etc., with the term *psychollage*.
2. I will not, at this point, use space to outline my positions on the ways in which self-guiding narratives guide action. Our position has been elaborated in other publications (Mancuso & Lerhrer 1986; Mancuso 1996). Our position parallels the position promulgated by Carver & Scheier (1981).

References

- Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1981). *Attention and self-regulation: A control theory approach to behavior*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Kelly, G. A. (1991). *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1955).
- Mancuso, J. C. (1977). Current motivational models in the elaboration of personal construct theory. In A. W. Landfield (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation: Personal construct psychology* (pp. 43–97). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Mancuso, J. C. (1986). The acquisition and use of narrative grammar structure. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 91–110). New York: Praeger.
- Mancuso, J. C. (1996). Constructionism, personal construct psychology, and narrative psychology. *Theory and Psychology*, 6, 47–70.
- Mancuso, J. C. (2000). *Key signifiers of a constructivist psychological theory*. <http://www.capital.net/~mancusoj/pcpsigfr.html>
- Mancuso, J. C., & Ceely, S. G. (1980). The self as memory processing. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 4, 1–25.
- Mancuso, J. C., & Hunter, K. V. (1983). Anticipation, motivation, or emotion: The Fundamental Postulate after 25 years. In J. R. Adams-Webber & J. C. Mancuso (Eds.), *Applications of personal construct theory* (pp. 723–792). Toronto: Academic Press.
- Mancuso, J. C., & Lehrer, R. (1986). Cognitive processes during reactions to rule violation. In R. Ashmore & D. Brodzinsky (Eds.), *Thinking about the family: Views of parents and children* (pp. 67–93). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mancuso, J. C., & Sarbin, T. R. (1983). The self-narrative in the enactment of roles. In T. R. Sarbin & K. Scheibe (Eds.), *Studies in social identity* (pp. 233–253). New York: Praeger Press.
- Mascolo, M. F., & Mancuso, J. C. (1990). The functioning of epigenetically evolved emotion systems. *International Journal of Personal Construct Psychology*, 3, 205–220.
- Milosz, C. (1981). *Native realm: A search for self-definition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Shils, E. A. (1981). *Tradition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Stein, N. L., & Glenn, C. G. (1979). An analysis of story comprehension in elementary school children. In R. O. Freedle (Ed.), *New directions in discourse processing* (Vol. II, pp. 53–120). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- van Dijk, T. A., & Kintsch, W. (1983). *Strategies of discourse comprehension*. New York: Academic Press.

Constructing the narrative unconscious

Jonathan D. Raskin

State University of New York at New Paltz

The author comments on Freeman's concept of the narrative unconscious, especially its emphasis on culturally shared unconscious memories. Several questions are posed, including: (1) Can memory be "collective?"; (2) What are cultural givens and how do people collectively experience them?; and (3) Are cultural "memories" only located at the level of nation states? Each of these questions is briefly discussed.

In a thoughtful and eloquent article, Freeman proposes some challenging and provocative ideas about what he calls the narrative unconscious, which he apparently ascribes to the cultural as much, if not more, than the personal. Given that psychology researchers commonly view the social and historical as little more than confounding variables to be controlled for so as to discover what human beings are "really" like (Burr 1995), I found Freeman's intertwining of the personal and cultural a refreshing and encouraging experience. Rather than postulating the traditional psychological notion of a rigidly bounded and essential self that, through the course of one's upbringing, becomes polluted by the social and cultural (hence making it difficult to isolate in the lab), Freeman boldly integrates the individual and social as he struggles to unpack the range of complicated issues that arise from the assumption that human experience is somehow *both* individually and socially constituted. I applaud Freeman for moving social science, and especially psychology, in this direction. As a psychologist in a discipline that has been reticent about including anything that is not readily examined via traditional experimental research methodologies, Freeman's pioneering spirit is to be commended.

Having made it clear that I am wholly supportive of Freeman's efforts, it must be said that any foray into a psychology of the narrative unconscious is bound to spark a great deal of debate, especially when that unconscious is

located squarely within the culture rather than individual minds. Of course, it is precisely this provocative aspect of the work that makes Freeman's article worthwhile. As I read it, I stumbled upon some intriguing questions, each posed as part of my effort to more clearly and cogently map out a theoretical model of the narrative unconscious. Below I briefly pose and respond to several of my key questions. Importantly, these responses should not be considered my definitive or final say on these topics. They are really more my meandering thoughts and an initial rejoinder as I struggle with the implications of Freeman's challenging paper. That is, what follows hopefully serves as a jumping off point for further exchange rather than as a theoretical assertion that limits future dialogue. It is intended, in the best narrative tradition, as a start point for continuing discussion about a variety of theoretical, scientific, and generative stories about the human experience.

Can memory be collective?

Freeman uses the term "narrative unconscious" in a manner suggesting that it somehow functions analogously to a personal unconscious, but with a specified culture as the unit of analysis and its members all sharing in "uncognized" (repressed?) conflicts tied to historical events. In a sense, the narrative unconscious contains cultural memories that all members of a society share. This is intriguing, but do we really wish to fully blur the line between personal and cultural memories? For example, I suggest that there is a noteworthy difference between my personal, first-hand memories of the September 11 terrorist attacks and my cultural, second-hand experience of the World War II attack on Pearl Harbor. In the sense that I lived through the former event and was not yet born during the latter, my "memories" of each are qualitatively different. That is, I did not experience the attack on Pearl Harbor as it happened and because of this it may be misleading for me to claim "memories" of Pearl Harbor – if what is meant by memories are first-hand recollections drawn from lived experience.

On the other hand, if what is meant by "narrative unconscious" is shifted away from the notion of memory and towards a discussion of how the effects of the Pearl Harbor attack have resonated through history and impacted the world's many cultures by influencing the ways that members of those cultures presently conceptualize themselves, their relationships, their countries, and their world – then the narrative unconscious becomes more compelling. In this sense, the narrative unconscious reminds me of social constructionism

because both emphasize how unexamined (or, again translating into Freeman's terms, "uncognized") dominant discourses and social constructions determine personal experience (Gergen 1991, 1994). Thus, to the degree that it stresses the constituting power of social and cultural discourses to shape human identities, the narrative unconscious may be a refreshing new way of presenting key social constructionist ideas. At the very least, the two approaches seem akin in spirit.

Who fashions what out of cultural givens?

Of course, the primary criticism of social constructionism, which may apply as well to the narrative unconscious, is that it locates the cause of human psychological experience entirely within the social realm (Held 1995; Smith 1994). People become the product of the many discourses they are embedded within, leaving little room for any individualized role in the creation of personal realities. While this sometimes results in what many see as the disheartening view of human experience as a socially determined cultural byproduct, social constructionists often view their theorizing as sowing the seeds of change by making people pay closer attention to the unexamined cultural discourses and practices that form the bases of their lives (Gergen 1994). Freeman seems to be getting at a similar idea when he shares his experiences visiting Berlin. Certainly many unexamined self-constituting social constructions (or, as Freeman might say, narrative unconscious cultural "memories") contributed to Freeman's powerful emotional epiphany. However, even this begs the question: Who exactly fashions what out of cultural givens from the narrative unconscious?

That is, it is only worth acknowledging the potentially constituting force of cultural constructions if we believe that once aware of them, people are capable of combining, recombining, and altering these constructions in ways they find preferable. The playfulness of actively combining and refiguring forms deriving from vastly different and sometimes seemingly incompatible realms is precisely the kind of thing that postmodern and narrative approaches often celebrate (Gergen 1994). Conceptualizing people as having the ability to do this reconfiguring seems to imply, however, that while culturally shared social constructions (as might be found in the narrative unconscious) have a tremendous influence on determining who we are and how we view things, people nevertheless are capable of individually manipulating or resisting these constructions. That is, individuals are capable of fashioning both narratives and counter narratives out of their culturally inherited discourses. In this sense, the more individualized narrative constructivist theories (e.g., Kelly 1991a, 1991b;

Mahoney 1991; von Glaserfeld 1995) are a valuable addendum to more social constructionist approaches (e.g., Burr 1995; Gergen 1985, 1994; Shotter 1993) because of their emphasis on people as active collaborators in the construction of social realities. In other words, people determine social realities as well as being determined by them. This suggests another question, one which I do not have time to fully explore here, namely what exactly is the role of personal experience and meaning in approaches to psychology that accentuate concepts like the narrative unconscious? However, suffice to say that for me, the individual and social are two equally useful levels of analysis and therefore negating one at the expense of the other seems limiting. Freeman's paper marks an effort to bring the cultural more prominently into psychology, but more work needs to be done to move people beyond the individual/social dichotomy.

What is a cultural given and who exactly gives to whom?

Freeman provocatively explores "cultural givens," though he left me with numerous questions. What exactly are cultural givens? Do they come fully formed or do those discussing them have a role in determining what counts as one and what does not? If they come fully formed, where do we find them? Are they left laying about the history departments of colleges and universities? If so, do all history departments have the same set? Don't cultural givens need to be negotiated and decided upon by members of a culture? Or, do dominant cultures get to impose these givens on weaker ones? What about members of a society who reject or challenge their culture's givens? That is, what happens when there is disagreement among people about what a cultural given is? For example, I might assert that part of the American narrative unconscious is guilt over the annihilation of Native American societies. Thus, this might constitute my idea of a "cultural given" for the American cultural unconscious. However, perhaps the owner of the Cleveland Indians – proudly displaying the team's Native American Chief Wahoo logo, with its stereotypically angled Indian features and bright red skin – might disagree. While I do not know that he would disagree, there are indeed people who prefer "Manifest Destiny" as a cultural given instead. Do I have the ultimate say in whether my conception of an American citizen's narrative unconscious is more on the mark or does someone else? How do we decide whose say counts the most? Or, are guilt over treatment of Native Americans and Manifest Destiny both part of the American cultural unconscious, but parts that are in conflict with each other in a way somewhat similar to how Freud might have seen the id, ego, and superego in conflict? Even if we

like this solution to our dilemma, it does not prevent others from challenging the content of cultural givens. In this sense cultural givens are not so much pre-formed *givens* as they are cultural *constructions*, collaboratively developed and shared by members of the culture at hand.

Are cultural memories more local or national?

On a related note, I found myself wondering not only whether there are cultural givens (and, if there are, how many are out there), but also whether the best level of analysis is at the nation state level. For example, Freeman seems to suggest cultural givens originate from nation states, with the apparent assumption that one's country of origin is the best indicator of the contents of one's narrative unconscious. Returning to Freeman's experiences in Berlin, it is as if all Germans share not only the same clearly delineated memories, but also the same perspective on those memories. Perhaps because I readily identified social constructionist themes in Freeman's article, I found this troubling. Within any country there are many diverse and conflicting discourses and, depending upon how many of these discourses one is exposed to and which are most dominant in one's particular subculture, the cultural worldview one has is likely to vary drastically. Certainly a German whose parents were Nazis is likely to belong to different subcultures than a German Jew whose parents were killed by the Nazis. Because each of these people belongs to more than one cultural group, it is likely that each one's cultural unconscious differs quite a bit from the other one's. Taking this even further, the social discourses that influence one's identity development are not solely on the cultural, ethnic, religious, or country-of-origin levels (even if these levels are important). Families, co-workers, and peers, among others, all constitute social groups to which each of us belong and each of these groups has its own set of discourses that shape us and inform us of who we are and how we should view the world (Burr 1995; Gergen 1994). Culture is as much a local phenomenon as it is a national one.

For example, the discourse that modulates and determines my identity when I am with my best friend is at least as important in understanding me as those discourses that emanate from the government under which I live. That is, there are many socially constructed understandings between people and most of these are actually on the local rather than national level. A person's identity is determined as much by one's closest relationships as it is by country identification. As Gergen (1991) so deftly communicates, we have multiple identities that differ across the many social arenas in which we operate. While Freeman

is clearly onto something valuable when he examines the social at the nation state level, we should not forget the local construction of identity.

Where do we go from here?

Freeman is to be commended for expanding the scope of narrative within psychology. As mentioned at the outset, psychology has been slow to incorporate culture and meaning in studying human experience. How are narrative and other meaning-focused psychologists to push psychology in the directions Freeman suggests? On a practical note, psychology is a discipline that values precise and operationally definable variables. While Freeman's approach is many things, concrete is not one of them. Should Freeman desire mainstream psychology to take up his narrative unconscious more seriously, he may need to better elaborate it in ways that those with an empirical research approach (quantitative or qualitative) might be able to test. While there are indeed dangers in this suggestion, namely operationalizing the narrative unconscious in ways that make researchers happy but detract from the sophistication of Freeman's original idea, the potential benefits may be worth it. That is, if Freeman can communicate the narrative unconscious in somewhat less abstract and more testable empirical terms, psychologists who would otherwise ignore this intriguing concept might just take note. Whether Freeman moves in this direction or not, I applaud him for his intriguing, provocative, and important work.

References

- Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40, 266–275.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gergen, K. J. (1994). *Realities and relationships*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Held, B. S. (1995). *Back to reality: A critique of postmodern theory in psychotherapy*. New York: Norton.
- Kelly, G. A. (1991a). *The psychology of personal constructs: Vol. 1. A theory of personality*. London: Routledge.
- Kelly, G. A. (1991b). *The psychology of personal constructs: Vol. 2. Clinical diagnosis and psychotherapy*. London: Routledge.

- Mahoney, M. J. (1991). *Human change processes*. New York: Basic Books.
- Shotter, J. (1993). *Cultural politics of everyday life: Social constructionism, rhetoric and knowing of the third kind*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Smith, M. B. (1994). Selfhood at risk: Postmodern perils and the perils of postmodernism. *American Psychologist*, 49, 405–411.
- von Glaserfeld, E. (1995). *Radical constructivism: A way of knowing and learning*. London: The Palmer Press.

Possible lives

Jens Brockmeier

Department of Psychology, New School University

In this commentary I suggest a view of cultural memory that highlights the simultaneous existence of several layers of personal and historical experiences interacting among each other. This view supplements Freeman's account of cultural memory which is seen as emphasizing the successive and teleological structure of the autobiographical process. Both models are discussed in narrative, autobiographical, and philosophical terms. (*Cultural memory, Autobiographical narrative*)

Where are the limits between knowledge and imagination? And what separates present experiences from past experiences? In 1763, Immanuel Kant wrote, "There is something great and, as it seems to me, very right about Herr von Leibniz's thought: The imagination of the soul captures the whole universe, although only an infinitely small number of these ideas is clear" (Kant 1905, p. 199). Leibniz had suggested including into the concept of consciousness an area of phenomena of which we are not conscious, or at least not fully conscious. For Leibniz these phenomena were due to "perceptions insensibles" which enter the mind in an unnoticed manner. Kant welcomed this idea because it offered a way to recognize that there are capacities or, perhaps better, activities of the mind of which we are not aware, at least not always, and which may come to our consciousness only gradually. That is to say, not only is the area of our conscious perception and self-reflection more limited than what makes up our consciousness, but there also is more to the mind than what can be captured by categories such as consciousness, reflection, and intellect. Leibniz, Kant, and most philosophers of their epoch called this all-encompassing mental capacity "soul."

At about the same time, philosophers and writers began to refer to the unnoticed side of consciousness as the “unconscious.” While towards the end of the 19th century the emerging scientific discourse of psychiatry and psychology, as well as academic philosophy would substitute “soul” for “mind,” the idea and the term of the unconscious became even more widespread. The unconscious had become, and would remain, a constant, if murky point of reference in the philosophical and literary discourse of modernity. Drawing on all of these cultural discourses, Freud eventually universalized the discourse of “the” unconscious and – expanding it from its originally subjective and cognitive focus to almost all aspects of psychological and cultural life – turned it into the center piece of an entire theoretical system of human nature. It is in this cultural-historical tradition of charting the “dark side” of the mind, as the 19th century put it, where Mark Freeman sets out to localize an issue that, since Freud, certainly has not lost relevance. Freeman dubs it the narrative unconscious, and he sees it playing a central role in the organization of memory and remembering.

However, while the Freudian tradition has focussed on the individual unconscious and the Jungian tradition on the collective unconscious, Freeman’s point of departure is the relationship between the individual and the historical. In looking at “the way in which cultural texts and ‘textures’ become woven into the fabric of memory” (p. 289), he wants to explore the cultural dimension of autobiographical memory. And while there are several recent approaches to cultural memory that emphasize the narrative interplay between the individual, the social, and the historical (e.g., Brockmeier 2002a; Lachmann 1997; Lambek & Antze 1996), Freeman wants to draw attention to those culturally and historically rooted aspects of one’s history “that have not yet become part of one’s story (pp. 289, 298).” We might call them cultural background or even underground and counter stories. They are hidden, as Freeman points out, but not so much in the sense of that which has been buried through the work of repression as that which has remained untold and unthought because it belongs to deep strata of history of which we are largely, if not entirely, unaware.

At stake, then, is that memory is more than we know of, and, in fact, more than we can possibly know of it. What Gadamer noted (as quoted by Freeman, p. 299) about our historical consciousness also holds for our memory: It “always includes more than it acknowledges itself.” And it includes, and is, more because – if we conceive of it for a moment as a densely written text – it is inextricably interwoven with the countless texts and contexts of culture. It is part of an infinite intertext that stretches out not only into the present but also into the past, opening up a symbolic space within which our history and

memory are given shape and meaning. It is this symbolic space, constituted by language, artifacts, and other cultural forms of life, that comprises the narrative resources for our memory stories. These resources include the repertoire of life narratives circulating in a culture: the stories about real and possible lives, which mark the historical horizon within which we see ourselves as selves. In this view, with personal memory being just one moment in the endless and beginningless space of history and historical knowledge, autobiographical consciousness covers only a tiny island of awareness, temporarily surfacing from a sea of unknown and unknowable size.

But there still is something else to this. There are the sudden breaks in which the unaware becomes aware, the moments of coming-to-consciousness of this unconscious dimension of the human condition: moments of great intensity in which we unexpectedly find ourselves drawn into the uncharted and widely unknown areas of our being. We fall out of step with time, hold our breath, overwhelmed by a sudden insight, a new vision of the world and the meaning of our lives. For James Joyce these were moments of epiphany, Walter Benjamin spoke of experiences of “chock”, and William James saw them as mystical revelations and ultimately as a form of religious experience.

Following a long-standing phenomenological tradition of self-examination, Freeman offers an acute account of one such moment or, more concisely, of the “inner movement” that takes place in such a moment. Freeman describes an episode from his life – a journey to Berlin – in which he experienced the hold of time past on time present and the intrusion of history, known and unknown, into his thinking and feeling. Visiting the city for the first time, he unexpectedly becomes aware of what he had not been aware until then: Even if he had never conceived of himself as being Jewish in any strong – religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural – sense (in fact, he writes about it as of his Jewish “background”), he is and has been inextricably connected to those horrendous events that two or three generations ago were masterminded and carried out in Berlin, then the center of Nazi power. All of a sudden being confronted with this past which, although seemingly located at a temporal and spatial distance, now turns out to be a part of his own personal history, the work of autobiography begins. And much of Freeman’s essay is, indeed, a reflection upon this process of autobiographical reconstruction: rewriting the self.

In reading this account, I thought of my first visit to Berlin and of the role this city has played in my life. As for Freeman, these experiences have come to inform my thinking about the issues in question, both in terms of my autobiographical self-understanding and my theoretical understanding of the autobiographical process. However, it seems that some of the theoretical conclusions

I have drawn from these experiences and reflections differ from Freeman's. I must confess this has surprised me, for my way to look at the narrative interplay between individual and historical memory is grounded in much the same hermeneutic and cultural-psychological assumptions that underlay Freeman's account. In other words, although sharing almost all of his premises, I would like to offer a look at the dynamics of cultural memory from a somewhat different angle, further writing the thick description of the mnemotic interplay between the individual and the historical with which Freeman's essay provides us. For the sake of brevity, let me call Freeman's view of this interplay based on a model of succession. This model traces that "inner movement" as a development towards a telos, an endpoint of coming-to-consciousness in which one's hidden historical roots come into view and the "narrative unconscious" becomes part of one's story. To this perspective I shall add a view based on a model of simultaneity. This model brings into sight the presence of several, indeed, many layers of cultural memory in which we live at the same time, and of which we may become more or less conscious according to the particular historical circumstances under which we remember and forget. Let me explain.

Growing up in post-war West-Germany, I had already gone through a number of subjective revelations about the country's recent cultural memory when I, as a youth, first came Berlin. It has often been remarked that in this city all wounds and scars of recent history are deeper and more lasting. Most of the material surface of the city is a cultural memory of last century's violence. The first building I lived in on my arrival in Berlin was strewn with shrapnel holes from the last days of the Battle of Berlin. Educated by young and decidedly antifascist and democratic teachers, my friends and I were quite aware of what had happened in the Germany of our parents and grandparents. Newspapers, films, TV documentaries, and books offered, even in the first two decades after the end of Fascism, quite an exhaustive picture – if someone wanted to know. And youngsters usually want to know. Surrounded by all those places and traces, persons and ideologies which spoke to us about a past that was all but passed, we became even more suspicious about the dominant climate of downplaying, denying, and "forgetting." The experience of living simultaneously in different epochs, to the same degree present and past, open and hidden, and dominated by contrary agendas of remembering and forgetting, became even more intensified when we were reading books by contemporary writers such as Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass. All of their texts revolved precisely around this experience – a suffocatingly thick layer of German cultural memory.

Moreover, often in these discourses the time of reference was not the present, the new post-war Germany, or its possible future but an even earlier past: either the years of the Weimar Republic between World War I and Hitler's seizure of power, or the old Imperial Reich that had collapsed in 1918. My uncle, for example, had lived the time of his life in the Berlin of the 1920s. In all the fond remembrances he told us about the Berlin cafés and edgy cabarets, gay clubs and leftish polical revues, he conveyed the impression that for him those years were the unrivaled standard not only of fun but also of free and fulfilled life. For grandma, however, the historical realm of happiness had ended, once and forever, even earlier: with the end of Berlin being the city of the Imperial court.

The idea that we – my friends, classmates, and I – were born into a society whose overwhelming majority had, until a few years ago, actively supported, or at least tolerated, a regime that had committed such unimaginable crimes, was disturbing. One of the earliest layers of my autobiographical memory in which an historical background shines through is about this challenge or, or perhaps better, predicament. That it also was, in a very subjective sense, a tense and contradictory layer of memory, comes to the fore when my father enters this picture. In all my memories he shows up as a loving and tender person, a best friend and playmate. But, of course, he also had served as a soldier in World War II, as he already was a soldier in the Kaiser's army, a highly decorated fighter pilot in World War I. When I found years after his death – he died when I was six years old – in a suitcase photos, war medals, and newspaper clips about his air victories, he suddenly appeared to me in a new light.

Historians have suggested that the entanglement of the father generation in the Third Reich was one of the motives behind the student uprising around 1968, which in Germany was centered in Berlin. Thus, for me, my friends, and fellow students, there was no doubt in which city we were to go to university. Not only there seemed to emerge an alternative – as utopian and, to be sure, naïve it was – to a society whose past we despised and whose present, which we saw dominated by conformity and commercialization, we scorned. Living and studying in Berlin also seemed to offer access to political traditions and cultural resources that ran counter to what we wanted to escape from. It had not escaped our attention that there had always been people in Germany, as all over the world, that felt similarly repelled by what we saw as the ruling establishment and the official discourse of power. Historically, Berlin had always been a prominent place of all kinds of counter-discourses in which democratic intellectuals, artists, and scientists had contributed to the formation of a further and, in fact, very different layer of Germany's and Europe's cultural mem-

ory. Whether they were bourgeois, aristocratic, or socialist; or whether they had Jewish, Christian, or atheist backgrounds – it was not only the Nazi regime that had a strong interest to silence them.

Arriving in Berlin, this was what we considered to be the historical layer of memory to which we felt particularly close. Within a few months, we knew the places at which Bertold Brecht lived and worked, found out about Franz Kafka's and Walter Benjamin's apartments, had seen all paintings by George Grosz and Max Beckmann to be found in West- and East-Berlin museums. And again, all this was embedded in an array of contemporary literary narratives – which included, for example, Peter Weiss's three-volume novel/essay *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, tracing the counter-narratives of a Berlin-based group of antifascist workers and intellectuals whose fight against the Nazis merged with their vision of a new approach to art and literature as a way of resistance against power and a form of rewriting their selves. In other words, Berlin became a place – for us, the only conceivable place – to chart what we, in those years, considered to be the foundational stratum of *our* cultural memory. It was a place dense with such cultural texts and textures we had been searching for to become “woven into the fabric of our memory”: texts and textures populated with outsiders, rebels, refugees, and critics, in thought and life, of that kind of societal system that we saw behind the memory-history of wars and crimes bequeathed upon us.

I later came to live in other cities and countries, experiencing not only new cultural realities but also the emergence of new past-layers of my cultural memory. They relativized the Berlin story. While it is often reported that for many people living outside of their country of birth and native language their sense of cultural belonging and national identity becomes stronger, in my case it diminished (with the exception of a few aspects). With it, the Berlin narratives and counter-narratives lost much of their significance. Their color and mnemonic weight faded, as other concerns and projects came to take center stage, providing the work of autobiography with new (and changing old) material. However, they have not really made disappear, nor have they repressed, the earlier layers. Neither have the new layers absorbed the earlier ones; nor have the new experiences transformed into memories that are completely independent from the old ones. All of them – and some more – are still there, often bobbing up unexpectedly and unpredictably. And they are “there” not only because I still have (most) of the same brain that I used to have when I lived in that building strewn with shrapnel holes, but also (and I suspect, first of all) because they are still circulating in the countless discourses of cultural memory in which I live today. These discourses have no mere mental or neurological existence but

are materialized in numberless “memory texts,” ranging from personal notes and conversations to the semiotic systems and artifacts that form the symbolic space of our culture which I mentioned earlier (and described in more detail elsewhere; see Brockmeier 2002b). Reading a letter from an old friend, seeing a photo in a magazine, or picking up a few words on the subway may bring back a long-ago episode or atmosphere – not necessarily from an “original” experience but, more likely, from an earlier memory discourse in which the picture was already used or the atmosphere talked about.

It is particularly in life narratives that we can study in great detail what it means to live simultaneously in several worlds of present and past experiences. Here we can explore the tropical, narrative, discursive, and perceptive shifts that make us flow so effortlessly and, in a sense, unconsciously among different times and lives that we might believe this dynamic is due to a special power or a hidden substance on its own: “the” unconscious. I suspect that for this exploration of the fleeting and ever-changing nature of life the notion of simultaneity is pivotal. To introduce the category of narrative into the study of human lives is to open up a multilayered reality, a reality which, after all, may turn out to be indistinguishable from several different but simultaneously present realities. Put differently, one implication of the idea that living and understanding a life is inextricably intermingled with narrative is to face that the experienced reality of life is the reality of several, in fact, multiple possible lives. There is no such thing as a human life that can be exhausted in one narrative; there always remains an untold rest, a surplus of meaning.

Each of the memory layers that I sketched (and all the more combinations of them) constitutes a fabric of meaning that would probably be sufficient to suggest a robust historical mooring for a life story. It would provide enough material for a plausible identity construction, for a possible real life. The idea that one’s autobiographical consciousness is grounded in various possible lives implies a polysemic notion not only of life but also of time. Autobiographical time, as articulated in all kinds of life narratives, not only moves continuously back and forth, be it in circles, spirals, or ellipses; it also is organized in temporally parallel and overlapping gestalts of possible lives. Our selves are always richer than what is present and can be articulated in this very moment because the particular form of life in which we find ourselves in this very moment is but one coincidental configuration of reality among several equally possible realities.

Real or imagined, narrated or enacted, discovered in one’s past or projected into one’s future, our possible lives are a constitutive part of our selves. They bind us simultaneously into diverse social and historical worlds and, in doing

so, create what Freeman calls our “larger selves.” To live possible lives in possible worlds is inherent to the human condition, to put the matter on a more general philosophical plane. It is as inherent to our being as the category of the hypothetical – the subjunctive – is inherent to the human mind. And it is inherent to the human mind because it is integral to the manifold cultural semantics in which the mind is embedded. Without language the dimension of the possible would not translate into a category of human mind and existence.

A consequence of this view is that it is impossible to assume that there is only one story, one true representation of a life. This does not exclude that there is a category of events in a life that can be captured in stories that are true or false or, at least, more true or less true. But the point that I want to make clear is that human beings always have a number of life projects, a variety of options, a range of possible meaning constructions.

Such options change over time and vary in different cultures. It is constitutive of late modern Western societies that each person has a set of autobiographies appropriate for different social settings, and most people are skilled at constructing new self-narratives for novel occasions. This cultural repertoire of narrative models and other discursive registers guides our ideas of who we are, and it does so in ways of which we typically are not aware. All of us have developed a portfolio of possible identities which are available to be carried out in various cultural situations according to different discursive strategies. And even within the limited frame of a particular interactive setting – e.g., a conversation, a family argument, an academic debate – it is not difficult to see that there usually is more than one identity project performed. We typically are entangled, at the same time, in more than one context of action or interaction, position ourselves in more than one discursive space, and are committed to more than one long-term life project. I suspect that many traditional categories have failed to capture this multifarious fabric of simultaneous endeavors because it does not respect clear-cut borderlines between the realm of the fact and the realm of imagination, between indicative and subjunctive, real and possible lives.

How, then, might new and more adequate concepts look? I believe Sarbin’s (1998) point is helpful here. He repudiates classifying narrative imagination as either “real” or “not real” (that is, he rejects using the words “real” or “reality” as excluders), suggesting instead a concept like “degrees of involvement.” This action concept resonates with my argument about the reality of possible lives, indicating what could be, to my mind, the direction of a conceptually more appropriate way to investigate the cultural conditions of our plural being.

Although we have only recently begun to reconsider, in this light, our understanding of human life in narrative terms, the underlying idea is not entirely new in the psychology and philosophy of mind. I want to conclude by referring to Johann Friedrich Herbart, the successor to Kant's chair. Herbart proposed to supplement the Leibnizian view of human imagination with a perspective that brings to prominence the simultaneous presence of several presentations and representations. Leibniz and Kant, as we remember, held that the human mind embraces unconscious phenomena because there are "perceptions insensibles" which enter the mind in a temporal succession and of which we become conscious only gradually, that is, with delay. Herbart (1886) set out to widen this picture, highlighting the interplay of simultaneous presentations, out of which, in his view, everything in the mind – thoughts, memories, feelings – arises in some fashion. Most presentations actively interact with others, reinforcing or opposing or even fusing with each other. In the process, some presentations may rise into consciousness, while others sink and remain below the "threshold of consciousness" until they may be pulled up again and reemerge in consciousness.

Obviously, both the Leibniz-Kant model of succession and the Herbart model of simultaneity do not exclude each other but can be – and, in fact, have often been – combined. Nevertheless, they put different emphasis on different aspects of the processes at issue. And this distinction is important, I argue, in order to realize that phenomena of succession and goal-oriented development – like those Freeman has described – are to be seen against the backdrop of a landscape of consciousness that stretches from a foreground of highlighted attention into the depth of an unnoticed background.

With this in mind, let me sum up. "Universe of discourse" is a term used in semiotics and philosophy of language to describe the whole of the meaningful world covered and created by a language. I have read Freeman's essay as a reflection on the idea, discussed by Kant, Leibniz, and Herbart, that human imagination may potentially capture our whole universe of discourse, although only "an infinitely small number" of these ideas is clear and conscious to us. Exploring the 'infinitely large number' of ideas not clear or conscious that are part of the universe of past discourses (our "cultural memory"), Freeman has given a subtle phenomenological account of how such untold and unwritten stories can be "constitutive of experience" (p. 305), even if they are "not yet" part of one's life story. Freeman's description of these unconscious narrative reserves follows the Freudian path. This path has a clear goal: to turn the id into the ego, the unconscious into the conscious, the dark side of the soul into a transparent part of our mind and self. In the autobiographical process the repressed

or ignored past is “worked through” to become the acknowledged present. In his view of this mental development, Freud, in turn, followed the classical Enlightenment path: illuminating the dark through the work of intellect and reason – a vision reflected in the quintessential Enlightenment narrative genre of *Bildungsroman*.

In my commentary I have tried to supplement this teleological picture, drawing on a concept of cultural memory that focuses on the interplay between historical and individual aspects of remembering and forgetting (rather than on a set of given collective memories). I have proposed that the work of autobiography does not necessarily result in making “the” narrative unconscious conscious but rather in articulating possible gestalts of one’s life, or gestalts of possible lives. Whatever the articulated story, taken as an elaborated construction of meaning it neither can claim to be ontologically “deeper” and based on more “fundamental” historical strata than any other story, told or untold; nor does it necessarily prove that the life lived previous to the narrative *prise de conscience* was superficial or false or meaningless. In fact, the reading of both Freeman’s and my Berlin experiences that I have offered suggests what makes such claims of greater authenticity arise is not the pressure of the past, as Freud saw it, but the pressure of the present. It is the specific circumstances of a local situation, as well as what Freeman referred to as the “hermeneutic preparedness” of a person, that shift one’s narrative identity project along the discursive trajectory of that cultural situation. Patently, these circumstances can turn a city into a living memorial of a horrendous past, as they can turn the same city into a living memorial of resistance against those horrors.

On this account, the autobiographical process does not appear as a teleologically directed process towards the discovery of a particular past, so far ignored, repressed, or forgotten; it rather turns out to be a continuous stream of discursive interactions that whirl up a variety of ideas and experiences, past, present, and future. To be sure, as Kant held, we are only aware of a small number of these ideas and experiences, sometimes more, sometimes less. The “degree of involvement” and, correspondingly, potential awareness depends, not least, on those cultural discourses in which we find ourselves at a certain time and place.

A central aspect of this view, then, is that it suggests not only conceiving of our lives and autobiographical selves as inextricably intermingled with these times and places, but also opening up the very notion of life to embrace the dimension of the possible as a constitutive part of human reality.

References

- Brockmeier, J. (Ed.). (2002a). Special issue: Narrative and cultural memory. *Culture & Psychology*, 8.
- Brockmeier, J. (2002b). Remembering and forgetting: Narrative as cultural memory. *Culture & Psychology*, 8(1), 15–43.
- Herbart, J. F. (1886). *Schriften zur Psychologie I* [Writings on psychology.] (1816). Hamburg & Leipzig: Meiner.
- Kant, I. (1905). *Werke, Bd. 2* [Works, Vol. 2]. Akademie-Ausgabe. Berlin: Reimer.
- Lachmann, R. (1997). *Memory and literature*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lambek, M., & Antze, P. (Eds.). (1996). *Tense past: Cultural essays in trauma and memory*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Sarbin, T. R. (1998). Believed-in imagings: A narrative approach. In J. de Rivera & T. R. Sarbin (Eds.), *Believed-in imagings: The narrative construction of reality* (pp. 15–30). Washington, DC: APA.

Working the narrative unconscious: Positioning theory and moral order

Mandy Morgan

School of Psychology, Massey University, New Zealand

This commentary discusses Freeman's "Charting the narrative unconscious" in relation to autobiography as a practice of theorizing subjectivity within the community of academic psychologists. Writing personal experiences as we address each other is understood through positioning theory as a manner of speaking ourselves into a community, in which it becomes possible to recognize similarities and differences among us. The commentary discusses how positioning theory may be engaged so as to transform psychological narratives simultaneously with surfacing counter-narratives and challenging the constitution of liberal humanist subjectivity in the stories we tell each other.

For some time now I have been interested in the ways in which autobiography, as a form of narrative practice, impregnates teaching, theoretical writing and empirical reporting (Morgan 1998; Morgan 1999; Morgan & Coombes 2001a, 2001b). From feminist discourse, I've taken seriously the notion that my embodied subjectivity could not be disengaged from either cultural narratives of sex and gender or daily practices like speaking and writing. I have also under-

stood that a feminist psychology calls me to theorise my own experience. To do so at a time when both 'theory' and 'experience' have become contested terms, involves questioning the cultural resources that make both theory and experience meaningful. In this context, commenting on Mark Freeman's (2002) article seems like an exemplary moment to accept an invitation to a dialogue which may open wider possibilities to speak about autobiography, narrative and cultural unconscious within psychology.

As a starting point, Freeman's questions concerning the relationship between individual and collective, memory and history, narrative and counter-narrative evoked further questions for me. Before this, however, I appreciate the narrative, autobiographical context in which Freeman's questions arise. As I read Freeman's account of his Berlin experiences I also remember my own, hearing echoes of my recollections of place and feeling, the transformation of monument to memory, and the bringing of a "world" already understood and practised to a scene that was personally 'new'. This is not to say that these echoes are sounds of similarity. My own experiences of Berlin are vastly different, both in minute particulars and in the expansive unspoken background against which those particulars are made sensible: It is a walk, not a bus ride that I recall most powerfully transforming distant events to immediate presence, yet for me, with somewhat less sudden rush of feeling. And I do not share Freeman's Jewish background or North American cultural context, though growing up Australian, alongside families of post war European refugees, I probably did encounter similar stories, books and movies. So, appreciating Freeman's autobiographic account includes recognising similarities and differences in personal experience, and also the sensibleness, personally, of such theoretical terms as "a cultural horizon" (p. 294) or "the supra-personal dimensions of self-formation" (p. 297).

I also appreciate Freeman's telling of his Berlin experiences because positioning theory (Brockmeier & Harré 1997; Davies & Harré 1990; Harré & van Langenhove 1991; Varela & Harré 1996) suggests such tellings are the form through which we speak ourselves into our communities, producing ourselves as subjects and communities of voices simultaneously and re-producing them in various versions through multiple relationships.

For me, then, Freeman's autobiographic account becomes a kind of access point for personal memories and theories of interpretive process which are inclusive of history and cultural narratives. Given my personal and theoretical interests in theories of the constitution of subjectivity, I have no difficulty accepting Freeman's arguments concerning narrative unconscious as an aspect of the historical and cultural embeddedness of personhood. The notion that the

'self' has distant origins and legacies, coheres with contemporary discursive and narrative theories of the production of self, as does the proposition that modern individualism is but one of many historically and culturally divergent versions of personhood. The transformations that Freeman proposes to our notion of autobiography perform a movement away from the traditional liberal humanist, and modernist, constitutions of the autobiographical subject. The form of subjectivity Freeman suggests is woven into history and culture through narrative. Autobiography, then, is "no longer ... exclusively a matter – of representing a life, from birth to death. Instead, it is a matter of discerning, as best one can, the multiple sources, both near and far, that give rise to the self" (p. 304).

The questions which Freeman's article provokes for me are questions of how to 'tell the narrative unconscious so to as to shed new light on the supra-personal dimensions of self-formation' through practices of autobiography: How to practice autobiography differently, so as to "discern sources". And, if it is the case that a narrative unconscious 'may bear within it counter-narratives' might it not also be the case that culturally, and especially with regard to power relations, there is still some useful theoretical place for a notion of repression, though perhaps radically re-written in relationship with contemporary theories of subjectivity?

I understand these questions as arising in relation to the particular theoretical, experiences which preface my reading of Freeman's article: the bibliographic frame through which my reading practices transformed Freeman's text into another set of questions. At least in part the 'background' of cultural horizon brought to my reading includes not only my own visit to Berlin, but also particular practices of scholarship, varieties of bibliographic frame. While Freeman cites MacIntyre's (1981, cited in Freeman 2002) text on the historicity of selfhood, I recall my first encounter with the terms 'unconscious' and 'narrative' in Fredric Jameson's (1981) text. Jameson's much cited injunction to "Always historicize" opened a space in which my interest in processes of historicising led me to White's (1987) work on narrative and history.

MacIntyre (1981, cited in Freeman 2002) and White (1987) both draw connections, differently, between narrative, morality and history. MacIntyre writes of the embeddedness of autobiographic stories in communities and the legacy of the past as a moral starting point for personhood. From MacIntyre's argument Freeman takes readers to the notion of a narrative unconscious as "those culturally-rooted aspects of one's history that have not yet become part of one's story" (p. 16).

The connection between history and story resonates for me with¹ White's work and suggests a way of addressing the question of how to tell the narrative unconscious. Such a 'telling' is not only a matter of 'adding' historical narratives to personal stories, because, as Freeman argues moving "beyond the confines of the monadic self to tell a different kind of story" (p. 304) is difficult, and as White suggests, history and narrative are related so as to belie any simple representation of the historical events proposed by MacIntyre as a person's moral starting point.

The narrativised history proper which occupies the place of legitimate representation of historical events in historiography (White 1987) might constitute a resource for articulating the historical within the autobiographic. White argues that the use of narrative in the process of depicting historical events provides a content that is not given by the subject matter, but by narrative form. For White an historical 'fact' (say the birth of one's mother in 1928 or 1938) becomes meaningful in relation to other facts through their ordering as meaningful temporal sequences in narrative form (White 1987). These temporal sequences are ordered so as to 'move' towards an implied or explicit 'ending' (Gergen & Gergen 1986). According to White such closure implicates sequences of events in a moral order. Narrative 'resolution' provides the moral principle through which the 'outcome' of events is judged as 'just' or 'unjust'. Through narrative, historical events become embedded in a moral order and are constituted as socio-political events.

Freeman argues that narrative is "woven into the very fabric of experience" (p. 305). This argument might include the possibility that narrative weaves the experiences of persons into moral orders which not only constitute historical events, but also persons as socio-political. Such a possibility invites a socio-political notion of personhood which itself follows a particular narrative trajectory.² In a given autobiographical moment, a narrative speaks a subject into a position within a moral order, and simultaneously arranges historical events as a movement towards a moral endpoint. Given the historical dominance of narratives producing liberal humanist subjectivities, the articulation of an historicised subjectivity involves telling a different kind of story. Simultaneously it gestures towards a notion of subjectivity in which the traditional liberal humanist subject is challenged at the heart of its constitution: matters of consciousness and choice. But as Freeman suggests, the movement to a different kind of story "beyond the confines of the monadic self" (p. 304) risks reproducing liberal humanist subjectivities, most evidently through the psychological interpretation of historical/personal events.

It seems to me then that “telling autobiography differently” so as to produce different subjectivities might usefully involve telling psychological stories which weave together history, morality, narrative and socio-political subjectivities, transforming the resource of “psychological interpretation” so as to minimise the risk of the return of the liberal humanist subject. This project involves engaging not only with the surfacing of counter-narratives within the narrative unconscious, but also attends to the transformations performed on psychological stories when they make use of resources from the history of psychology as it is currently told. Freeman, for example, pays attention to re-writing the notion of the unconscious so as to move away from the “dynamically repressed – to that which has been lived but which remains unthought and hence untold” (p. 289). I will return to this re-writing shortly.

Davies and Harré (1990) propose a transformation of the psychological story of roles which produces a theory of subject positioning. In positioning theory ‘positioning’ is construed as the social process through which conversation participants offer, accept or refuse ‘subject positions’ that are made available through their own and other’s discourse. Used in this sense, discourse refers to both the social act of speaking together and also the “institutionalised use of language and language-like systems” (1990, p. 45). Narrative is also involved in positioning since conversations include explicit and implicit personal story telling as well as discussions of topics. Speakers tell anecdotes from memory of previous conversations and previous tellings of lived experiences. Subject positions offered and taken up within conversations both enable and constrain personhood: they confer rights and specify obligations and duties. They locate persons within moral orders.

Positioning theory (Brockmeier & Harré 1997; Davies & Harré 1990; Harré & van Langenhove 1991; Varela & Harré 1996) has provided a rich resource for re-telling psychological stories of human subjectivity. It has been engaged, at least, in work on development (Bamberg 2000), femininity and masculinity (Harrison 1997; Wetherell 1997; Wetherell & Edley 1999), abuse (MacMartin 1999), stigmatisation (Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford 1996) and self subordination (Raethzel 1997) as well as theoretical work regarding its implications for transforming psychological knowledge (Hawes 1998; Howie & Peters 1996; Jones 1997; Michael 1997; Wetherell 1998). Much of this work has focused on an immanentist view of positioning within conversation in which ‘structure’ is understood as fluid patterns rather than fixed or static positions (Varela & Harre 1996). Performativity and function, as well as notions of affordances and symbols have informed theoretical frameworks (Bamberg 1997; Forrester

1999; Jones 1999) which have been engaged to analyse particular moments of articulation.

Parker (1997) also suggests that the “notion of subject position” is a valuable tool for understanding abuses of power in psychology and its wider culture” (p. 291). The connection between subject positioning and social power relations enables a notion of ‘positioning’ to work not only at the level of interpersonal conversation, but also in relation to the socio-political level which unfolds as inseparable from the personal through Freeman’s notion of narrative unconscious.

In recent work we have engaged positioning theory (Morgan & Coombes 2001a, 2001b), in a somewhat modified form, to analytically read an autobiographic narrative. This reading practice makes use of positioning theory as a psychological story which weaves together history, morality, narrative and socio-political subjectivities and transforms the resource of “psychological interpretation” so as to attend to previously ‘untold’³ dimensions of socio-political personhood. In the course of this work we identified moral orders legitimating exclusion or marginalisation through stories which position subjects as incompetent, as unable to articulate their experience, or as without entitlement to speaking rights. In as much as this kind of work ‘surfaces’ the moral orders through which particular narratives weave persons and historical events together as socio-political, enabling and constraining what may be ‘said and done’ and how it may be understood, then it could contribute to a project of “discerning the multiple sources that give rise to the self ... as a process of poesis, which is itself a part of history” (pp. 304–305).

The question of re-writing of the notion of the unconscious so as to move away from the “dynamically repressed” (p. 289) arises for me in the context of these analytical readings of autobiographical narratives. While I affirm the necessity of re-writing psychological terms, narratives and discourses in the project of movement away from modern individualism, I remain suspicious that a reformulated notion of dynamic repression might prove useful to theoretical writing on the narrative unconscious. This suspicion arises because it is possible to imagine that counter-narratives legitimating subversive moral orders are ‘dynamically repressed’ within social power relations. It is possible to imagine a kind of ‘cultural repression’ which is active against the speaking of particular historicised and narrativised experiences. In the process of opening “ourselves to the possibility of exploring new and different forms of making sense of personal life” (p. 305), it may yet prove useful to theorize the narrative unconscious with regard for the possible return of the culturally repressed.⁴

Notes

1. In an earlier draft, I wrote this phrase as “put me in mind of” – as an attempt to avoid evoking ‘mind talk, or cognitive discourse’. Clearly, the attempt failed, and opened up a theoretical space for questioning “resonance”.
2. Freeman points out that the dimension of poiesis which marks the processes of “fashioning an identity in and through ... multiple sources” is “itself a part of history, as are the genres and storylines that are employed in the task (pp. 304–305). Thus it is hardly surprising that the conception of personhood produced through this theorising may be, itself, positioned within a moral order.
3. as psychological stories ...
4. I have directed this argument towards positioning theory as a resource of scholarship with regard to my appreciation of Freeman’s autobiographical writing. In writing autobiographically we engage in the activity of speaking ourselves into a community through personal storytelling. The community into which I write myself, here, is a community resourced by scholarship and bearing responsibility for “abuses of power in psychology and its wider culture” (Parker 1997, p. 291).

References

- Bamberg, M. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 335–342.
- Bamberg, M. (2000). Language and communication – What develops? Determining the role of language practices for a theory of development. In N. Budwig, I. Užgiris, & J. V. Wertsch (Eds.), *Communication: An arena of development. Advances in applied developmental psychology* (pp.55–77). Stamford, CT: Ablex Publishing.
- Brockmeier, J., & Harré, R. (1997). Narrative: Problems and promises of an alternative paradigm. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 30, 263–283.
- Davies, B. & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20, 43–63.
- Forrester, M. A. (1999). Reflections and projections of the developing self. *Theory and Psychology*, 9, 29–46.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (1986). Narrative form and the construction of psychological science. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology. The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 22–44). New York: Praeger.
- Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (1991). Varieties of positioning. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 21(4), 393–407.
- Harrison, L. (1997). ‘It’s a nice day for a white wedding’: The debutante ball and constructions of femininity. *Feminism and Psychology*, 7, 495–516.
- Hawes, S. (1998). Positioning a dialogic reflexivity in the practice of feminist supervision. In B. Beyer & J. Shotter (Eds.), *Reconstructing the psychological subject: Bodies, practices and technologies* (pp. 94–110). London: Sage.

- Howie, D., & Peters, M. (1996). Positioning theory: Vygotsky, Wittgenstein and social construction psychology. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 26, 51–64.
- Jameson, F. (1981). *The political unconscious. Narrative as a socially symbolic act*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Jones, R. A. (1997). The presence of self in the person: Reflexive positioning and personal constructs psychology. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 27, 453–471.
- Jones, R. A. (1999). Direct perception and symbol forming in positioning. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 29, 37–58.
- Lawless, S., Kippax, S., & Crawford, J. (1996). Dirty, diseased and undeserving: The positioning of HIV positive women. *Social Science and Medicine*, 43, 1371–1377.
- MacMartin, C. (1999). Disclosure as discourse. Theorising children's reports of sexual abuse. *Theory and Psychology*, 9, 503–532.
- Michael, M. (1997). Individualistic humans: Social constructionism, identity and change. *Theory and Psychology*, 7, 311–336.
- Morgan, M. (1998). Postmodernism, science and the subject of writing. Paper presented at The Discursive Construction of Knowledge Conference, The University of Adelaide, South Australia.
- Morgan, M. (1999). Touches of the institution: An informal curriculum of teaching about violence toward women. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, XXVII (1&2), 185–196.
- Morgan, M., & Coombes, L. (2001a). Subjectivities and silences, mother and woman: Theorising an experience of silence as a speaking subject. *Feminism and Psychology*, 11, 361–375.
- Morgan, M., & Coombes, L. (2001b). 'Narrative positionings: Theorising silence as discursive act.' Unpublished manuscript. School of Psychology, Massey University, New Zealand.
- Parker, I. (1997). Discursive psychology. In D. Fox & I. Prilleltensky (Eds.), *Critical psychology: An introduction* (pp. 284–298). London: Sage.
- Raethzel, N. (1997). Gender and racism in discourse. In R. Wodak (Ed.), *Gender and discourse* (pp. 57–80). London: Sage.
- Varela, C. R., & Harré, R. (1996). Conflicting varieties of realism: Causal powers and the problem of social structure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 26, 313–325.
- Wetherell, M. (1997). Linguistic repertoires and literary criticism: New directions for a social psychology of gender. In M. Gergen & S. Davis (Eds.), *Toward a new psychology of gender* (pp. 149–167). New York: Routledge.
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretive repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse & Society*, 9, 387–412.
- Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1999). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices. *Feminism and Psychology*, 9, 335–356.
- White, H. (1987). *The content of the form: Narrative, discourse and historical representation*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

RESPONSE

to commentaries on “Charting the narrative unconscious: Cultural memory and the challenge of autobiography”

by Mark Freeman

To begin, I want to express my sincerest appreciation for the commentaries written in response to my article. Each, in its own way, has helped me think beyond my initial formulation of the ideas at hand, and for that I am extremely grateful. In particular, they have helped me think further, and more subtly, about the notion of the narrative unconscious. The question is: Have they led me any closer to the *truth* of the situation?

Let me turn first to James Mancuso’s piece since, in some respects, it represents the most direct challenge to my own rendition of things. If I understand Mancuso correctly (something about which I am not at all certain), I have erred most egregiously by *substantializing* the narrative unconscious – that is, by (allegedly) considering it a “place,” from which it might be possible “to retrieve a wholly made ‘video-tape’ of the anticipatory narratives that the person will create.” In regard to the idea of a “place,” I will simply note that I certainly have no interest whatsoever in talking about a *material* place; what is being addressed is the *mind*, the workings of *psychical* reality. Having said this, I do need to consider whether indeed I have somehow misused the language of “entity,” *thing* – as in “the” narrative unconscious. (Jens Brockmeier raises a similar issue in his commentary.) As for the issue of “retrieval” along with that of the “wholly made ‘video-tape,’” my own position is quite different than the one Mancuso is positing. Part of the point of the essay has to do with the fact that there *was* no videotape – that, indeed, there was no personal memory, no unearthing, no retrieval. In speaking of the narrative unconscious, I do not turn to the sort of archeological language frequently employed in psychoanalysis (valid though it may be in that context). Rather, I speak of what has gone *unthought*, to unarticulated structures of meaning that exist at the intersection of person and history and that have yet to be brought to conscious awareness.

On one level, I suppose, it doesn’t much matter whether one uses the term “unconscious” or “nonconscious” (or “off awareness”): whatever one elects to

call it, the reference is to what was *not conscious* or not fully conscious. But there is a reason I prefer to use the term “unconscious” in this context. Right now, there are many things going on around me (not to mention far away) about which I am not conscious. There are also aspects of my functioning that are no doubt “highly automated,” as Mancuso puts it, and that point the way to dimensions of my cognitive “system” that are being built without my quite knowing it. What I have suggested, however, is that there may be more going on than nonconscious cognitive processing. Here, I will refer to a “psychollage” that will likely be no more palatable to Mancuso than the one I have employed. What the idea of the narrative unconscious suggests, to me at any rate, is that there is a deep “otherness” or *alterity* within the fabric of identity, that alongside the manifest narratives we might tell about ourselves there are indeed latent counter-narratives, narratives that are *different*, that have little to do with “events” or “scenes” or “(my) experiences” but instead with supra-personal structures of meaning and significance (i.e., “culturally-rooted aspects of one’s *history* that have not yet become part of one’s *story*”). This is why the video-tape metaphor is precisely *not* applicable to the notion of the narrative unconscious. There is no point of origin, no site to which to return, no retrieval, no discrete memories “locked by ‘repression’ and prevented from escaping by ‘resistance.’” Acknowledging the seminal contributions of Freud (whose conceptualization of the unconscious is, of course, rather like the one just described [and for good reason]), what I have tried to discuss in my essay is quite different. The “latent,” rather than referring to that which has been buried by the coercive force of repressive censorship, refers to the inchoate, to that which has been lived but not yet told. Perhaps I ought to have formulated this issue more clearly.

Some related issues emerge in Mandy Morgan’s commentary. By all indications, however, her own angle on the notion of the narrative unconscious is a bit more welcoming than Mancuso’s. The reason, it would seem, has to do with exactly that dimension of *alterity* referred to above. On some level, Morgan suggests, my own perspective represents something of an indictment of narratives producing “liberal humanist subjectivities.” By moving beyond both consciousness and choice via the irruption of the narrative unconscious, the way is paved toward a different image of subjectivity and identity, one that is decidedly more “ex-centric,” one might say, than that of the self-possessed individual, fully aware of his or her history and fully in charge of his or her story. Interestingly enough, it is at this juncture that quite disparate theoretical conceptualizations of subjectivity and identity meet: the otherness within, so often the focus of poststructuralist theorizing, would appear to owe a portion of its very existence to *tradition*, in the sense that Gadamer (1982) and others

have spoken about it. One might even say in this context that it is precisely my belonging to tradition that prevents my belonging to myself: insofar as “I” am structured and constituted by that which goes beyond the concrete particulars my personal life, there is an essential obscurity about my own identity and the story of its coming to be.

As sympathetic as I am to much of what Jonathan Raskin says about my essay, there are several places where we part company. Consider the premise with which he begins his discussion of the difference between the attack of September 11th and the attack on Pearl Harbor. According to Raskin, “In a sense, the narrative unconscious contains cultural memories that all members of a society share.” With all due respect to Raskin, never was it said that “all members of a society” share such memories. Nor would it be said, for it is patently not so. More important for present purposes is the question of whether in fact we wish to fully blur the line between personal and cultural memories. In answer to this question, I would say no, we do not. I would also agree that there is “a noteworthy difference between my personal, first-hand memories of the September 11 terrorist attacks and my cultural, second-hand experience of the World War II attack on Pearl Harbor.” This is because he has “lived through” the former and wasn’t yet born during the former. But how “first-hand” was Raskin’s “experience” of September 11th? I do not know the details. It’s quite possible that he was in lower Manhattan at the time. Or perhaps he was able to see smoke off in the distance. But even if we assume that he was “right there” during this catastrophic event, is it not also the case that much of what he “remembers” is, in all likelihood, profoundly colored by what he saw on television, by newspaper and magazine images, and by the countless stories told in the wake of the disaster? My aim here is emphatically not to dilute the intensity of his, or our, response to the event. Nor is it to equate our “memories” of September 11th and of Pearl Harbor; for many of us, the former has a kind of immediacy that the latter does not, and cannot, have; it was contemporaneous with our lives; we saw it “live” (on tv). But is it not the case that much of what we will remember is thoroughly suffused with “second-hand” information? While I do not wish to *fully* blur the line between personal and cultural memories, I certainly do wish to blur this line in a significant way. The reason is straightforward: *it’s blurry*.

As Raskin goes on to suggest, “the primary criticism of social constructionism, which may apply as well to the narrative unconscious, is that it locates the cause of human psychological experience entirely within the social realm.” With all due respect to Raskin once again, this is simply not the case. I have no interest whatsoever in locating human experience entirely within the social realm, and in fact, a good portion of my work (e.g., Freeman 1993, 1999) ar-

gues explicitly *against* doing so. As does the present essay: in speaking of *poiesis*, for instance – the process “of fashioning an identity in and through [the] multiple sources . . . both near and far, that give rise to the self” (p. 304) – I try to ensure that there remains a significant space for the meaning-making “I.” Or, as I have put the matter elsewhere (1999), “even though the ‘tools’ employed in the construction of selfhood are social in nature, the configurational acts through this construction occurs are better conceived in poetic terms, as imaginative labor seeking to give form and meaning to experience” (p. 99). So far, therefore, Raskin and I appear to be of a piece in this context.

I am afraid, however, that we quickly part company once again. According to Raskin, “it is only worth acknowledging the potentially constituting force of cultural constructions if we believe that once aware of them, people are capable of combining, recombining, and altering these constructions in ways they find preferable.” Later on in the same paragraph, he goes on to suggest that “while culturally shared social constructions (as might be found in the narrative unconscious) have a tremendous influence on determining who we are and how we view things, people nevertheless are capable of individually manipulating or resisting these constructions.” As much as I concur with the general sentiment here, I feel the need to add an important qualification. *Sometimes* people are in fact capable of manipulating or resisting constructions of the sort to which Raskin is referring, but certainly not always. If there is anything my Berlin experience told me, it is that my own power of “manipulation” may, in certain situations, be decidedly weaker than I had presumed. It is *not* always possible to combine, recombine, and alter these constructions in ways I find “preferable.” Sometimes, in fact, my own narrative “preferences” are utterly beside the point.

So it is that I have come to think a bit differently about social constructionism and, more importantly, about what might be termed “narrative freedom.” Significant though our own imaginative labor may be in the fashioning of selfhood, it is not to be cordoned off from the social realm. Moreover, narrative freedom – the freedom of the narrative imagination – is not limitless. Rather, it is circumscribed and delimited by innumerable forces both inside and outside the perimeter of the self. Let me be clear about this issue. “Cultural givens” can be, and often are, negotiated by members of a culture. There can also be serious disagreements about what these cultural givens are. To speak of such givens (or, if it is preferred, “constructions”), therefore, is not to claim either non-negotiability or universality. Nor, I hasten to emphasize, would I want to claim that “the best level of analysis is at the nation state level” or “that one’s country of origin is the best indicator of the contents of one’s narrative un-

conscious"! I haven't claimed this and I have no interest in doing so now. The reason is, again, straightforward: *it's not true*.

"Within any country," Raskin rightly points out, "there are many diverse and conflicting discourses and, depending upon how many of these discourses one is exposed to and which are most dominant in one's particular subculture, the cultural worldview one has is likely to vary drastically." This is precisely why I identified myself not only as a citizen of the United States, but as (among other things) a somewhat ambivalent Jewish one, for whom "Berlin" possesses specific meanings that would differ considerably from those of others. Charting the narrative unconscious is not to be restricted to the nation state level. Indeed, it is not to be restricted, ahead of time, to *any* particular level of analysis. It all depends on the specific contours of tradition, which can itself only be specified through narrative – that is, through the process of imaginatively discerning the multiple sources, both near and far, giving rise to the self. There are bound to be surprises.

Let me respond, finally, to Jens Brockmeier's extremely thoughtful meditation on "possible lives." In response to most of his paper, I am tempted to simply say, "I agree." In fact, at one point, I found myself scribbling a note in the margins indicating that Brockmeier's rendition of my ideas was clearer and more compelling than my own! In any case, for the sake of dialogue, I shall address some questions that his commentary has led me to consider. At a most basic level, Brockmeier suggests, my own theoretical perspective is to be situated within that broad stretch of thought that has emphasized that "the area of our conscious perception and self-reflection [is] more limited than what makes up our consciousness" and that "there also is more to the mind than what can be captured by categories such as consciousness, reflection, and intellect." Hence the emergence of the idea of the unconscious and, more generally, the idea that there are somehow "hidden" dimensions of memory and identity. "In this view," Brockmeier writes, "with personal memory being just one moment in the endless and beginningless space of history and historical knowledge, autobiographical consciousness covers only a tiny island of awareness, temporarily surfacing from a sea of unknown and unknowable size." Well said. What, then, does it mean for this tiny island to become larger? Is it a process of bringing more of what is "underneath" to the surface? Is it a process of "growing"? How exactly should we conceptualize the movement posited, of "making the unconscious conscious"? The "sudden breaks" through which one sometimes comes to awareness seem to lead in the direction of positing something anterior, heretofore "hidden" or inchoate, irrupting into being. The "unconscious"

is made “conscious.” But does the metaphor really work? Or does it remain too archeological, too bound up with linearity, singularity, and succession?

Rather than adhering to a model ostensibly based mainly on succession, Brockmeier supplements this model with one based on simultaneity, which “brings into sight the presence of several, indeed, many layers of cultural memory in which we live at the same time, and of which we may become more or less conscious according to the particular historical circumstances under which we remember and forget.” Rather than speaking of the reconstruction of some *one* life, therefore, Brockmeier opts for speaking about *many* “possible lives,” all of which bear upon the challenge of autobiography. “A consequence of this view,” he adds, “is that it is impossible to assume that there is only one story, one true representation of a life.” But what does it mean to speak of “layers”? Is it possible to do so without recourse to the model of succession? And, acknowledging that it may be impossible to assume the existence of a single pristine story, eagerly awaiting “its” chance to be told, doesn’t the idea of somehow fashioning a better, more truthful story – one that is deeper, more comprehensive, more cognizant of the wider world – remain plausible? I am not entirely sure what it would mean to say that I had encountered another *life*, one of many possible ones. It seems to me that, instead, I encountered another dimension of this one, one that has in fact given this one a new *dimensionality* – and, again, an alterity – of which I had previously been (largely) unaware.

Brockmeier continues his commentary by noting that, in “late modern Western societies . . . each person has a set of autobiographies appropriate for different social settings. . . . This cultural repertoire of narrative models and other discursive registers guides our ideas of who we are, and it does so in ways of which we typically are not aware.” He goes on to speak of our having developed a “portfolio of possible identities which are available to be carried out in various cultural situations according to different discursive strategies.” Did I simply reach into this portfolio in Berlin? Did *it* reach into *me*? It is possible that I have misconstrued this portion of Brockmeier’s commentary. But in speaking of possible identities “available to be carried out” and of identity projects “performed” in accordance with situational demands, I wonder whether he has returned to a picture of the subject more “at home,” so to speak, with its plurality and variousness than the model of succession would suggest.

In all fairness, Brockmeier does acknowledge that the two basic models in question “do not exclude each other” and can in fact be combined. I also realize that my characterization of his alleged return to a more comfortable, at-home subject may be challenged. My path, not unlike Freud’s, Brockmeier ventures, is the one with “the clear goal: to turn the id into the ego, the unconscious

into the conscious, the dark side of the soul into a transparent part of mind or self.” My response to this characterization is twofold. My first inclination is to protest: while something has indeed been said about making the unconscious conscious, nothing at all has been said about turning id into ego or about moving into a region of psychic transparency. Moreover, on the basis of what I consider in my essay, the “goal” (should one wish to formulate the matter in these terms) is not at all clear. If anything, it’s the *obscurity* of the entire process that looms largest for me: autobiography in particular, and self-reflection more generally, seem harder than they once did, for the landscape of history, memory, and narrative has become vast – “infinite,” to use Brockmeier’s own term. So much for my first inclination.

My second inclination was to accept the basic characterization, or at least that portion of it that speaks of “illuminating the dark” – if not “through the work of intellect and reason,” then through the work of autobiographical narration itself. Herein lies the main difference between our perspectives. For Brockmeier, “the work of autobiography does not necessarily result in making ‘the’ unconscious conscious but rather in articulating possible *gestalts* of one’s life, or *gestalts* of possible lives.” For me, however, the possibility of making the unconscious conscious and thereby arriving at a deeper, fuller, more comprehensive understanding of one’s history remains. This does not mean that the work of autobiography *necessarily* leads to making the unconscious conscious. Nor does the process entail the supposition that the life lived beforehand was superficial or false (though it certainly can be). But isn’t it fair to say that the pre-Berlin narrative I might have told was less “complete” than the subsequent one and that indeed some small measure of “enlightenment” may have occurred? Please understand: I am not saying that I now have the complete story! Quite the contrary: now, more than ever, I have a clearer sense of the interminable nature of the task. The “pressure of the present,” as Brockmeier puts it, looms large. But so too does the pressure of the past. Judging by the irruption I have described, it can exert more pressure than one might guess.

Earlier on in this response, as well as in the essay itself, I tried to distance myself from the notion that the narrative unconscious involved repression, Freudian-style. This was partly a way of distinguishing my own idea of the unconscious from the dynamic/hydraulic model erected by Freud. The basic distinction stands. But was I too quick to distance myself in this way? For Brockmeier, it appears, I wasn’t quick enough. But I wonder whether there is a certain hastiness entailed in maintaining that, no, *this* version of the unconscious avoids all those thorny problems of psychic places and strata and depths. Perhaps this is what Morgan was suggesting in her own “suspicion”

that “a reformulated notion of dynamic repression might prove useful to theoretical writing on the narrative unconscious.” Is it possible that there is a kind of “cultural repression” at work in processes of the sort I have discussed – the repression, for instance, of particular kinds of stories, ones that deal with modes of subjectivity other than those enshrined in the discourse of liberal humanism? Is it possible that there are narrative depths to be plumbed and that these depths are to be located not only in the dusty attic of personal memory, hidden away like so many *things*, but in the open air of culture, awaiting those startling moments when history suddenly draws near?

The issues become extremely complicated at this point. In employing the language of “awaiting,” as above, one might get the sense that there was some fully formed constellation of unconscious thoughts clamoring for a situation that would release them, turn them loose. This is surely not the case. Had there never *been* a visit to Berlin, there would not have emerged the opportunity to make the narrative unconscious conscious. In fact, one might plausibly argue in this context that the very act of making the narrative unconscious conscious is, at one and the same time, a process of *creating* the narrative unconscious itself: far from merely being “activated,” a constellation of thoughts is formed for the first time. Presumably, this is why Brockmeier privileges the pressure of the present over the pressure of the past. Perhaps it is also why, more generally, the project of making the narrative unconscious conscious, with its inevitable psychoanalytic overtones, has met with some resistance. But again, must there not be some anterior momentum, some “pre-narrative” directedness, for the aforementioned constellation to be formed? Why *this* constellation and not some other?

In closing, I want to return briefly the idea of *poiesis*. As I noted in a recent essay on psychoanalytic *poiesis* and narrative understanding (Freeman 2002), the poet doesn’t simply find already-articulated meanings in the world. Nor does he or she simply make them. “Rather,” I suggested, “the poet is engaged in a process in which meaning is at once found *and* made – or, to be more explicit still, in which *meaning is found through being made*” (p. 24; italics in original). Something similar may be said about the project of autobiography. That *poiesis* is involved is clear enough; without the work of the narrative imagination, emerging out of the pressure of the present, there can be no autobiography. But this very process of autobiographical *poiesis* is, finally, in the service of disclosing or “unconcealing” (see Heidegger 1971) what is past. Perhaps there is the need to place greater emphasis on the term “making” in considering the process of making the narrative unconscious conscious. This should not, however, lead to the elision of the remaining terms of the process.

References

- Freeman, M. (1993). *Rewriting the self: History, memory, narrative*. London: Routledge.
- Freeman, M. (1999). Culture, narrative, and the poetic construction of selfhood. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 12, 99–116.
- Freeman, M. (2002). The burden of truth: Psychoanalytic poesis and narrative understanding. In W. Patterson (Ed.), *Strategic narrative: New perspectives on the power of personal and cultural stories* (pp. 9–27). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1982). *Truth and method*. New York: Crossroad.
- Heidegger, M. (1971). *Poetry, language, thought*. New York: Harper Colophon.

Considering counter narratives

Michael Bamberg

Clark University, USA

In this chapter I endorse the view that countering dominant and hegemonic narratives is the flip-side of being complicit. Rather than pitting one strategy against the other, I will argue that in narratives-in-interaction both are made use of to bring off and more intelligibly manage emergent identities. Consequently, the domain for analyzing counter positions is the social realm of interaction in which narratives are implemented rather than the stories per se. (*Counter Narratives, Master Narratives, Complicity, Narratives-in-Interaction, Positioning Analysis*)

When Molly Andrews originally approached me with the proposal for a special issue of *Narrative Inquiry*, I was very excited. For one, I consider the topic of counter narratives as extremely relevant since it brings narrative research closer to the field of practical applications and opens up the possibility of using narrative research in the service of liberating and emancipating agenda. The other, more personal, reason was that I had tried my own hand in the analysis of counter narratives a while back with a number of graduate students from my home institution (Bamberg 1997; Talbot, Bibace, Bokhour, & Bamberg 1996), but had not been able to return to this issue. I encouraged Molly and was looking forward to reading the manuscripts. Little did I know about my involvement with this issue. Because when it came to eliciting the commentaries for the six articles that Molly had in hand, and when asking around among my friends and colleagues in the field of narrative research, I was surprised about the willingness and enthusiasm with which the articles were met. Many more commentaries poured in than I was able to accommodate in a single issue of *Narrative Inquiry*, and so we decided to publish the rest in the issue that followed. In addition, in order to keep the articles and all commentaries together, Molly and I had planned to edit them into a book in which readers had access to them as a unit. We also decided to give the original six authors the opportunity to answer the flood of comments that had hailed them. Fi-

nally, having all the contributions together, I couldn't help but collect some of my own thoughts and write them down in order to share them. And although I consider this chapter a kind of 'postscript', written as the final contribution for this volume, it does by no means lend conclusion to the topic of counter narratives. Counter narratives as a topic is certainly to be continued, and the chapters in this book as well as the commentaries and the responses all document clearly that we have made advances by entering this dialogue, but that more is needed.

Our earlier work with counter and master narratives (Bamberg 1997; Talbot et al. 1996) is an exemplar of a good number of proposals that brought discourse-analytic psychology to the study of narratives. It was a fine-grained analysis of the discursive claims of two women making an attempt to come across as responsible and 'normal.' More specifically, we went out to tackle the two questions: "(1) What is the source of identity claims that resist dominant discourses, and how can such claims be recognized in personal accounts? (2) How are these counter claims put to use? (Talbot et al. 1996, p. 226). And with regard to this latter issue, we argued, "we seek not only to describe how such counter claims are appropriated and employed in situated discourse, but also to examine what specific purpose they may serve for the narrator" (ibid.). We also had stated clearly that "our study is a preliminary exploration of these questions; it is not intended to lead to definitive answers, but rather to stimulate further investigation of these and similar themes" (ibid.). Hollway (1984), Davies and Harré (1990), Riessman (1993), and an array of others had made more elaborate and highly successful advances in similar directions years before we started thinking along those lines. However, at least retrospectively, looking back from what we claim to know today, it seems as if our thrust in this direction was one of the few that tried to sketch the possibility of comprehending alternatives that run counter to hegemonic ideologies as micro-discursive accomplishments. This was new at that time, at least to us in the discipline of psychology; and exciting. Nevertheless, and again looking back from what we claim to know today, the 1996 article still appears very much caught up in the attempt to clearly delineate what counts as 'counter' in individuals' stories, ascribing to them a relatively stable fixity located in the narrator's individual consciousness. I now believe, however, that this was a simplification that may point in the wrong direction when it comes to do political consciousness raising. I will return to this point in my concluding remarks.

This chapter is designed to further the dialogue that this volume as a whole has opened up. It is divided into three parts. First, I will discuss the notion of narrative, particularly of master narrative, and how it forms the backdrop when

it comes to considering counter narratives. Here, I will foreground the principled openness for the perception of different possibilities and for improvised courses of actions and events in the telling of stories. This will, I hope, prepare the ground for the integration of stories into the *real* world of everyday interactions, where they come to existence, that is, in the social realm of interaction. In my second section, I will consider how we can think more productively about the construction of counter claims by viewing them as the flip-sides of master narratives, especially in how participants bring off and manage claims about themselves. Looking at narratives-in-interaction, we may be better off to see how complicity and countering are activities that go hand-in-hand, making it difficult to specify a *tout court* distinction between them. Then, in a third section, I will elaborate on the interactive realm as the territory where counter as well as master narratives emerge in co-presence and as discursive *process*. It is here, where I will briefly present *positioning analysis*, as a way to analyze counter narratives in their proximity to master narratives.

Narrative and claiming a sense of self

I would like to start with a question that in most of the contributions to this volume seems to have been taken for granted but in my opinion requires a bit more dialoguing: ‘Why narrative?’ What is special about ‘narrative’ that potentially elevates *counter narratives* to an interesting and probably even important topic of inquiry? Is narrative in any way a privileged genre that makes the inquiry into how it can function to draw up positions that can be characterized as ‘counter’ special? And furthermore, what is our fascination with *counter narratives*? What is it that is countered, and why? And why is countering (potentially) more interesting than complicity? – Starting with the latter question, investigations of counter strategies seem to be guided by a deep concern with power and hegemony. If it is possible to delineate more clearly where and how discourses that run counter to hegemonic discourses emerge, and if it is possible to describe the fabric of these counter discourses in more detail, we should be able to make headway in designing alternative strategies to public, institutionalized power relations, resulting in more egalitarian reciprocity and universal moral respect. But how can narratives figure productively in this?

A brief look at the exchanges between the original authors and commentators and the differing approaches to ‘narrative’ yields the possibility of different answers. Indeed, in my own theorizing about narrative I have taken the typical ambiguous route around answering these kinds of questions (cf. Bamberg

1999a, 1999b, 1999c): Narrative is *not* a privileged discourse genre when compared to other discourse genres used in everyday interactions. It stands as one genre among many others (such as descriptions, argumentations or explanations) and can be analyzed according to the ways the 'narrative format' differs or (functionally) overlaps with these other speech genres. In ordinary, everyday discourse we employ narratives just like any other discourse genre in the attempt to make sense and signal this 'sense' to others. As such, there is nothing special to narratives that lends 'extra strength' to the possibility of designing counter strategies to hegemony and power.

Looking at narrative from a different angle, however, there seems to be something special to their implementation, even at the level of mundane, conventional everyday interactions, because narratives order characters in space and time and, therefore, as a format, narrative lends itself not only to connecting past events to present states (as well as imagined, desired states and events) but also to revealing character transformations in the unfolding sequence from past to future. In other words, narratives, as a particular speech genre, may be able to offer something to the presentation of selves (and others) that other speech genres don't do so eloquently and directly. As such, narratives provide the possibility of a format that has become the privileged way of fashioning self and identity, at least in 'modern times,' which is open to a certain fluidity, to improvisation, and to the design of alternatives.

It is clear that the 'turn to narrative' in the social sciences is grounded in this second assumption. It is built on a number of analogies between story, biography and life. And although lives are lived, and stories are told, and although there is in general an open-endedness to lives, 'narrative coherence' is seen as providing the guiding post for the living of lives (Ricoeur 1992). It serves as a structure that is added on to life (White 1981), enabling the self to locate oneself in a 'narrative whole' with a beginning, a middle and an end (MacIntyre 1981). This analogy between story and life has enabled social scientists, and I think in a number of very interesting ways, to start innovative investigations into the fabric of lives and experience, and thereby into the construction of subjectivity. The 'life-story' and 'biographic' approach to how people draw up a sense of self and identity clearly bespeaks of this tendency. And although a host of these approaches work with the underlying assumption that a 'good life' is a life that can be told as a 'coherent life,' displaying a clear sense of one's past and future orientation, these approaches are apt, and often even designed, to reveal discrepancies between the told and the lived, and to reveal the fragmentations and the unknown in the narrative charting of self and identity.

However, this general orientation of bringing narrative and lives into closer proximity and analytic focus has come with some costs. Let me just mention a few. First, I think it should be noted the narrative design of one's past into what is currently relevant to 'the present' (and a potential, imagined future) is by no means an everyday, mundane thing to do. Rather, it is an exception, and, I would like to add, a very special exception: one that tends to stylize a particular notion of self and identity, because nobody stands in front of a mirror, addressing oneself (as one's audience) with the story of one's life. Not only do we not have time for this type of activity, but, in addition, what purpose would it serve? I only can think of two types of situations in which people come close to engaging in narrativizing their lives to themselves as (primary) audience: the literary author who sits down to write for an imagined, generalized readership (who is argued to represent a sense of the narrator's self by some literary critics), and the (research and/or therapeutic) interview that is supposed to reveal the storied sequence of events representing the lives of participants/clients. What these situations share is the design of the audience as co-operative in a particular way so that the interaction can result in bringing 'out' (in the sense of revealing) not only what happened, but also a somewhat authentic sense of the person who does the telling. This orientation seems to be tantamount to a privileging of the personal and confessional over the social-interactional; as if there is a layer *beyond* or *behind* the self as 'revealed' in everyday settings. I will return to this point later, but what becomes bleached out to a certain degree in this type of approach is the challenging and confrontational nature of everyday interactions in which stories are contested, followed by other stories that modify the claims made, shifts into new domains, and the like.

In addition, a position from which a narrator reviews all potential event-candidates for one's life story and picks out only those that are made relevant, and then begins to sequence and relate them in a cohesive (not yet necessarily coherent) way, is only possible from a very reflective vantage point. The sorting of events that leads up to a 'me' in the sense of "this is a sequence of 'I-positions' in the there-and-then, leading up to a 'me' as who I want to be understood", requires a somewhat *conscious* or at least *analytic* focus on consistencies across time, places, and actions in which the 'I' admits to have been agentively (or in a life of suffering and victimization: inagentively) engaged in. As Sartwell (2000) contests, and in my opinion correctly, this view of the subject as agent and experiencer underplays seriously the lived moment, the way lived moments are actually 'sensed' and experienced, and only counts moments that gain their 'quality' in light of surrounding moments which in concert add up to a meaningful temporal plot configuration. As such, it may be argued that

the attempt to compose life stories actually ‘invalidates’ life the way it is actually lived. One way to counter this all-too-reflective (and somewhat distant) narrator is the call for the charting of a ‘narrative unconscious’ in order to import the possibility of gaining access to ‘unexplored’ (Freeman, this volume) or ‘deeper layers’ (Brockmeier, this volume) of experiences. Again, although this is certainly a possibility, particularly relevant for therapeutic encounters, it detours around and circumvents what is happening in everyday storytelling, in situations where we seemingly “naturally” share stories with one another, where we contest and negotiate them.

As a third point, and this is closely connected with the previous points just made, ‘small stories,’ the ones we tell in passing, in our everyday encounters with each other (stories which I would like to consider the ‘*real*’ stories of our *lived* lives), become secondary to a degree that they appear irrelevant for the biography researcher who is interested (only) in what narrators pick to integrate into their life stories. This predilection has had practical implications for the kinds of analyses that, according to Ochs and Capps (2001), privilege certain possibilities of narrative dimensions and underplay others: (i) with regard to the dimension of ‘tellership,’ conventional narrative analysis has privileged ‘one active teller’ in contrast to ‘multiple active co-tellers;’ (ii) high ‘tellability’ has been over-explored at the expense of low ‘tellability;’ (iii) detached ‘embeddedness’ from surrounding talk and activity has been emphasized over a more contextual and situational ‘embeddedness;’ (iv) a more certain and constant ‘moral stance’ has been assumed as the default case in contrast to a more uncertain and fluid one; and (v) with respect to linearity and temporality, the closed temporal and causal order has been privileged over a more open temporal or spatial ordering. These, in my opinion unfortunate, tendencies – though not in any way caused by a focus of narrative inquiry on biographies and lives – nevertheless come in the wake of an otherwise productive inquiry into the study of lives through the use of narratives.

The argument that the employment of narratives as a somewhat privileged territory for drawing up selves and identities in life stories (or biographic accounts) comes with potential costs, should, however, not detract from the more central and relevant issue that narratives are employed (in everyday interactions as well as in institutionalized situations) to make claims about ourselves and our identities. First of all, this is relevant with regard to the possibility of grounding characters in a spatial and temporal origin and developing them in terms of “*their*” movement through space and time – up to the point that is relevant for why the story is shared at the time of interaction. Furthermore, to portray these characters as agents (agentively) or undergoers (inagentively)

opens up the possibility for the presentation of characters as ‘becoming’, that is, as undergoing processes of transformation – as for instance from being inagentive and passive at one location and time coordinate of one’s life, to becoming involved and agentive with the crossing into new spatio-temporal territory (as in immigrating to a new country or becoming a father). The possibility of arranging the interplay of space, time and character transformations along these lines is a critical cultural and historical accomplishment, since it has opened up an opportunity to overcome epic ascriptivism and depict characters as in flux and searching; searching to fulfill desires, searching for a good life, searching one’s <real> identity.

In addition, and on top of this spatio-temporal foundation of a storied world, characters are drawn up with plans and goals in relationship to other characters (who come with their own plans and goals), creating a social world within which individual characters emerge as protagonists versus antagonists, as good versus bad, as heroes versus villains. In other words, the perspective from where these characters are created as interacting with one another is not only always value-laden but presents characters as engaging in conflict and struggle over these values. Again, in narrative, the world of the characters is not written in stone, it appears improvised and is open to different interpretations. The story could have gone otherwise: if particular events had not happened, the here-and-now would look different; if a character had engaged in x, instead of y, the chain of events would have taken a different turn.

Consequently, a presentation of story characters with the potential to change over time and across different locales, as acting and interacting in a social world with others that is open to interpretation and variation, can serve as an excellent tool to present one’s own claims as to what is valued and relevant to conversation partners in social interactions who share some but not necessarily all of one’s own predilections. In other words, moving into the social realm of sharing narratives, where values and interpretations are in the process of being put together, gives excellent grounds to do rhetorical work of convincing others of one’s own point of orientation, and of why one sees things this way. Stories do exemplary work in detailing stances and moral in the form of character deployments in interactive settings.

An excellent example is presented in Munsch’s (1980) story of *The Paper Bag Princess* which leaves intact the sequence of events of the traditional heroic story line in which the protagonist saves *his* object of sexual desire, but switches the characters (the princess is the heroine and the prince the one ‘being saved’) and changes the ending (the heroine skips off into the sunset alone and the story ends with the words: ‘They didn’t get married after all’). According to

Davies and Harré (1990) this improvisation turns the traditional master narrative around and opens up a feminist reading. However, it should be noted that a story of male hegemony (for instance) does not automatically transform into a counter story by the simple replacement of male with female characters: The way characters are being positioned vis-à-vis one another in order to design an overall orientation that can be characterized as complicit with dominant narratives or counter to them is far more complex.

Up to now, I have deliberately avoided the possibility of narratives in which the speaker thematizes him- or herself as a character in the story as in what is often called 'personal narrative.' The reasons for doing this are simple: Primarily, I wanted to show that stories in principle are rhetorical tools for point or claim making, irrespective of whether they are 'revealing' personal and private issues about the speaker. By entering the narrative realm the point or claim that is under construction becomes contextualized in the form of exemplary actions by exemplary characters that are appropriated (from a narrator's point of view) to "act out" and make currently relevant the claim the speaker intends to convey for the here-and-now of the conversation. This principle holds whether the speaker talks about him-/herself or about others. However, inserting the self of the teller into the story line opens the door to the possibility of an 'I' that has been or even still 'is' in flux, is open to interpretation, and can be viewed from different angles. The conversational point of presenting different 'I's' at different times and places, subjected to different character constellations, can be highly effective in constructing a particular understanding of 'me' as speaker in particular conversational contexts. In other words, the sequence of I-positions in the story-world are the means to bring off a claim with regard to 'this is the way I want you to understand me', here and now – 'the *I* as a character who has emerged in the story-world' is made relevant to the '*me* as the speaker in the here-and-now.' This differentiation between the self as character in the story and the self as speaker (animator and/or author) is extremely important, because we all too often tend to collapse them too quickly in our analyses. However, although there is no principled difference between drawing up characters in a story world in which the self of the speaker figures as character from drawing up story worlds in which he/she is not, I would like to concede that the former usually has more at stake in terms of anticipating and preventively fending off potential objections by the audience.

In sum, narratives always *reveal* the speaker's identity. The narrative point-of-view from where the characters are ordered in the story world gives away – and most often is meant to give away – the point-of-view from where the speaker represents him-/herself. By offering a narrative, the speaker lodges a

claim for him/herself in terms of who he/she is. In narratives in which the speaker talks about or even thematizes him/her-self, this is no more nor less the case. However, constructing a self as a character in the story world and entering this construction as a claim for the self of the speaker requires 'additional' rhetorical work in order to be heard 'correctly'. It is this 'additional rhetorical work' that elevates 'personal narratives' into the realm of interesting data, and not the fact that speakers are revealing something that counts as more intimate or 'personal.' It is along these lines that I would like to argue that narratives told in everyday interactions always lodge claims about the speaker's self, and in their attempts to convince and make these claims intelligible, speakers incorporate counter claims vis-à-vis what they think could constitute possible misunderstandings.

Narratives and counter claims

One of the hot spots of the dialogue between the original authors and their commentators, flaring up again in the responses to the commentators, is the question concerning what it is that is actually 'countered', when considering counter narratives. The dialogue made apparent that there are assumptions lurking in the background concerning notions of 'dominant' or 'master narratives' (also variably called plotlines, master plots, dominant discourses, or simply story lines or cultural texts) that are taken to provide the social locations where and how subjects are positioned (Hollway 1984; Davies & Harré 1990; Harré & van Langenhove 1999). In this section, I will briefly discuss (a) what master narratives are, that is, how they are taken to function as the backdrop against which counter narratives can be drawn up; and (b) how these master narratives can be invoked by speakers and set up against what counts as 'counter.' An additional issue that I will touch on is the role played by *narratives* (and narrativizing – as the activity of engaging in narratives) in this process of countering master narratives.

Master narratives

In a general sense, there seem to be two different interpretations of the term 'master narratives'; one claiming (in a more narrow sense) the existence of master narratives that delineate how narrators position themselves with their story; the other arguing in a much broader sense that speakers are principally subjected to grand récits and metanarratives from which there seems to be no

escape. General cultural expectations of what constitutes a 'normal pregnancy' (Throsby, this volume, Talbot et al. 1996), of mothers being blamed by their children (Andrews, this volume), or of older people as asexual (Jones, this volume), seem to be master narratives of the former kind. They are 'frames' according to which courses of events can easily be plotted, simply because one's audience is taken to 'know' and accept these courses. Countering these expectancies is not necessarily an easy accomplishment for those affected, but there seems to be nothing that prevents us from viewing certain event chains (story lines) as simplified, idealized or simply not holding universally, particularly when it comes to one's own specific case or experience. In addition, these so-called culturally accepted frames most often are fragmented and come in ways that make it easy to set them up as problematic and not at all conclusive or consistent. Thus, one possible strategy to counter these frames is by way of appealing to other frames that are contradictory, and to presenting one's own experience along those lines.

However, when it comes to the grand récits or metanarratives, the way they are evoked by Bauman and Briggs (2003), Latour (1987, 1993), or Lyotard (1979) in order to explain how much the modern mind is engulfed in pre-existent sociocultural forms of interpretation, it is not as easy to simply point to the historical genesis (and cultural specificity), and the openness to change and potential contradictoriness of such récits. The answer to the question whether (and more importantly, how so) the subject can resist Foucault's 'regimes of power and knowledge,' where subjectivity is the outcome of discursive practices, or oppose and subvert Bourdieu's 'habitus,' with its implications of a 'grammar of actions without a subject,' is not straightforward. Here, it is impossible to 'simply' point to *my* personal experience that doesn't match up with these kinds of master narratives.

This situation becomes more complicated in two ways. First, master narratives are setting up sequences of actions and events as routines and as such have a tendency to 'normalize' and 'naturalize' – with the consequence that the more we as subjects become engaged in these routines, the more we become subjected to them. In this sense, master narratives surely constrain and delineate the agency of subjects, seemingly reducing the range of their actions. At the same time, however, it should not be forgotten that these master narratives also give guidance and direction to the everyday actions of subjects; without this guidance and sense of direction, we would be lost. It is in this way that master or dominant narratives are not automatically hegemonic and that complicity with them does not automatically result in being complicit with or supportive of hegemonic power-knowledge complexes.

As a further point of complication, those smaller, everyday-employed master narratives are part of the fabric of such grand récits, and vice versa. They do not come clear-cut in these two categories, but are thoroughly interwoven with each other. The question lurking behind this concerns the nature or fabric of the master narratives (the way they present themselves as ideologies, plot constructions, story lines, and discourses), as well as the social and individual forces that have the force to change master narratives. Of particular relevance is the problem of resources that enable the individual subject to draw up positions that contribute and ultimately lead to (historical) change. Central to this discussion is the problem of how dominant and powerful such master narratives are, and how locally situated narrating practices are either forced to be complicit or able to open up territory to bring about any liberation and emancipation from them – which some have considered as just ‘a hope’ or even ‘a nostalgic leftover’ of the master narratives of Modernity, with only small local ‘rupturing effects’ being possible. In my opinion, there are two options to viewing the subject vis-à-vis these master narratives, that is, *not* as swallowed and absorbed by them: Either, we consider the subject as ‘rational’, equipped with the ability to step outside its own practices and potentially becoming reflective, critical, countering and subversive; and as a consequence we can begin listing the (contextual) factors that turn this ability on and into an ‘awareness’ of being subjected and constrained. Or, and this is the option I have already hinted at and will elaborate further below, we build ‘*doing* being critical’, countering and even being subversive more directly into the fabric of our daily interactions.

Invocations of master narratives

I would like to catch up with the concession that speakers constantly invoke master narratives, and that many, possibly even most, of the master narratives employed remain inaccessible to our conscious recognition and transformation. Master narratives structure how the world is intelligible, and therefore permeate the petit narratives of our everyday talk. If this is true, it follows that speakers generally and principally are compliant and only rarely engage in resisting or countering the grid of intelligibility provided by what is taken for granted. The question then, of when and why we engage in counter narratives, is extremely relevant, and I wish I could contribute more to an answer. However, the examples compiled in this volume as well as my earlier work (Bamberg 1997; Talbot et al. 1996) remain largely descriptive by delineating and outlining in fine-grained detail the processes of how master narratives are invoked so that counter narratives can come to existence, that is, to describe these processes as

they invoke potentially liberating and emancipating agenda. Consequently, any possible answers to the 'why-question' have to await more refined observations and descriptions of the minutiae of engagements in countering practices.

Let me, nevertheless, reiterate how characters in local stories can be repositioned to transform a stereo-typical dominant narrative of the heroic male prince who battles the dragon to save the beautiful princess so that he can possess her. This hegemonic plot line is employed so it can be countered and transformed into a feminist reading. In *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch 1980; discussed in more detail in Davies & Harré 1990); Elizabeth, originally introduced as "the beautiful princess," undergoes a transformation into a dirty, 'normal' girl (the girl dressed in a *paper bag*), who outsmarts a dragon in order to save her prince. But at the end she decides not to marry 'her prince,' because he insists on maintaining his male, hegemonic gaze of her as 'his beautiful princess.' As I had mentioned, the sequence of events is kept intact, although minor changes had to be adopted and they had to be carefully crafted to keep the character in line with other master narratives (e.g., girls as non-violent) and maintain intelligibility: for instance, the dragon was not defeated by physical force but by the force of artful smartness. Overall, *The Paper Bag Princess* documents nicely, how existent (master) plot lines can be appropriated and transformed by inserting 'counter characters,' that is, characters that traditionally had to fill slots in 'subordinate roles.' However, these counter characters have to be brought off and carefully managed in order to leave intact, and be complicit with, other existing (master) plot lines.

A similar strategy is to counter the dominant narrative with personal information that only the speaker has access to as in the strategy employed by Mary in the work I alluded to earlier (Bamberg 1997; Talbot et al. 1996). Mary characterizes the expert physicians as narrow-minded and ultimately not knowing what she knows. She characterizes herself as knowing-best so that she can successfully lodge the claim of a rational and responsible identity: one who is doing the right thing in being pregnant, countering the medical master narrative through which she is defined as putting herself (and her unborn fetus) irresponsibly at risk. In analogy to *The Paper Bag Princess*, Mary brings off and carefully manages characters (here herself and her best friends who support her) who counter the characters traditionally in charge of the sequence of events. This way, Mary succeeds in reorienting her audience to an alternative reading. Her recourse to 'the personal' as something only she has access to, is carefully managed, since it can potentially incriminate herself. The positioning of herself as a woman in charge (of the sequence of events) and as a responsi-

ble person rhetorically preempts and deflects possible counters to the hearable trouble such orientations may cause in her audience.

These two short examples, along with the wealth of examples presented in this volume, may suffice to show that there are always certain aspects of dominant stories that are left intact, while others are reshaped and reconfigured. Speakers never totally step outside the dominating framework of the master narrative, but always remain somewhat complicit and work with components and parts of the existent frame 'from within.' Since narratives provide a landscape for the perception of different possibilities, the presentation of the sequence of events leaves room for improvisation and a careful management of perspectives that is sensitive to possible counters from the audience. Speakers do not present a simple counter story but seem to be juggling several story lines simultaneously. It is in this sense that counter narratives always operate on the edge of disputability and require a good amount of interactional subtlety and rhetorical finessing on the part of the speaker.

Analyzing counter narratives

In the previous two sections I have tried to subtly change the consideration of counter narratives from a clear-cut way of identifying master and counter narratives as oppositional stances to a more complex, though, as I hope, analytically more interesting and challenging, territory. The questions are no longer whether speakers are complicit with existing master narratives or whether they are countering them. Neither is the question whether they actually engage in countering, and if so, to what degree and from whose perspective, the analyst's or the participant's? I have gradually tried to replace these questions by how speakers employ narratives to juggle claims as to who they are that are hearable *both* as complicit with and as countering. In other words, the question has shifted to *how* they create a sense of self and identity that maneuvers simultaneously in between being complicit and countering established narratives that give guidance to one's actions but at the same time constrain and delineate one's agency. It is with this slightly different orientation that I want to discuss issues of narrative analysis that are sensitive to counter narratives.

Where (and How) do counter narratives emerge?

Before discussing analytic issues regarding counter narratives, let me briefly bring up the problem of going out and finding or eliciting counter narratives.

Again, I want to return to and discuss in a bit more detail (so I can critically reflect on), our original study published in 1996 (Talbot et al. 1996). As we made clear in our introductory remarks of the article, the interviews conducted with expectant mothers who had been diagnosed with medical conditions (that placed them and their unborn children at risk during their pregnancies) were research interviews. They were conducted by a female interviewer in her late twenties and took place in the cotext of a larger project on "Normal and High Risk Pregnancies." And since the interviewees had already successfully (though with complications) given birth before, but were pregnant again at the time of the interview, they were expected in their claims to oscillate between master and counter narratives, or, as we called it then, "being 'caught' within this process of self-reflection and self-reconstruction" (1996, p. 228 [Footnote 4]). Thus, it would be fair to say that these agenda, which are clearly 'research agenda', were on the table, so to speak, for both interviewer and interviewee. And it would also be reasonable to expect that these agenda were 'attended to' not only in the way the interviewer moved into the topic of pregnancy and diabetes and the interviewee as following up on this interest, but also in the way event sequences were chosen and arranged and characters positioned vis-à-vis one another, because they 'needed to do their job.' In other words, the stories shared and the way they addressed what can be assumed to be 'master' and 'counter' are reflective of those research agenda that governed the local conversation.

In spite of the fact that we as authors alluded to this issue, it is remarkable how little of our original analysis actually attended to it. Instead of analyzing how interviewer and interviewee 'co-produce' – what is considered a 'participant creation' that falls under the header of 'politics of enunciation', and is part of the 'discursive accomplishment of situated identities', to use the terminology of Bell, Coombes & Morgan, Rich, and Murakami (all this volume) – we focused on rather decontextualized excerpts as if they simply reflected the interviewee's claims in the form of pre-existing meanings, beliefs, and practices that were teased out by a skilled interviewer and expressed by the interviewee in the here-and-now of the local interview. Unfortunately, analyses like ours may have contributed to the (erroneous) assumption that counter narratives (or complicit narratives) are orientations that people 'have', and when in the right situation, such as research or therapeutic interviews, these counter orientations pop out as confessions and can be taken as reflective of the authentic selves of the interviewees.

Frankly, if we were to go back to the same data and do a thorough re-analysis, it should be possible to show in detail how the challenges to the in-

interviewee's claims are not only working from existing master discourses as represented macro-structurally, but become 'real' in the interactive situation. It is within this local interaction, that institutional research agenda are forcing their way into the structure of the situation, in order to become 'attended to' by the participants of the interaction. Please note that this is not meant to deprive the interviewer of her interview skills. Even if the interviewer has (successfully?) moved out of her research role and attempted to slip into a co-conversationalist role, and in spite of the ethical issues that are lurking in this kind of practice (see Bamberg 1991; Bamberg & Budwig 1992), the claims of the interviewee will still be hearable as preempting and resisting potential interpretations on the interviewer's part. The interviewee's oscillation between being complicit with and countering aspects of the master narratives of pregnancy and (Western) medicine is her way of carefully preempting and deflecting possible counters from the interviewer. Not only does the interviewee construct herself as the responsible woman who knows, but also the interviewer as the (young) woman who does not know (yet) but ought to know for her own good as a woman and future mother. Showing how these identities emerge in the data as part of 'doing' complicity *and* resistance as interactive accomplishments would clearly do more justice to the data than we did in our original analysis in 1996.

As such, I am not disputing the right to use interviews (or focus-group-like group discussions) to 'elicit' counter narratives because they may be open to the charge of 'importing' research agenda that are reflected in the stories reported. And although it would be favorable to have more data on the emergence of counter narratives in every-day talk, as in private conversations and public meetings, there is nothing that prevents us from using interviews as elicitation techniques and analyzing them as interviews. Of course, interviews, just like any other talk-in-interaction, are no innocent windows into participants' interiors. Rather, they are in need of being analyzed as interactive, social, and cultural practices, which entails a close scrutiny of how such responses are put to use, as opposed to speculating about the attitudes that they putatively reflect. Rather than seeing master and counter narratives as mentally held properties or convictions, either/or, and slow to move, I propose to view them as talk's business, in and outside of interview settings. As a result, we are fully interested in the inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambiguities that arise as our interviewees try to find ways to mitigate the interactive trouble of being misconstrued. Rather than seeing these inconsistencies and equivocations as an analytic nuisance, they are exactly what are most interesting. They offer a way into examining how interviewees are bringing off and managing their identity claims (Bamberg, in press). Seen this way, they no longer appear as contradic-

tions or inconsistencies, but rather as openings into which we as analysts can delve and discover how such attending to multiple story lines and rhetorical finessing between them is used to work up identity claims that do not appear immediately obvious, naïve, and challengeable.

Positioning

For the purpose of analytic work with narratives, I had begun to apply in some of my previous work the concept of ‘positioning’ (Bamberg 1997, 2004; Talbot et al. 1996). This concept has gained current relevancy in theorizing identity and subjectivity, where ‘positions’ are typically conceptualized as grounded in master narratives but opening up and conserving some territory for individual agency. Elaborating on Butler’s (1990, 1995) notion of performing identities in acts of ‘self-marking,’ I have tried to advance a view of positioning that is more concerned with self-reflection, self-criticism, and agency (all ultimately orientated toward the possibility of *self-revisions*). In so doing, I suggest that we clearly distinguish between the ‘being positioned’ orientation, which is attributing a rather deterministic force to master narratives, and a more agentive notion of the subject as ‘positioning itself,’ in which the discursive resources or repertoires are not a priori pre-established but rather are interactively accomplished. ‘Being positioned’ and ‘positioning oneself’ are two metaphoric constructs of two very different agent-world relationships: the former with a world-to-agent direction of fit, the latter with an agent-to-world direction of fit. One way to overcome this rift is to argue that both operate concurrently in a kind of dialectic as subjects engage in narratives-in-interaction and make sense of self and others in their stories.

In taking this orientation, the ‘who-am-I?’ (identity) question does not presuppose a unitary subject as the ground for its investigation. Rather, the agentive and interactive subject is the ‘point of departure’ for its own empirical instantiation (Butler 1995, p. 446) – as a subject that is constantly seeking to legitimate itself, situated in language practices and juggling several story lines simultaneously. The analysis of how speakers actively and agentively position themselves in talk starts from the assumption that the intelligibility of their claims is situationally and interactively accomplished. However, since this intelligibility is the result of what is being achieved, and therefore inherently oriented to, we begin our actual narrative analysis by paying close attention to the ways in which the represented world of characters and event sequences is drawn up. Here we attempt to spot descriptions and evaluations of the characters and analyze the time and space coordinates in the way that these relate to social

categories and their action potential. From there we move into a closer analysis of the way these referential and representational aspects of story construction are assembled in their sequential arrangement among the participants of the conversation. The assumption that governs this step is that particular descriptions and evaluations are chosen for the interactive purpose of fending off and mitigating misinterpretations. The descriptions and evaluations rhetorically function to convey how speakers signal to their audience how they want to be understood.

In working from these two levels of positioning (one with respect to the content of what the story supposedly is about, the other with respect to the coordination of the interaction between speaker and audience), we are better situated to make assumptions about the ideological master narratives within which the speakers are positioning a sense of self, that is, as signalling complicity in order to mark off segments that can be countered. The analysis of the first two positioning levels is intended to progressively lead to a differentiation of how speakers work up a position as complicit with and/or countering dominant discourses. It is at this juncture that we come full circle by showing how subjects position themselves in relation to discourses by which they are positioned. In other words, analysing talk in interaction along these lines enables us to circumvent the aporia of two opposing subject theories, one in which the subject is determined by existing narratives, the other in which the subject is the only ground from which narratives are constructed.

Ironically, this way of analysing talk-in-interaction for the purpose of gaining an understanding of how interactants establish a sense of self (*in stories-in-interaction*) resembles closely what in developmental theorizing is termed 'microgenesis' (see Bamberg, *in press*). This approach focalizes the momentary history of human sense-making in the form of emergent processes. It assumes that developmental changes (such as *learning* or *better understanding*) emerge as individuals create and accomplish interactive tasks in everyday conversations. In the empirical data discussed in this volume, the interactive space between the participants, whether situated in interviews or other social locations, *is* the arena in which identities are micro-genetically performed and consolidated and where they can be micro-analytically accessed. Here I am borrowing from developmental (Bamberg 2000; Catan 1986; Riegel 1975; Werner 1957; Werner & Kaplan 1984; Wertsch & Stone 1978), conversation-analytic (Schegloff 1982; Sacks 1995; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974), and 'communities of practice' approaches (Eckert 1989, 2002; Hanks 1996; Wenger 1998) to analyze the sequential and relational structure of narratives-in-interaction, for the purpose of inquiring not only into the developing sense of self and others,

but also into what is shared as the cultural background of sense-making. This does not imply that such ‘senses’ of self, other and generalized other (culture) do not exist previously to or outside the discourse situation. However, for analyzing narratives-in-interaction, I am suggesting the bracketing out of these categories so that we can be open to the analysis of what the participants make currently relevant in the interactive setting. In entering this orientation from a socio-linguistic and ethnomethodological vantage point, I am proposing considering counter narratives as brought off and carefully managed in the social realm of interaction rather than as stories that have a previous existence in the mind or the life of speakers.

Concluding remarks (to open up)

By imposing my own view on how to work with master and counter narratives upon the implied reader, and having the opportunity to do this in the concluding chapter of this volume, I did not mean to close the dialogue that has been facilitated so wonderfully by the original six contributions and picked up in the numerous commentaries and the answers to them. Rather, I understand my attempts to demystify master narratives (as automatically hegemonic) and personal narratives (as automatically countering) as a potential revival of the dialogue and the controversies that ensued in the course of this volume. In pursuit of this very same plan, I would like to pick up on and make relevant the distinction that was recently advanced by Avril Thorne (2004). Thorne characterizes the kind of proposal for identity construction that I have tried to advance in this chapter as working within “a highly proximate framework”, one that potentially washes out “the personal past of the speakers, the complexities of their current concerns, and their hopes for the future” (Thorne 2004, p. 3). And she continues by contrasting my approach with McAdams’ (1993) and Hermans’ (1996) theories which “both emphasize that identity-making is a process of reflecting upon multiple facets of an individual’s experience rather than by positioning one’s own experience vis-à-vis others who are physically present in a setting. Identity [in McAdams and Herman’s approach] is primarily conceived as developing through self-reflection, not social discourse” (Thorne 2004, p. 3).

I think that Thorne’s distinction helps tremendously in depicting the shortcomings of the view I have proposed in this chapter. In order to crystallize what is going on in situated interactions, and working with the assumption that even total strangers can make sense of each other in short, brief segments

of interactions, I am reducing these interactants in terms of their histories of (personal) experiences. I am asking the analyst to disregard any considerations along those historical lines, at least for the moment, even if they should be available through other sources. The attempt to remain analytically unbiased and admit into the analysis only what is made relevant or 'demonstrably attended to' by the participants of the interaction strips individuals of their history. And whether it will be possible to bridge 'personal approaches to identity' of the kind of McAdams and Hermans with 'situated approaches' of the like I suggested, is an open question, requiring more dialoguing.

Another orientation to open up for more dialogue could follow Amy Shuman's suggestion to explore the highly under-researched dimensions of empathy and entitlement in story-telling practices. Positioning analysis (at least thus far) has not addressed how characters in the story world are coordinated in ways that result in feelings of empathy, in the sense of "conveying a true understanding of human experience" (Shuman, in production). This process of "transvaluing the personal to the more-than-personal (human, shared, universal)" (Shuman, *ibid.*) is something that remains largely covered up by 'situated approaches' to narrative analysis of the like I have proposed. Shuman goes on to argue that empathy also has the potential to destabilize "meaning from the personal to the allegorical," so that allegorical understandings can become challenged. These processes of recognizing oneself in the stories of others, and how this kind of recognition of self in others comes to existence, are excellent candidates for contributing to innovative and better understandings of how the personal and social is intersecting with being complicit and countering. – This dialogue definitely needs to be continued.

References

- Bamberg, M. (1991). Voices of curing and caring: The role of vagueness and ambiguity in informed consent discussions. *Family Systems Medicine*, 9, 329–342.
- Bamberg, M. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 335–342.
- Bamberg, M. (1999a). Talk and what talk is about: The development of form and content in discourse practices. *Human Development*, 42, 247–252.
- Bamberg, M. (1999b). Identität in Erzählung und im Erzählen. Versuch einer Bestimmung der Besonderheit des narrativen Diskurses für die sprachliche Verfassung von Identität. *Journal für Psychologie*, 7, 43–55

- Bamberg, M. (1999c). Is there anything behind discourse? Narrative and the local accomplishment of identities. In W. Maiers, B. Bayer, B. Duarte Esgalhado, R. Jorna, & E. Schraube (Eds.), *Challenges to theoretical psychology. Selected/edited proceedings of the 7th biennial conference of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology, Berlin, 1997* (pp. 220–227). North York: Captus University Publications.
- Bamberg, M. (2000). Critical personalism, language, and development. *Theory & Psychology, 10*, 749–767.
- Bamberg, M. (2004). “Positioning with Davie Hogan – Stories, tellings and identities. In C. Daiute & C. Lightfoot (Eds.), *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society*. London: Sage.
- Bamberg, M. (in press). “I know it may sound mean to say this, but we couldn’t really care less about her anyway.” Form and functions of ‘slut-bashing’ in male identity constructions in 15-year-olds. *Human Development*.
- Bamberg, M., & Budwig, N. (1992). Therapeutic misconceptions. When the voices of caring and research are misconstrued as the voice of curing. *Ethics and Behavior, 2*, 165–184.
- Bauman, R., & Briggs, C. L. (2003). *Voices of modernity*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. In S-E. Case (Ed.), *Performing feminisms: Feminist critical theory and theatre* (pp. 270–282). Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Butler, J. (1995). Collected and fractured: Responses to identities. In K. A. Appiah & H. L. Gates (Eds.), *Identities* (pp. 439–447). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Catan, L. (1986). The dynamic display of process: Historical development and contemporary uses of the microgenetic method. *Human Development, 29*, 252–263.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). ‘Positioning: The social construction of selves’, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 20*, 43–63.
- Eckert, P. (1989). *Jocks and burnouts: Social categories and identity in the high school*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Eckert, P. (2002). Demystifying sexuality and desire. In K. Campbell-Kibler, R. Podesva, S. J. Roberts & A. Wong (Eds.), *Language and sexuality: Contesting meaning in theory and practice* (pp. 99–110). Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Hanks, W. F. (1996). *Language and communicative practices*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (1999). *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hermans, H.J.M. (1996). Voicing the self: From information processing to dialogical interchange. *Psychological Bulletin, 119*, 31–50.
- Hollway, W. (1984). Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.) *Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* (pp. 227–263). London: Methuen.
- Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. (1993). We have never been modern (C. Porter, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1979). *The postmodern condition* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press.
- MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After virtue*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

- McAdams, D.P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. New York: William Morrow.
- Munsch, R. (1980). *The paper bag princess*. Toronto: Annick Press.
- Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative. Creating lives in everyday storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Self as another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Riegel, K. F. (1975). Toward a dialectical theory of development. *Human Development*, 18, 50–64.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications
- Sacks, H. (1995). *Lectures on conversation: Volumes I and II*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics of the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language*, 50, 696–735.
- Savin-Williams, R. C. (1995). An exploratory study of pubertal maturation timing and self-esteem among gay and bisexual male youths. *Developmental Psychology*, 31 (1), 56–64.
- Sartwell, C. (2000). *End of story. Toward an annihilation of language and history*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Shuman, A. (in production). *Redeeming narrative*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1982). Discourse as an interactional achievement: Some uses of ‘uh huh’ and other things that come between sentences. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Analyzing discourse: Text and talk* (pp. 71–93). [Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics 1981.] Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press
- Talbot, J., Bibace, R., Bokhour, B., & Bamberg, M. (1996). Affirmation and resistance of dominant discourses: The rhetorical construction of pregnancy. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 6, 225–251. (Available @ <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/virtual/mbamberg.htm>)
- Thorne, A. (2004). Putting the person into social identity. *Human Development* (in press).
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Werner, H. (1957). *Comparative psychology of mental development*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Werner, H., & Kaplan, B. (1984). *Symbol formation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wertsch, J., & Stone, C. A. (1978). Microgenesis as a tool for developmental analysis. *Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition*, 1, 8–10.
- White, H. (1981). The value of narrativity in the representation of reality? In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Index

A

Abjection 229, 230
Accountability 40, 43, 45, 145, 244
Accounts 12, 21, 22, 27, 30, 31, 34,
35, 40–42, 53–55, 68–71, 84,
87, 89, 96, 107, 149, 164,
169, 182, 183, 185, 191, 206,
217, 218, 272, 280, 281, 299,
352, 356
Narrative accounts 35, 40–42,
44
Personal accounts 191, 206, 352
Theoretically-based accounts
272
Action 43, 46, 84, 154, 160, 164, 217,
245, 248–251, 253, 254,
281–285, 298, 307, 309, 315,
Counter-action 247
Affirmation 314
Agency 79, 80, 88, 96, 145, 222, 230,
360, 363, 366
Analysis 4, 9, 10, 29, 39–41, 57, 67,
83–85, 87, 90, 92, 101,
105–110, 114, 115, 118,
120–122, 147, 151, 153, 156,
157, 160–162, 165, 166,
169–171, 174, 175, 182,
185–187, 191–195, 197, 198,
204–210, 213–218, 245, 251,
255, 257–259, 267–269, 272,
279–282, 285, 320, 344,
351–353, 356, 363–369
Emic analysis 174, 175, 191,
192, 197, 198, 207, 208
Etic analysis 174, 175, 182, 185,
186, 191, 195, 198, 204, 207,
208, 213

Anecdote 148, 149
Author 25, 27–31, 36, 85, 113, 133,
144, 159, 204, 205, 207, 208,
239–242, 257, 260, 262, 263,
309, 310, 315, 316, 355, 358
Implied author 257
Autobiographies 138–140, 289, 291,
298, 315, 328, 346
Immigrant autobiography 265

B

Badness 225
Bad teenage behavior 272, 273
Being mothered 7, 8, 11, 27, 32, 33,
40, 42, 46, 47, 55
Bildungsroman 330
Biography 11, 17, 31, 43, 113, 354,
356
Black 4, 10, 11, 15, 34, 131, 221,
227–235, 241, 255, 258–261,
265–268,
Black citizenship 233, 235, 241,
267
Black women 11, 34, 227, 258,
265, 267, 268

C

Childhood 3, 7–9, 11–13, 16, 18, 20,
21, 23, 24, 32–35, 39, 43–45,
47, 55, 57, 58, 131, 302
Childhood memories 11
Experiences of childhood 18,
35, 45
Childlessness 64, 73, 78, 79, 88, 94,
106
Childrearing 8, 11

Class 3, 4, 10, 11, 15, 17–19, 21, 24,
34, 58, 107, 109, 140, 221,
223–226, 229–233, 239, 242,
259–264, 267,
Underclass 229, 231, 256, 258
Communities of practice 367
Complicity 198, 351, 353, 360, 365,
367
Conflict 21, 22, 87, 90, 137–139,
141, 142, 151, 160, 162–164, 167,
226, 229, 261, 263, 320, 357
Consciousness 1, 2, 290, 296–300,
304, 322, 323, 328–330, 334,
342, 345, 352
Historical consciousness 299,
300, 323
Contextualization cues 204, 209,
243
Conversation analysis 175, 207, 213,
215, 267, 272
Cultural 1–3, 5, 7–9, 11, 23, 24,
27–30, 32–37, 42, 44, 46,
53–55, 57, 61, 62, 74, 79, 91,
100, 115–117, 119, 125, 130,
146, 149, 169, 170, 172–174,
177–179, 181–187, 191, 192,
199–208, 214–219, 222–224,
227, 229, 231–233, 239,
245–247, 256–260, 262,
267–269, 271, 278–283, 285,
289, 292, 294–296, 298, 305,
313, 316–333, 336, 341,
343–346, 348, 357, 359, 360,
365, 368
Cultural censorship 245
Cultural givens 206, 316,
318–320, 344
Cultural repression 336, 348
Cultural studies 223, 224, 239,
256, 262, 271, 278, 279, 285
Cultural-studies research 221,
240
Cultural texts 256, 289, 323,
326, 359

D

Developmental psychology 9, 10,
27–30, 32, 38, 42, 53, 56
Discourse 3, 8, 11, 28, 29, 34, 35, 37,
40, 41, 44–46, 54, 55, 62–66,
68, 73, 75, 76, 83, 92, 96,
101, 105, 107–109, 145, 147,
149, 169, 174, 191, 192, 197,
204, 206, 207, 214–216, 218,
228, 241–243, 245, 246, 248,
251, 252, 255–257, 260, 261,
267–269, 271, 272, 279, 281,
284, 320, 326, 327, 330, 332,
335, 337, 348, 352, 354, 368
Discourse analysis 40, 41, 66,
83, 101, 191, 192, 198, 204,
218, 241, 267, 268, 271
Discourse practice 46, 55
Discourse-analytic psychology
352
Discourses 2, 28, 30, 38, 55, 62, 67,
73, 79, 83–85, 100, 107, 116,
173, 203–207, 264, 266, 271,
284, 291, 318–320, 325, 327,
330, 331, 336, 345, 352, 353,
359, 361, 365, 367
Counter discourses 83, 353
Deviancy discourses 100
Dominant discourses 2, 38, 61,
67, 73, 84, 172, 173, 318,
352, 359, 367
Positive discourses 85
Socio-cultural discourse 246
Television discourse 255, 257
Discursive psychology 84, 214, 215
Critical discursive psychology
214

E

Enlightenment 330, 347
Entertainment 221, 226, 232,
261–264, 266
Ethnomethodology 114, 191
Evaluation 87, 92, 114, 115, 123,
154, 164, 165, 264, 267, 270, 282

- Everyday 11, 27–29, 32, 33,
113–117, 121–127, 129–133,
137–139, 141–143, 146, 155,
161–167, 207, 209, 217, 223,
234, 256, 282, 283, 290,
353–356, 359–361, 367
Everyday lives 28, 116, 123,
124, 126, 132, 146, 155, 283
Everyday sense-making 27
Exclusion 3, 11, 106, 233, 336
- F**
Femininity 62, 71, 73, 79, 80, 95, 99,
101, 228–230, 232, 241, 335
Feminism 22, 44, 45, 80, 95, 222,
227, 265, 268
Fertility treatment 66, 109
- G**
Gender 11, 34, 36, 102, 175, 185,
203, 221, 223, 224, 226, 229, 239,
241, 242, 256, 258–268, 332
Gerontology 204, 206
- H**
Heteronormativity 185, 215
Heterosexuality 100, 185, 200
Historicity 32–34, 36, 333
History 5, 33, 40, 46, 47, 63, 64, 69,
77, 86, 92, 119, 123, 127,
129, 140, 153, 154, 160, 224,
233, 235, 259, 262, 265, 289,
290, 293–295, 298, 299, 301,
304, 305, 312, 317, 319,
323–325, 332–337, 342, 345,
347, 348,
Narrativised history 334
Home media 143, 144, 147–149,
160, 164, 165
- I**
Identity 33, 35, 36, 40–42, 44–47,
56–58, 111, 113, 116, 118,
119, 127, 131, 228, 239–244,
258, 260, 262–265, 280, 281,
291, 292, 295, 297, 298, 300,
301, 304, 320, 321, 327–329,
331, 337, 342–346, 352, 354,
355, 357, 358, 362, 363, 365,
366, 368, 369
Identities 23, 33–35, 41, 43, 45,
47, 127, 239, 240, 242–244,
256, 263, 265–268, 271, 318,
321, 329, 346, 351, 356,
364–367
Identity work 35, 44, 46, 239,
241, 243, 244, 280, 281
Identity-making 368
National identity 265, 327
Production of identity 262, 263
Self-identity 12, 138, 141
Social identities 239, 243, 244
Speaker's identity 358
Ideological codes 255, 256, 258
Ideologies 28, 254, 285, 325, 352,
361
Hegemonic ideologies 352
Imagery 16, 23, 116–120, 125, 127,
131, 133, 149, 151–153, 164,
165, 167, 294
Participant-created imagery
152
Visual imagery 117, 153, 164
Images 75, 113–125, 129, 131–133,
145–147, 149, 151–156,
159–166, 203, 234, 242, 265,
302, 343
Personal familial images 129
Photographic images 113, 114,
122, 125, 132, 133, 137, 140,
142, 143, 145, 156, 163, 167
Visual images 114–116, 118,
121, 124, 159, 161, 165, 167
Inclusion 3, 230
Interdependency 40
IVF 3, 61–74, 77, 79, 80, 83, 85–94,
96, 99–102, 105–110
In vitro fertilisation 3, 61

- IVF failure 63, 67, 69, 80, 83,
85, 89, 90, 108
- IVF technology 87, 102
- L**
- Life history/life histories 7, 15, 42,
48
- Life stories 35, 161, 261, 356
- M**
- Masculinity 62, 99, 228, 230, 268,
335
- Maternal influences 27, 42, 44
- Media impact 255–257, 261
- Membership categorization 192,
197, 243
- Memory 17, 24, 35, 36, 41, 120,
127–129, 131, 160, 289–294,
296, 299, 300, 302, 303, 305,
309–311, 313–317, 321–328,
330, 332, 335, 341, 345–348
- Collective memory 332
- Metaphor 131, 143–145, 160, 215,
342, 346
- Methodology 27, 84, 107, 113, 114,
118, 132, 204, 207, 213
- Visual methodology 113, 114,
118, 132
- Micro-analysis 204, 271
- Microgenesis 367
- Motherhood; *see also* being mothered
2, 3, 8–11, 15, 17, 18, 24, 33,
34, 36, 38, 39, 44, 55–57, 62,
64, 65, 70, 73–76, 79, 87, 92,
100–103, 222, 228, 231, 232,
271
- Biological motherhood 33
- Discourse of motherhood 8,
228
- Intensive mothering 99, 100
- Mother-blaming 7, 9, 25, 27,
31, 33, 45–47, 55
- Mothering 2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15,
24, 27, 29, 31, 33, 34, 36–40,
42, 43, 46, 47, 55, 56, 99–101
- Working class mothers 18, 19,
24
- N**
- Narration 115, 116, 123, 127,
129–133, 144–146, 160, 167, 239,
241–243, 347
- Narrative inquiry ix, 1, 59, 113–115,
117, 118, 124, 127, 132, 133, 137,
145, 151, 159, 164, 165, 262, 351,
356
- Narrative studies 32, 34, 35, 204
- Narratives; *see also* narrations
- Auditory narrative 221
- Autobiographical narrative
141, 289, 322
- Canonical narratives 172
- Co-production of 99
- Counter-narratives ix, x, 1–5, 7,
29–33, 35, 36, 40, 42, 43, 51,
53, 54, 57, 59, 78, 79, 94, 99,
101, 102, 110, 113, 114, 119,
131, 137, 138, 142, 143, 146,
162, 163, 167, 169, 170,
172–177, 180–183, 185–187,
193, 196, 199–201, 205,
207–210, 213, 214, 217, 218,
221, 223, 235, 240, 242, 256,
259, 261–263, 267, 268, 284,
290, 297, 301, 326, 327, 331,
333, 335, 336, 342
- Cultural narratives 1, 2, 5, 7, 8,
27, 29, 32, 42, 54, 99, 100,
102, 149, 205, 206, 232, 233,
269, 281, 283, 332, 333
- Culturally available narratives
2, 172
- Dominant narratives x, 2, 4, 10,
20, 42, 62, 79, 99, 226, 234,
235, 255, 261, 263, 265, 267,
268, 358, 360

- Hegemonic narratives 267, 351
 Life narratives 323, 327, 328
 Made-over narratives 222
 Master narratives 1–5, 8, 11, 27,
 28, 30, 33, 34, 36–38, 43, 55,
 56, 172, 173, 262, 265,
 351–353, 359–363, 365–368
 Meta-narrative 270–274
 Narrative coherence 354
 Narrative features 221
 Narrative making 312, 313, 315
 Narrative picturing 115, 120,
 121, 131, 132, 154
 Narrative representation 243
 Narrative unconscious 235,
 289, 296–298, 303, 312,
 316–322, 324, 330, 331,
 333–336, 341–345, 347, 348,
 356
 Narratives-in-interaction 351,
 353, 366–368
 Negative narratives 163
 Personal narratives 24, 32–35,
 37, 119, 205, 206, 222, 223,
 239, 262, 359, 368
 Popular culture narratives 257
 Positive narratives 137, 138,
 141
 Public narrative 272
 Retrospective narratives 2
 Self-guiding narratives 307–313
 Transgressive narrative 176,
 177, 194, 200
 Visual narratives 115, 119, 121,
 132, 152, 157, 263
 White trash narratives 233
 Narrateé 258, 261
 Narrator 24, 32, 34, 205, 242, 257,
 270, 301, 352, 355, 356, 358
 Normality 61, 62, 64, 66, 79, 80, 83,
 85, 90, 99, 102, 105
 Normativity 66, 73, 79, 80, 83, 87,
 108
- P**
 Parenting 17, 35, 57, 64, 76, 225,
 228, 234, 235, 265, 267, 270
 Participant orientations 191,
 196–198
 Performance 87, 153, 227, 228, 235,
 250, 267, 268, 272, 286
 Personhood 37, 40, 93, 333–337
 Photo-therapy 120, 131, 162, 163
 Photobiography 118
 Photographs 4, 15, 44, 113–118,
 120–131, 133, 134, 137–151, 155,
 162–165, 167, 294
 Photography 4, 113–117, 120–126,
 129, 133, 145, 151, 155, 156,
 159, 163–165
 Amateur photography 122
 Everyday photography 4, 113,
 114, 116, 117, 121, 122, 125,
 126, 129, 133, 155, 164, 165
 Pictures 3, 4, 117–119, 124, 126,
 132, 143–150, 152–154,
 159–162, 164, 242
 Pictures speak 160, 161
 Pictures speaking 144
 Pictures triggering stories 146
 Plurality of meaning 90
 Poiesis 304, 336, 337, 344, 348
 Politics of enunciation 37, 39, 56,
 364
 Popular culture 65, 169, 172, 203,
 222, 223, 227, 255–257, 259, 262
 Positioning x, 13, 14, 17, 27, 33, 35,
 36, 40–45, 47, 56–59, 68, 87,
 89, 181, 258, 260, 331, 332,
 335–337, 351, 353, 362,
 366–369
 Positioning analysis x, 351, 353,
 369
 Positioning theory 56, 331, 332,
 335–337
 Subject position 336
 Power 1, 3, 5, 9, 33, 38–40, 96, 97,
 100, 102, 105, 111, 145, 154, 163,
 203, 222, 227, 228, 231–233, 240,

252, 264, 318, 324–327, 333, 336,
337, 344, 353, 354, 360
Pregnancy 63, 64, 75, 91, 92, 100,
360, 364, 365
Psychollage 307, 308, 310–316, 342

R

Race 11, 34, 36, 58, 65, 100, 107,
187, 204, 221, 223–227, 229, 239,
241, 242, 255, 256, 258–268, 280,
282, 283, 285, 286, 293
Racism 227, 231, 258, 259, 261, 264
Re-interpretation 33, 43
Representations 3, 35, 61, 64, 90, 91,
115, 116, 127, 221, 226, 230,
239, 259, 267, 268, 283, 291,
311, 314,
Cultural representations 3, 61,
90
Medical representations 91
Narrative representation 243
Storied representation 127
Resistance 1, 13, 23, 33, 37, 41, 43,
62, 76, 78–80, 92, 106, 111, 126,
163, 193–197, 216, 222, 266, 278,
291, 292, 296, 312, 326, 331, 342,
348, 365
Responsibility 11, 13, 18, 63, 64, 86,
92, 93, 108, 227, 228, 258, 264,
268, 297,
Rhetorical 46, 55, 57, 68, 79, 84,
111, 171, 175, 192, 208, 259,
266, 284, 357–359, 363, 366
Rhetorical achievement 46, 55,
57
Rhetorical devices 266
Ruling relations 32, 33, 36

S

Secondary orality 240, 244, 281
Self 5, 14, 24, 35, 58, 77, 93, 118,
120, 125, 127, 129, 133, 141,
164, 271, 289, 291, 294,
296–302, 304, 308–312,

314–316, 324, 330, 333–336,
344, 345, 347, 353–355, 358,
363, 366–369

Authentic selves 364

Self as a character 359

Self-definition 301

Self-revisions 366

Sense of self 353, 354, 363, 366,
367

Sex 18, 169, 170, 172, 173, 176, 177,
179, 181, 183–187, 191, 200–205,
213,

Sexuality 34, 173, 185, 199–205,
207, 221, 224, 229, 239, 262, 263

Social 1, 13, 23, 24, 32–41, 43, 44,
46, 47, 56, 58, 61, 62, 76, 79,
80, 83, 84, 100, 113–116,
118–120, 123–127, 130, 132,
137, 138, 142, 143, 145, 146,
154, 161, 162, 165, 169–171,
185, 186, 206, 208, 210,
221–224, 226, 227, 229–233,
235, 239–257, 261–264, 267,
268, 278–285, 290, 291, 296,
297, 300, 308, 313–316,
318–321, 323, 328, 335, 336,
343, 344, 346, 351, 353, 354,
357, 359, 361, 365–369

Social categorization 239, 243

Social remembering 40

Stories x, 1–5, 9–13, 15, 23, 24, 27,
28, 30, 31, 33–40, 43, 44, 46,
51, 53, 55–58, 62–65, 75, 79,
89, 91, 99, 116, 120, 130,
132, 133, 146–149, 152, 161,
171, 173, 183, 187, 201, 202,
217, 221–224, 228–235,
240–242, 244, 246, 256, 257,
259–264, 267–272, 279, 280,
282, 284, 286, 293, 302, 305,
308, 310, 311, 315, 317, 323,
328, 330–337, 343, 348,
351–358, 362–366, 368, 369

- Counter-stories 2, 229
 Critical stories 2, 9, 53
 Dominant stories 1, 2, 5, 9, 53, 79, 363
 Empirical stories 269
 Happy stories 62, 63
 Hopeless stories 64, 65
 Media stories 286
 Personal stories 1, 33, 36, 222, 223, 257, 262, 269, 334
 Photographic stories 132
 Real life stories 261
 True stories 221
- Storylines 4, 37, 39, 57, 62, 65, 79, 99, 100, 105, 170, 172–174, 178, 181, 184, 186, 187, 191, 192, 196, 197, 202–205, 207, 214, 218, 305, 337
- Asexual older people storyline 173, 174, 176–178, 181, 183, 193–195, 198, 202, 205, 206, 208, 209, 214, 216, 218
- Cultural storyline 169, 172–174, 177–179, 181, 182, 184, 185, 199–202, 205–207, 214
- Dominant cultural storylines 1, 169, 170, 172, 174, 177, 184, 186, 187, 191, 192, 202–205
- Dominant storylines 62, 79, 172, 207
- Liberal storyline 173, 174, 177, 178, 181, 182, 185, 193, 200–202, 205, 206, 210, 214, 217, 218
- Oppressive storylines 262
- Prevalent storylines 172
- Progressive storyline 87, 89, 107–109
- Story-telling; *see also* storytelling 113, 114, 132, 145, 153, 221, 243, 246, 272, 273, 309, 369
- Gender-based story telling 245, 284
- Subjectivity 11, 37, 246, 280, 299, 331–335, 342, 348, 354, 360, 366
- Subversion 5, 9, 235
- T**
- Talk 11, 31, 41, 54, 63, 85–87, 122, 130, 148, 170–174, 182–184, 186, 187, 192, 198, 200, 203, 204, 206, 209, 214–218, 221, 223–229, 231, 233, 235, 239–241, 245–264, 266–272, 278–286, 290, 301, 337, 356, 361, 365–367
- Good talk 285
- Hyper-talk 245, 251–254, 282, 284, 285
- Talk shows 4, 5, 173, 221, 223–229, 231, 233, 235, 239, 241, 245, 247, 248, 251, 254–264, 266–269, 271, 272, 278, 279, 281–286
- Day-time talk shows 261, 262, 264, 266, 267
- Television talk shows 4, 5, 221, 223, 225, 226, 239, 247, 256, 259, 261, 272, 278, 279, 281
- Talk-in-interaction 205, 207, 209, 210, 365, 367
- Technology 61–63, 65–73, 79, 83, 85–87, 91, 95, 102, 107, 109, 110, 117, 121, 123, 124, 151–153, 290, 296
- Claiming technology 70
- Naturalising technology 38, 41, 67, 101, 103
- Negotiating technology 67, 83, 85, 102
- Normalising technology 67, 86, 87, 101, 184, 193, 195, 233
- Theory x, 11, 22, 24, 34, 37–39, 56, 185, 214, 218, 221, 222, 235, 240, 254, 255, 272, 279, 281, 282, 284–286, 307, 311, 331, 332, 335–337
- Feminist theory 185

Poststructuralist theory 37, 38,
 56
 Turn taking 171, 214

V
 Video intervention assessment 119,
 162
 VIA 119, 151, 152, 155, 156,
 162, 316, 342
 Viewer 124, 127, 131, 132, 154, 160,
 161, 256–260
 Implied viewer 257
 Real viewer 257, 260
 Visual 113–122, 124, 130, 132, 133,
 138, 143, 145, 151–154, 156,
 157, 159, 161, 164–167, 221,
 224, 230–232, 244, 262, 263,
 278, 280, 282, 310, 311, 314
 Visual imagery 117, 153, 164
 Visual images 114–116, 118,
 121, 124, 159, 161, 165, 167
 Visual literacy 161
 Visual research 151, 152, 156

Visual syntax 156, 157, 161, 166

W

Ways of seeing 118, 159, 161
 Whiteness 224, 226, 228–232, 235,
 242, 257
 Trailer-park white 230
 White trash 221, 224, 227–230,
 232, 233, 241, 242, 255, 256,
 258–260, 277
 Wifehood 18
 Women 2–4, 7–11, 15, 17, 18, 21,
 23, 33–35, 39, 61–66, 69, 71,
 73–77, 84, 85, 90–92, 94,
 99–101, 108, 109, 126, 169,
 170, 173, 176, 181, 183–187,
 193, 197, 199–210, 213, 216,
 218, 223–235, 258, 260, 262,
 264–268, 352
 African-American women 262,
 264–267
 Black women 11, 34, 227, 258,
 265, 267, 268

In the series *Studies in Narrative* the following titles have been published thus far or are scheduled for publication:

- 1 **BROCKMEIER, Jens and Donal CARBAUGH (eds.):** Narrative and Identity. Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture. 2001. vi, 307 pp.
- 2 **SELL, Roger D. (ed.):** Children's Literature as Communication. The ChiLPA project. 2002. xii, 352 pp.
- 3 **DE FINA, Anna:** Identity in Narrative. A study of immigrant discourse. 2003. xiv, 252 pp.
- 4 **BAMBERG, Michael and Molly ANDREWS (eds.):** Considering Counter-Narratives. Narrating, resisting, making sense. 2004. x, 380 pp.
- 5 **QUASTHOFF, Uta M. and Tabea BECKER (eds.):** Narrative Interaction. vi, 301 pp. + index. *Expected Spring 2005*