A METHOD OF NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

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Introduction

- “Research into meaning is the most basic of all inquiry” & the study of humans requires a focus on meaning, in general, & narrative meaning in particular (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 9)

- Language describes the human world & conveys meaning about past events & actions. (Munhall, 2001)

- Qualitative research – data mostly written/spoken word
Narrative Analysis (NA)

• Narratives are special type of discourse or story
• Written or oral communication that connects succession of events in a person’s life.
• Narrative research analyzes stories to interpret understanding of events & actions
Narrative Analysis (NA)

- NA allows researcher to consider the “mysterious moving force that creeps in between the words & between the lines, sparking ideas, images, and emotions that are not contained in any of the words at a time.” (Tannen, 1982, p. xii)
Narrative Analysis (NA)

- Definition is fundamental, indefinite, & general
- Diverse theoretical perspectives
- Numerous approaches
- Depending on discipline, purpose & aim, researcher has choice of several, varied or combined methods
NA Typologies

• Plurality - Allows researcher to compare problems, functions & techniques

• Mishler’s types
  – Reference & temporal ordering with 4 sub-types
  – Textual coherence & structure with 2 sub-types
  – Narrative function with 4 sub-types

• Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber’s types
  – Holistic (whole story for group) vs categorical (personal & word count)
  – Content (explicit or implicit) vs form (plot, sequence, relationship complexity, word choice, or emotional)
NA Purpose - Describe or explain

- Complete, topical or edited life story/history
- Particular experience within life story
- Context of narrative plot
- Influence of culture in individual formation
- Role of life events in employment of individual’s life
Narratives

- Storytelling is everyday occurrence
- Communication connects extraordinary/significant life events
- Useful for telling significant events to stranger/researcher
- Beginning, middle, & end that responds to “and then what happened?”
- Stories & paralanguage analyzed
- Themes or variations
Photo-Interviewing with NA

• Visual aid to elicit stories with context
• Photographs - not data
• Removes focus from participant
• Data collection
  – less stressful
  – more natural, personal, intimate
• Especially useful to examine family over time, family relationships & for participants with low self-esteem
Lesy (1980)

• . . . we’d sit in the kitchen and start looking at the pictures. They’d go through them, quickly at first . . . . But then it always happened: we’d get to one picture or one page and they’d stop. . . they’d sit up. . . and start talking, looking right through me and they’d be gone. Back there. Gone. . . I never said a. . . word except “yes” because I was back there with them . . The people told me stories; they spoke parables; they made confessions. They told me tales; they recounted epics; they recited myths. They told me the way things really are. . . . They passed judgment. They held the scales. They told me the Truth. (p.xiv)
• Adults
  – use complex grammar & sentence structure which increases ability to evaluate meaning
  – More likely to discuss significant narratives
  – 8 to 10 participants
Narrative Analysis

- Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber’s holistic (whole story for group) - form (relationship complexity, word choice, or emotion) model of particular experience in life story
- Unstructured interview best
- Photos introduced subject; focused discussion, but allowed freedom
- Probes, clarification
- Audio-taped 60 to 90 minutes
- Transcribed
Narrative Analysis

- Stories extracted
- Extracted stories with context
- Arranged chronologically
- Paralanguage noted
- Codes developed
- Codes into more abstract categories
- Categories into constructs
- Patterns emerged
Example of Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Data</th>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Analytic Notations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That reminds me of a time, like when I was in High School, I remember that</td>
<td>Like in High School, he’d go through my closets</td>
<td>Alerts beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’d go through my closets</td>
<td>He didn’t like the fact that I wore baggy clothes. I wore jeans</td>
<td>Sets stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And that. He looked through the</td>
<td>He didn’t like the fact that I wore tight clothes</td>
<td>Teenagers like to blend with peers and don’t like to be seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes that I wore, at all.</td>
<td>He’d go Dress up. Wear tight clothes so people will</td>
<td>Dad critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He didn’t like the fact that I wore baggy clothes. I wore jeans.</td>
<td>If people look at me, I want</td>
<td>Different values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He thought I should dress differently. He’d go ‘Dress up. Wear baggy clothes. I wore jeans.</td>
<td>If people look at me, I want</td>
<td>Disagreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look at you’. He thinks like that.</td>
<td>I speak up. My sister never</td>
<td>1st teenager in family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If people look at me, I want them to see who I am</td>
<td>did that. She was always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that..... Maybe.. Well,</td>
<td>Perfect and I was........</td>
<td>Becomes quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak up and that’s one of my problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My sister never did that....</td>
<td>voice trails off</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rigor - Audit trail

- Memos re:
  - contextual info
  - Stimulus & justification for procedural choices
  - evolution of findings investigators personal orientation to data

- Consultation with other qualitative researcher

- Addresses confirmability, dependability, and credibility.