Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis

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Narrative inquiry refers to a subset of qualitative research designs in which stories are used to describe human action. The term *narrative* has been employed by qualitative researchers with a variety of meanings. In the context of narrative inquiry, *narrative* refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot. Bruner (1985) designates two types of cognition: paradigmatic, which operates by recognizing elements as members of a category; and narrative, which operates by combining elements into an emplotted story. Narrative inquiries divide into two distinct groups based on Bruner's types of cognition. Paradigmatic-type narrative inquiry gathers stories for its data and uses paradigmatic analytic procedures to produce taxonomies and categories out of the common elements across the database. Narrative-type narrative inquiry gathers events and happenings as its data and uses narrative analytic procedures to produce explanatory stories.

Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis

There is an increasing interest in narrative inquiry among qualitative researchers. This interest is merited because narrative is the linguistic form uniquely suited for displaying human existence as situated action. Narrative descriptions exhibit human activity as purposeful engagement in the world. Narrative is the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes. I am using the phrase *narrative configuration* to refer to the process by which happenings are drawn together and integrated into a temporally organized whole. The configurative process employs a thematic thread to lay out happenings as parts of an unfolding movement that culminates in an outcome. The thematic thread is called the plot, and the plot's integrating operation is called emplotment. When happenings are configured or emplotted, they take on narrative meaning. That is, they are understood from the perspective of their contribution and influence on a specified outcome.

In this discussion of narrative configuration, I am using the term *narrative* to refer specifically to texts that are thematically organized by plots. Qualitative researchers, however, have not limited their use of the term narrative to this meaning. In the qualitative research literature, the term *narrative* is employed to signify a variety of meanings. These multiple uses have caused some ambiguity to be associated with the term and have sometimes led to a lack of clarity and precision in its use. Thus, the first section of the paper is an investigation of the referents of the different meanings of *narrative* and how qualitative researchers employ these referents. In everyday conversation and in the qualitative research literature, the term *narrative* is used equivocally. Although the term has been used to refer to any prose text, in this paper I emphasize its reference to a specific kind of prose text (the story) and to the particular kind of configuration that generates a story (emplotment).

The second section develops Bruner's (1985) distinction between paradigmatic and narrative modes of thought. This distinction is used in the final section to identify two types of narrative inquiry: (a) analysis of narratives, that is, studies whose data consist of narratives or stories, but whose analysis produces paradigmatic typologies or categories; and (b) narrative

analysis, that is, studies whose data consist of actions, events, and happenings, but whose analysis produces stories (e.g. biographies, histories, case studies). I place particular emphasis on the second of these two types – narrative analysis – calling attention to the use of emplotment and narrative configuration as its primary analytic tool.

Uses of the term "narrative" in qualitative research

Narrative as prosaic discourse

Among its many uses, *narrative* can denote any prosaic discourse, that is, any text that consists of complete sentences linked into a coherent and integrated statement. In this sense, narrative discourse is differentiated from poetic discourse, that is, text with meter and rhyme. In discussions of data types, narrative as prosaic discourse designates one of the forms of data. Research data can be categorized into three basic forms: short answer, numerical, and narrative. A data-gathering questionnaire illustrates these categories. Respondents can be asked to provide data in a short-answer format (their names, nationality, areas of interest); in a numerical format (choosing a number on a Likert scale indicating their level of interest in a topic); and in a narrative format (a paragraph on why they are interested in a position). Although qualitative research can use all three forms of data, it is primarily characterized by its use of data in narrative form.

The meaning of *narrative* as prosaic text has been extended to refer to any data that are in the form of natural discourse or speech (e.g. interview protocols). For example, Miles and Huberman (1984) write, "We dictated interview and observation notes in *narrative* [emphasis added] form along with any pertinent analytical or methodological notes, and had them transcribed" (p. 19). In this general extension of the term, *narrative* becomes synonymous with the primary linguistic expressions that make up qualitative research projects; it is used to refer to the data form of field notes or original interview data and their written transcriptions. *Narrative* in the sense of any prosaic discourse merely points to the primary kind of data with which qualitative researchers have always worked. In this usage, *narrative* has been employed to signify that qualitative inquiries are concerned essentially with everyday or natural linguistic expressions, not with decontextualized short phrases or with abstracted counts designed for use in computational analysis.

Linked to this usage, qualitative researchers have employed *narrative* to describe the form of the collected body of data they have gathered for analysis. The analytic task of qualitative researchers can involve finding the primary structures and themes in a 1000-page corpus of prosaic text (Kvale, 1989). Miles and Huberman (1984) remonstrate, "The most frequent form of display for qualitative data in the past has been *narrative text* [emphasis in original]" (p. 21). They advocate the use of schematic displays of the collected body of qualitative data as an adjunct (or replacement) for narrative displays to provide more direct access to themes and categories. This usage also has been applied to the form of the final qualitative research report to distinguish it from the form of report used to summarize computationally based research (Carlston, 1987).

Narrative as story

In recent years qualitative researchers have attended to a more limited definition of *narrative* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In this definition, *narrative* refers to a particular type of discourse, the story, not simply to any prosaic discourse. I believe that work with stories holds significant

promise for qualitative researchers (Polkinghorne, 1988). Stories are particularly suited as the linguistic form in which human experience as lived can be expressed (Ricoeur, 1986/1991). The focus of this paper is on *narrative* as story and the use of story in qualitative research.

A story is a special type of discourse production. In a story, events and actions are drawn together into an organized whole by means of a plot. A plot is a type of conceptual scheme by which a contextual meaning of individual events can be displayed. To illustrate the operation of emplotment, I will use a simple story. "The king died; the prince cried." In isolation the two events are simply propositions describing two independent happenings. When composed into a story, a new level of relational significance appears. The relational significance is a display of the meaning-producing operation of the plot. Within a storied production, the prince's crying appears as a response to his father's death. The story provides a context for understanding the crying.

I hesitate to use the word *story* to refer to this type of narrative. *Story* carries a connotation of falsehood or misrepresentation, as in the expression, "That is only a story." Narrative has been used in this sense to refer to the story that evinces a culture's world-view or ideology (Fisher, 1989; Lyotard, 1979/1984) and serves to legitimize its relative values and goals. Often, qualitative researchers work with stories that relate events that are alleged to have happened. Instead of using a neologism or an awkward phrase such as *emplotted narrative*, I will use *story*, in its general sense, to signify narratives that combine a succession of incidents into a unified episode. This usage is becoming the accepted practice among qualitative researchers working with life history materials (Josselson, 1993). A storied narrative is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts. In this context, *story* refers not only to fictional accounts but also to narratives describing "ideal" life events such as biographies, autobiographies, histories, case studies, and reports of remembered episodes that have occurred.

The subject-matter of stories is human action. Stories are concerned with human attempts to progress to a solution, clarification, or unraveling of an incomplete situation. In Vanhoozer's (1991) words, "Other things exist in time, but only humans possess the capacity to perceive the connectedness of life and to seek its coherence" (p. 43). Stories are linguistic expressions of this uniquely human experience of the connectedness of life (Ricoeur, 1990/1992). The ground of storied expressions is the phenomenon of individual protagonists engaged in an ordered transformation from an initial situation to a terminal situation. The capacity to understand stories derives from the correlation between the unfolding of a story and the temporal character of human experience and the human pre-understanding of human action (Ricoeur, 1983/1984). Although the protagonists of stories can be expanded by drawing analogies to institutions, organizations, or groups of people and by anthropomorphic depictions of animals (as in fairy tales), the story form retains its primary character of an imitation of personal action (Aristotle, 1954).

Bruner (1990) notes that "People do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence. They frame events and sentences in larger structures" (p. 64). Plot is the narrative structure through which people understand and describe the relationship among the events and choices of their lives. Plots function to compose or configure events into a story by: (a) delimiting a temporal range which marks the beginning and end of the story, (b) providing criteria for the selection of events to be included in the story, (c) temporally ordering events into an unfolding movement culminating in a conclusion, and (d) clarifying or making explicit the meaning events have as contributors to the story as a unified whole.

Plots mark off a segment of time in which events are linked together as contributors to a particular outcome. The segment of time can range from the boundless (the story of God's creation of the universe), to centuries (the story of the settlement of the United States), to lifetimes

(biographies), to daily or hourly episodes (the story of going shopping). In each case, the plot establishes the beginning and end of the storied segment, thereby creating the temporal boundaries for the narrative gestalt.

Plots also function to select from the myriad of happenings those which are direct contributors to the terminal situation of the story (Carr, 1986). For example, if the plot of the story concerns a person's winning a game, those events and actions pertinent to the winning are selected for inclusion in the highlighted figure of the story. Other events such as the clothes worn, the day on which the game was played, or the eating of breakfast, because they are not central to the plot, are included as background.

For meaningfulness and understanding, stories rely on people's presumption that time has a unilinear direction moving from past to present to future and on their sense that events, motives, and interpretations can affect human actions and outcomes. The plot relates events by causally linking a prior choice or happening to a later effect. This causal link differs from the Humean conception of determinate causality and subsumption under laws (Manicas & Secord, 1983) in that it recognizes the effect of choices and planned actions on future consequences. In the narrative story, causal linkage of events is often known only retrospectively (Freeman, 1984) within the context of the outcome of the total episode. The significance and contribution of particular happenings and actions are not finally evident until the denouement of the episode. Events which might have appeared insignificant at the time may turn out to have been a crucial occurrence affecting the outcome. For example, a chance meeting of two people in a grocery store may, in retrospect, turn out to have great significance in that it was the beginning of a romance that led to a lifelong partnership. Plots accomplish these synthesizing functions as a mental construct. Stories exist independently of a particular expressive form. The same plot and its events can be presented through various media, for example, through an oral telling, a ballet, a motion picture, or written document. Recent qualitative researchers have often gathered stories through interviews, later transforming them through transcriptions into written form.

Stories in which a plot is able to unify its diverse elements fully are a normative form most often manifested in fictional tales in which the author is able to shape the elements to conform thoroughly to the design of the plot. Many tales, for example, autobiographies, are only partially integrated into a single plot line. The integrity of some of these tales is maintained by having the same protagonist involved in a series of emplotted episodes, but without an overarching plot that transforms the chronicle of storied episodes into a single, unified story with episodic subplots. Other tellers of tales, for example, Altman (1993) in his film *Short Cuts*, offer a collection of stories concerning a single topic or theme without presenting them as parts of a single plot. Some writers, such as postmodern authors, seek to communicate that experience is fragmented and disorganized. One technique they can employ is based on readers' expectations that when a discourse contains story-like elements, such as a setting and protagonists, a plot will be included that serves to display the elements as meaningful and consequential parts of a single enterprise. By not including a plot in their presentation, these authors call attention to their view that life events lack coherence and causal relationship.

Paradigmatic and narrative cognitions

Narrative as story is of special interest to qualitative researchers as they try to understand the fullness of human existence by including in their inquiries the unique characteristics that differentiate human existence from other kinds of existence (Polkinghorne, 1983). Stories express a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute positively and negatively to attaining goals and fulfilling purposes. The knowledge carried by stories differs from that which has been promoted by the Western scientific tradition.

In the Western tradition, with its Classical Greek heritage, the creation and communication of true knowledge has been held to be the province of a logical and formal style of discourse (Olson, 1990). Rationality has been identified with a type of discourse that advanced hypotheses, reported evidence, and systematically inferred conclusions. The notion that there is a distinct type of rational discourse appropriate for producing knowledge was the foundation for the advocacy of a single, unified science for all scholarly disciplines. This kind of discourse is the essence of contemporary scholarly and academic writing. It is the kind of discourse we use when writing a qualitative research report. All other discourse types were understood as unfit to present clear thought and knowledge, and these were lumped together under the term poetic discourse. Poetry, drama, and storied narrative could not provide true knowledge; they were limited to communicating and generating emotional experiences, and, because of this, were seen as having power to lead people dangerously astray.

In recent years, this bifurcation of linguistic forms into cognitive versus emotional (that is, knowledge-generating versus expressive) has received a particularly significant challenge. One of the notable contributors to this challenge is the cognitive psychologist, Jerome Bruner. In his *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Bruner (1985) argued that narrative knowledge is more than mere emotive expression; rather, it is a legitimate form of reasoned knowing. He proposed that there are two distinctive modes of thought or types of cognition or rationality, two ways in which we know about the world. He designated the traditional logical-scientific mode of knowing *paradigmatic cognition* and storied knowing *narrative cognition*:

> There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (though complementary) are irreducible to one another. . . . Each of the ways of knowing, moreover, has operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. They differ radically in their procedures for verification. (p. 11)

Narrative or storied discourse communicates worthwhile and thoughtful knowledge, although the form of this knowledge differs from that advocated in the received tradition. Paradigmatic cognition has been held as the exclusive cognitive mode for the generation of trustworthy and valid knowledge. The proposal that there is more than one mode of valid rationality is not new. For example, Dilthey and the neo-Kantians at the end of the 19th century argued that knowledge of humans required an understanding (*verstehen*) or reasoning to interpret human expressions and cultural artifacts. The historian Dray, writing in the late 1950s, argued that the deductive-nomological mode of explanation was not as appropriate for understanding human action as is a narrative-like explanation (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Both paradigmatic and narrative cognition generate useful and valid knowledge. They are part of the human cognitive repertoire for reasoning about and making sense of the encounter with self, others, and the material realm (cf. Gardner, 1983). The significance of Bruner's contribution is his expansion of ways of knowing beyond the singular mode advocated by the received tradition to include the narrative mode.

Paradigmatic cognition

The primary operation of paradigmatic cognition is classifying a particular instance as belonging to a category or concept. The concept is defined by a set of common attributes that is shared by its members. General concepts can include subordinate concepts or categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example, the concept, *furniture*, contains subordinate categories such as *chair*, *table*, or *desk*. Each concept is distinguished from all the others by the possession of some peculiar

attribute or group of attributes, called its *specific difference.* Paradigmatic thought attends to the features or attributes that essentially define particular items as instances of a category. This kind of thinking focuses on what makes the item a member of a category. It does not focus on what makes it different from other members of the category. Thus, the actual size, shade of red, or marks on the surface that make a particular item unique are not of primary concern.

The classificatory function of cognition locates or establishes the category of which an item is a member. For example, in a grocery store, a child points to a particular round, red object with a stem and asks, "What is that?" The mother or father responds, "That is an apple." Paradigmatic thought links the particular to the formal. The realm of the particularity of each experienced item differs from the formal realm of concepts. The concept, apple, is not the same as an actual, material piece of fruit. The power of paradigmatic thought is to bring order to experience by seeing individual things as belonging to a category. By understanding that this particular item is an apple, I anticipate and act on the knowledge I have of apples in general (Smith, 1989). Paradigmatic reasoning is common to most quantitative and qualitative research designs.

In the quantitative approach to research, categories often are selected prior to the collection of data. Researchers spell out in advance the operations of measurement and observation that determine whether an event or thing is to be considered an instance of the categories of interest. In most quantitative inquiries, the researcher's concern is not simply a nominal interest in which category an item belongs, but for categories that vary in the extent or amount its instances have of it, they seek to determine this amount. For example, a researcher could be interested in not only determining whether a particular emotional response belongs to the category *anxiety,* but also in how intense is the anxiety of the examined instance. Computational analysis can provide mathematical descriptions of the relations that hold between and among nominal or variable categories. A type of computational analysis, factor analysis, identifies the possibility of common categories underlying combinations of the researcher-identified categories.

In contrast with the preselection of categories of quantitative approaches, qualitative researchers emphasize the construction or discovery of concepts that give categorical identity to the particulars and items in their collected data. Qualitative researchers examine the data items for common themes and ideas. The coding schemes of qualitative analysis are designed to separate the data into groups of like items. The grouped items are inspected to identify the common attributes that define them as members of a category (Strauss, 1987). Most qualitative analytic procedures emphasize a recursive movement between the data and the emerging categorical definitions during the process of producing classifications that will organize the data according to their commonalties. The analysis builds the categorical definitions by continually testing their power to order the data. The categories are revised and retested until they provide the "best fit" of a categorical scheme for the data set. Although the general practice of qualitative analysis follows this description of developing a categorical schematic out of the data, some researchers follow a practice similar to the quantitative approach in which they come to the data to determine whether they fit with a predetermined network. Often these conceptual networks reflect previously developed theoretical systems.

Much qualitative analysis is not content simply to identify a set of categories that provide identity to the particular elements of the database. It seeks a second level of analysis that identifies the relationships that hold between and among the established categories. This analysis seeks to show how the categories link to one another. The kinds of relationships searched for include, for example, causal, correlational, influential, part-whole, or subcategorical.

Paradigmatic reasoning is a primary method by which humans constitute their experience as ordered and consistent. It produces cognitive networks of concepts that allow people to construct experiences as familiar by emphasizing the common elements that appear over and

over. The networks are maintained and transported through local languages and are personalized through individual experiences. The networks, however, are abstractions from the flow and flux of experience. By providing a familiar and decontextualized knowledge of the world, they allow us to manage the uniqueness and diversity of each experience as if it were the same as previous experiences. We are able to learn a repertoire of responses to be applied in each conceptually identified situation.

Narrative cognition

Narrative cognition is specifically directed to understanding human action (Bruner, 1985; Mitchell, 1981; Ricoeur, 1983/1984). Human action is the outcome of the interaction of a person's previous learning and experiences, present-situated presses, and proposed goals and purposes. Unlike objects, in which knowledge of one can be substituted for another without loss of information (as in replacing one spark plug with another), human actions are unique and not fully replicable. Whereas paradigmatic knowledge is focused on what is common among actions, narrative knowledge focuses on the particular and special characteristics of each action.

Narrative reasoning operates by noticing the differences and diversity of people's behavior. It attends to the temporal context and complex interaction of the elements that make each situation remarkable. In describing narrative reasoning, Carter (1993) writes that it "captures in a special fashion the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs" and that "this richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions" (p. 6). While paradigmatic knowledge is maintained in individual words that name a concept, narrative knowledge is maintained in emplotted stories. Storied memories retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivational meaning connected with it.

Narrative cognition configures the diverse elements of a particular action into a unified whole in which each element is connected to the central purpose of the action. Hearing a storied description about a person's movement through a life episode touches us in such a way as to evoke emotions such as sympathy, anger, or sadness. Narrative cognition gives us explanatory knowledge of why a person acted as he or she did; it makes another's action, as well as our own, understandable. Narrative cognition produces a series of anecdotal descriptions of particular incidents. Narrative reasoning does not reduce itself to rules and generalities across stories but maintains itself at the level of the specific episode. Nor does it translate its emplotted story into a set of propositions whereby its dramatic and integrative features are forfeited (McGuire, 1990). The cumulative effect of narrative reasoning is a collection of individual cases in which thought moves from case to case instead of from case to generalization.

This collection of storied experiences provides a basis for understanding new action episodes by means of analogy. The collection of stories is searched to find one that is similar in some respects to the new one. The concern is not to identify the new episode as an instance of a general type but as similar to a specific remembered episode. The new episode is noted as similar to, but not the same as, the previously selected episode. Thus, the understanding of the new action can draw upon previous understanding while being open to the specific and unique elements that make the new episode different from all that have gone before. The analogical understanding recognizes the improvisation and change that make up the flexible variability of human behavior (Lave, 1988). The more varied and extensive one's collection of storied explanatory descriptions of previous actions, the more likely that one can draw on a similar remembered episode for an initial understanding of the new situation and the more likely that one will appreciate and search for the elements that make the new different from the recalled instance.

Analysis of narratives and narrative analysis

One purpose of this discussion is to provide a paradigmatic analysis of narrative research, that is, to tease out and present a taxonomy of different kinds of narrative inquiry. I find that there are two primary kinds of narrative inquiry that correspond to the two kinds of cognition – paradigmatic and narrative – described by Bruner (1985). I call the type that employs paradigmatic reasoning in its analysis, *analysis of narratives*, and the type that uses narrative reasoning, *narrative analysis*. In the first type, analysis of narratives, researchers collect stories as data and analyze them with paradigmatic processes. The paradigmatic analysis results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings. In the second type, narrative analysis, researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories (for example, a history, case study, or biographic episode). Thus, analysis of narratives moves from stories to common elements, and narrative analysis moves from elements to stories.

In my review of the recent qualitative research identified as narrative inquiry, I find that the research has emphasized the analysis of narratives type of study. By calling attention to the two types, I hope that the particular strengths of the narrative analysis type of research will be apparent and that researchers will engage in more studies of this variety. Both types of narrative inquiry produce valued products; the products, however, are of different cognitive forms. The recognition of the difference in the cognitive form of the results requires that each type of inquiry be judged by specific criteria of validation and trustworthiness. The following sections describe procedures employed in the two types of narrative inquiry.

Paradigmatic analysis of narrative data

Narrative inquiry of the analysis of narrative type contrasts with other qualitative research studies in that its data are in the form of storied narratives. It is similar to other qualitative research in that it employs a paradigmatic analysis of the data.

In regard to temporality, it is possible to classify qualitative data into two kinds – diachronic and synchronic. Diachronic data contain temporal information about the sequential relationship of events. The data describe when events occurred and the effect the events had on subsequent happenings. The data are often autobiographical accounts of personal episodes and include reference as to when and why actions were taken and the intended results of the actions. Synchronic data lack the historical and developmental dimension. They are framed as categorical answers to questions put by an interviewer (Mishler, 1986b) and provide information about the present situation or belief of an informant (e.g. answers to questions about what one feels about his or her neighborhood, tax increases, or the meaning or experience of death of a significant other).

Narrative inquiry of both the analysis of narrative and narrative analysis types requires primarily diachronic data. In this, the two types differ from other qualitative research approaches that often rely on synchronic data. Analysis of narrative research relies on a type of diachronic data, the storied narrative. The storied narrative differs from a mere listing of a sequence of events, that is, from a chronicle. Stories are sustained emplotted accounts with a beginning, middle, and end. The sources of storied narratives are varied, including written documents (personal journals [Berman, 1989], autobiographies, and biographies) and oral statements (from previously recorded oral histories and from interviews). Interviews appear to be the most often used source of storied narratives in contemporary narrative inquiry.

Mishler (1986b) reports that interviewees' responses will often be given as stories. He notes

that people frequently understand and recapitulate their experiences in storied form. If the interviewer will not suppress the interviewee's responses by limiting the answers to what is relevant to a narrowly specified question, a storied answer will be provided. The interviewer can solicit stories by simply asking the interviewee to tell how something happened. The stories are generated as reminiscences of how and why something occurred or what led to an action being undertaken. Subjects do not have to be taught how to tell stories; it is part of their cognitive repertoire (Kemper, 1984) and an ordinary way in which they make sense of and communicate life episodes. Nevertheless, the demands on interviewers in the generation of interviewees' personal stories as data are complex and taxing (Young & Tardif, 1992). The orally generated stories need to be transcribed and, thereby, transformed into written texts for analysis. That is, they must be "textualized" for "only in textualized form do data yield to analysis" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 95).

Analysis of narratives

Much of the literature on doing qualitative research has focused on the techniques of various forms of data gathering: fieldwork, participant-observation, and interviewing. Much less attention has been given to the procedures for analyzing the gathered data. Early ethnographers did not see the analysis of data as problematic once the facts were unearthed. In a comment about the Chicago School that could hold for early ethnographic work in general, Van Maanen (1988) writes, "little need was felt to do much more than gather and arrange the materials, for they would . . . speak for themselves" (p. 19). Although social science concepts and theory influenced and informed the interpretation and analysis of data, little was written about the theory of analysis. More recently, writers on qualitative methods have begun to consider the theoretical concerns that underlie the analytic process (e.g. Polkinghorne, 1991b; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

   Many qualitative research studies employ a paradigmatic type of analysis. As described above, paradigmatic analysis is an examination of the data to identify particulars as instances of general notions or concepts. The paradigmatic analysis of narrative seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data. Most often this approach requires a database consisting of several stories (rather than a single story). The researcher inspects the different stories to discover which notions appear across them. Two types of paradigmatic search are possible: (a) one in which the concepts are derived from previous theory or logical possibilities and are applied to the data to determine whether instances of these concepts are to be found; and (b) one in which concepts are inductively derived from the data. An example of the first type of paradigmatic analysis is the use of psychoanalytic theory to locate instances of personality types or uses of defense mechanisms. Another example is categorization of storied data as instances of a logically derived plot typology, such as Aristotle's in which the protagonist achieves the goal (a comedy) or does not achieve the goal (a tragedy). The second type, inductive analysis, is more closely identified with qualitative research (Hammersley, 1992). In this approach, the researcher develops concepts from the data rather than imposing previous theoretically derived concepts. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory notion is an instance of this type of paradigmatic analysis. Inductive analysis includes the recursive movement from noted similar instances in the data to researcher-proposed categorical and conceptual definitions. Through these recursions, the proposed definitions are altered until they reach a "best fit" ordering of the data as a collection of particular instances of the derived categories.

   The use of these two types of paradigmatic analysis has produced a wide variety of studies. The variety results from the differences in conceptual focus that are of interest to the researcher.

Researchers interested in the cognitive development of children have produced a body of research based on the paradigmatic analysis of children's stories. They have been interested in the form and structure of the stories told by children of different ages (e.g. McCabe & Peterson, 1991). Literary theorists have also focused on the formal attributes of storied narratives, for example, Propp's (1928/1968) classic study of the structure of Russian fairy tales. More often, however, qualitative researchers have been interested in content and meaning exhibited in the storied data they collect (Mishler, 1986a; Sutton-Smith, 1986). They look for various kinds of responses, actions, and understandings that appear across the storied data (Denzin, 1989).

Paradigmatic analysis is employed not simply to discover or describe the categories that identify particular occurrences within the data but also to note relationships among categories. This kind of matrix analysis attempts to detect the covariance among concepts. For example, Gergin and Gergin (1987) asked young adults and older adults to tell their life stories. In analyzing the stories, they noted that, in general, the plots of the young adults' stories depicted a happy childhood followed by a difficult adolescent period and an upward swing in the present (a romantic plot); the older adults' stories described the young adult years as difficult but the period during 50–60 years of age as positive, followed by a time of regression (a tragic plot).

Ruth and Öberg (1992) provide an exemplar of a paradigmatic analysis of storied narratives. Their study was based on the life stories of 23 women between the ages of 75 and 85 living in Helsinki, Finland. The first group of subjects was gathered from respondents to an advertisement asking for people who would tell about their life. Additional subjects were selected in order to include people from different social strata. Extensive interviews were conducted over several settings with each subject. The total amount of time spent interviewing each subject averaged 7 hours and 40 minutes. Subjects were first asked to tell their life stories, then they were asked to provide more detailed information about particular common themes in their life stories that the researchers had decided were important to their project. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The transcribed text made up the database for the study.

The procedures used in the paradigmatic analysis of the data are described by Ruth and Öberg:

> The data were analyzed using the "Grounded theory" method, that is groups of qualitatively similar life histories were brought together in one category and they were labeled after the dominating qualities in the category. . . . We found six different categories of way of life among the elderly which were named "the bitter life," "the sweet life," "life as a hurdle race," "life as a trapping pit," "the arduous working life," and "the silenced life." All 23 women interviewed could be found represented in the above-mentioned ways of life. The basis of this typification was the way the interviewees started and ended their life stories, what turning points their stories included, how they overcame major changes in their lives, and how they interpreted and evaluated these changes. (p. 135)

The report of the study provides extended descriptions of each of the six ways of life. Further analysis involved examining the place of the categorized stories along a series of dimensions. For example, each category of way of life was inspected for its place on the locus-of-control dimension. The "bitter life" stories displayed an outer-directed locus of control, the "life as a trapping pit" stories displayed the theme of loss of control over life, the "arduous working life" stories displayed an inner-directed locus of control. Other dimensions used by Ruth and Öberg in their analysis include the self-image evinced in the stories of the various ways of life, the evaluation of one's life as a whole, and the evaluation of one's old age.

As the Ruth and Öberg research illustrates, paradigmatic analysis provides a method to uncover the commonalties that exist across the stories that make up a study's database. It functions to generate general knowledge from a set of particular instances. The discussion of the

external validity of the paradigmatic findings of commonalities within the database, that is, whether the findings hold for similar, yet unexamined stories, is beyond the scope of this paper. The strength of paradigmatic procedures is their capacity to develop general knowledge about a collection of stories. This kind of knowledge, however, is abstract and formal, and by necessity underplays the unique and particular aspects of each story.

Narrative analysis of eventful data

In research that employs narrative analysis as distinguished from analysis of narratives, the result is an emplotted narrative. The outcome of a narrative analysis is a story – for example, a historical account, a case study, a life story, or a storied episode of a person's life. In this type of analysis, the researcher's task is to configure the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or purpose. The analytic task requires the researcher to develop or discover a plot that displays the linkage among the data elements as parts of an unfolding temporal development culminating in the denouement.

Events and happenings as data

Unlike narrative inquiry of the paradigmatic type, the data employed in the narrative analytic type are usually not in storied form. The purpose of narrative analysis is to produce stories as the outcome of the research. The data elements required for this production are diachronic descriptions of events and happenings. Narrative analysis composes these elements into a story. The researcher begins with questions such as "How did this happen?" or "Why did this come about?" and searches for pieces of information that contribute to the construction of a story that provides an explanatory answer to the questions. The information can come from various sources, including interviews, journals, public and personal documents, and observations. For example, a biographer wanting to write the life story of a person would seek out personal diaries and letters, interview relatives and friends who knew the person, gather public statements and writings of the person, collect articles and accounts written about the person, and, if the person were living, interview him or her. All of these data need to be integrated and interpreted by an emplotted narrative.

What data are gathered depends on the focus of the research. Narrative analysis requires that the researcher select a bounded system for study. The researcher needs to have "some conception of the unity of totality of a system with some kind of outlines or boundaries" (Stake, 1988, p. 255). The bounded system can be two years in the life of a child with a learning disability, the first years of the development of company, or an academic year for a teacher and his or her pupils. Data which relate to the particular system under study are sought. The search is for data that will reveal uniqueness of the individual case or bounded system and provide an understanding of its idiosyncrasy and particular complexity.

Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis is the procedure through which the researcher organizes the data elements into a coherent developmental account. The process of narrative analysis is actually a synthesizing of the data rather than a separation of it into its constituent parts. Nevertheless, because the meaning of the term *analysis* has been extended in qualitative research to cover any treatment of the data, I retain *analysis* when referring to the configuration of the data into a coherent whole.

Narrative analysis relates events and actions to one another by configuring them as contributors to the advancement of a plot. The story constituted by narrative integration allows for the incorporation of the notions of human purpose and choice as well as chance happenings, dispositions, and environmental presses. The result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about. In this analysis, the rescarcher attends to the temporal and unfolding dimension of human experience by organizing the events of the data along a before–after continuum. White's (1975) intensive study of three lives provides an exemplar of the use of narrative analysis in qualitative research.

Narrative analysis synthesizes or configures events into an explanation of, for example, how a successful classroom came to be, how a company came to fail in its campaign, or how an individual made a career choice. Narrative configuration makes use of various kinds of plots as organizing templates. The most basic plot types are the "tragic," in which the protagonist does not achieve the goal, and the "comedy," in which the protagonist does achieve the goal. Within these two basic types are many variations dealing with different movements within the narrative toward the goal (satisfaction) and away from it (disappointment) before the final outcome.

The analytic development of a story from the gathered data involves recursive movement from the data to an emerging thematic plot. Evolving a plot that serves to configure the data elements into a coherent story requires testing the beginning attempts at emplotment with the database. If major events or actions described in the data conflict with or contradict the emerging plot idea, then the idea needs to be adapted to better fit or make sense of the elements and their relationships. The development of a plot follows the same principles of understanding that are described by the notion of the hermenuetic circle. The creation of a text involves the to-and-fro movement from parts to whole that is involved in comprehending a finished text.

As the plot begins to take form, the events and happenings that are crucial to the story's denouement become apparent. The emerging plot informs the researcher about which items from the gathered data should be included in the final storied account. Not all data elements will be needed for the telling of the story. Elements which do not contradict the plot, but which are not pertinent to its development, do not become part of the research result, the storied narrative. This process has been called *narrative smoothing* (Spence, 1986). Human experience does not match a carefully crafted, congruent story. It consists of extraneous happenings and everyday chores as well as simultaneous multiple projects (Carr, 1986). The very act of bringing these happenings into language imposes a higher level of order on them than they have in the flux of everyday experience. The move to narrative configuration extracts a still higher order from the fullness of lived experiences (Kerby, 1991). The configuration, however, cannot impose just any emplotted order on the data. The final story must fit the data while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves.

Dollard (1935) proposed seven criteria for judging a life history. Although written almost 60 years ago, the criteria arc still applicable and can be used by the researcher as guides in generating a storied history or case study from the gathered data. The following is my statement of Dollard's criteria in the form of guidelines for developing a narrative.

(1) The researcher must include descriptions of the cultural context in which the storied case study takes place. The protagonist has incorporated, to some extent, the values, social rules, meaning systems, and languaged conceptual networks of the culture in which he or she developed (Bourdieu, 1980/1990). Particular meanings of happenings and actions are provided by the cultural heritage; assumptions about acceptable and expected personal goals are maintained by the social environment; and normal strategies for achieving these goals are sustained by the milieu. In generating the story, the researcher needs to attend to the contextual features that give specific meanings to events so that their contributions to the plot can be understood.

(2) In gathering and configuring the data into a story, the researcher also needs to attend to the embodied nature of the protagonist. The incarnate nature of human existence locates the person spatially and temporally. The bodily dimensions (such as height and physique) and genetic-given propensities (such as academic intelligence and probabilities of illnesses) affect personal goals and produce life concerns. The body undergoes continuous change throughout life, and its developmental stages provide an essential context for actions; for example, the physical and cognitive development of a 3-year-old and a 73-year-old are fundamentally different. People's emotional responses to events and others are not merely cognitive but also bodily (Lazarus, 1991). Illness and bodily incapacity affect a person's self-identity as well as influencing one's productivity. The body places temporal limits on life, and the recognition of approaching death influences goals and actions. It is important that researchers include the bodily dimension in their storied explanation of a given topic.

(3) In developing the story's setting, the researcher needs to be mindful not only of the general cultural environment and the person as embodied, but also of the importance of significant other people in affecting the actions and goals of the protagonist. An explanation of the relationships between the main character and other people – parents, siblings, spouse, children, friends, and personal antagonists – is required in the development of the plot. The reasons for undertaking actions are often related to concern for another's happiness, not simply to fulfill a personal agenda. Carr (1986) uses the term "we-subject" (p. 134) when referring to narratives in which the purpose of the person's actions is the achievement of the well-being of others.

(4) Although the cultural setting, the body, and other people provide the context and limits in which the protagonist acts, he or she makes choices to pursue particular goals, decides on a series of activities designed to accomplish these goals, and undertakes the selected actions. The story is about the central character and movement toward an outcome. The researcher needs to concentrate on the choices and actions of this central person. To understand the person, we must grasp the person's meanings and understandings; the agent's vision of the world; and his or her plans, purposes, motivations, and interests. Attention to the inner struggles, emotional states, and valuing of the protagonist provides important data. The protagonist is not merely a pawn buffeted by the setting, but an actor who alters the scene. Different people respond differently to the same events. The story needs to describe the interaction between this particular protagonist and the setting.

(5) In constructing the story, the researcher needs to consider the historical continuity of the characters. People are historical beings retaining as part of themselves their previous experiences. Past experiences manifest themselves in the present as habits and are partially available through recollection. Embedded habits present themselves not only as motor skills and body movements but also as patterns of thought. In considering the person as a biographical being, attention needs to be given to social events that the protagonist and his or her historical cohorts have experienced. For example, in developing life stories of older Americans, it is important to understand the impact of the Depression on their goals and strategies. In making the protagonist's decisions and actions understandable and sensible, the researcher needs to present them as consistent with previous experience. Although a person's past experiences persevere into the present, they do not necessarily determine future actions. The plot of many case histories is about a person's struggle to change habitual behaviors and to act differently.

(6) The outcome of a narrative analysis is the generation of a story. A story requires a bounded temporal period; that is, it needs a beginning, middle, and end. The researcher must mark the beginning point of the story and the point of denouement. A story needs to focus on a specific context in which the plot takes place. The researcher should present the characters with enough detail that they appear as unique individuals in a particular situation. The researcher

should not overlook details that differentiate this story from similar ones. The power of a storied outcome is derived from its presentation of a distinctive individual, in a unique situation, dealing with issues in a personal manner; this power is contrasted with research findings which present *l'homme moyen*, the abstracted, statistically average person (Gigerenzer *et al.*, 1989).

(7) The final guideline for judging the adequacy of a narrative analysis is whether it makes the generation of the researched occurrence plausible and understandable. The previous guidelines refer to dimensions that need to be considered in generating a story from the data. This final guideline concerns the need for the researcher to provide a story line or plot that serves to configure or compose the disparate data elements into a meaningful explanation of the protagonist's responses and actions. Although the configuration process cannot be accomplished by following an algorithmic recipe, certain steps are commonly used in the production of storied narratives. The story is a reconstruction of a series of events and actions that produced a particular outcome. The configuration process often begins with the story's ending or denouement. By specifying the outcome, the researcher locates a viewing point from which to select data events necessary for producing the conclusion. The researcher asks, "How is it that this outcome came about; what events and actions contributed to this solution?" Examples of outcomes include the achievement of a high reading score, overcoming performance fears, and overcoming an addiction to drugs. From its conclusion, the researcher retrospectively views the data elements in order to link them into a series of happenings that led to the outcome.

After the denouement is identified, the researcher can work directly with the data elements. A first step in configuring the data into a story is to arrange the data elements chronologically. The next step is to identify which elements are contributors to the outcome. Then the researcher looks for connections of cause and influence among the events and begins to identify action elements by providing the "because of" and "in order to" reasons (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) for which they were undertaken. Often these connections are not simply one to one but are combinations and accumulations of events that influence a response or provide sufficient reason for an action.

The final step is the writing of the story. The storied product is a temporal gestalt in which the meaning of each part is given through its reciprocal relationships with the plotted whole and other parts. The researcher cannot simply compile or aggregate the happenings; they must be drawn together into a systemic whole. As Vanhoozer (1991) summarizes, "Just as painting is a *visual* representation which shapes or configures *space*, so narrative is a *verbal* representation of reality which shapes or configures *time*" (p. 37). The problem confronting the researcher is to construct a display of the complex, interwoven character of human experience as it unfolds through time and as it stands out at any present moment through recollection and imagination (Heidegger, 1927/1962). The plot provides the systemic unity to the story; it is the glue that connects the parts together. Thus, the final writing begins with the construction of the plot outline. The outline is an intellectual construction (Stake, 1988) or temporally patterned whole that the researcher develops from working with the sequentially ordered data.

With the outline in mind, the researcher fills in and links the data elements to other data elements and to the plotted whole story. Filling in the outline with detail often has the effect of displaying weaknesses in the plot's capacity to unite the data. This requires adjustments to the outline so that it better fits the data. During the process of linking the elements together and identifying their contribution to the plotted outline, it sometimes becomes apparent that there are gaps in the data. When possible, the researcher gathers additional data to fill in the missing links in order to produce a full and explanatory story. The interdependence of story and data is described by Bruner (1986):

> It is not that we initially have a body of data, the facts, and we then must construct a story or theory to account for them. . . . Instead . . . the narrative structures we construct are not

secondary narratives about data but primary narratives that establish what is to count as data. (pp. 142–143)

In the decades since Dollard developed his criteria, changes have occurred in the philosophy of science that call attention to the constructive processes that underlie the production of knowledge (Rosenau, 1992). The storied finding of a narrative analytic inquiry is not a third-person "objective" representation or mirrored reflection of a protagonist's or subject's life as it "actually" occurred; rather, the finding is the outcome of a series of constructions. Researchers engaged in narrative analysis need to be attuned to their contributions to the constructive aspects of their research and to acknowledge these in their write-ups. The data used in narrative inquiries are not simple descriptions of sense-impressions. They are dialogical productions resulting from interactions between subjects and the researchers (Tierney, 1993). The write-up itself is not a neutral representation of the research finding; it is a composition that molds the story to fit the current grammatical conventions and conceptual framework of the language in which the story is expressed (Clifford, 1986). In addition to Dollard's seven criteria, a life history produced by a narrative analysis can be expected to include a recognition of the role the researcher had in constructing the presented life story and the effect the researcher's views might have had in shaping the finding.

The function of narrative analysis is to answer how and why a particular outcome came about. The storied analysis is an attempt to understand individual persons, including their spontaneity and responsibility, as they have acted in the concrete social world. The storied production that is the outcome of the research is the retrospective or narrative explanation of the happening that is the topic of the inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1988). The plausibility of the produced story is in its clarification of the uncertainty implied in the research question of why the happening occurred. The explanation needs to satisfy the subjective needs of the reader of the report to understand how the occurrence could have come about. The story has to appeal to the reader's experienced general sense of how and why humans respond and act (Ricoeur, 1983/1984). It needs to be compatible with the reader's background knowledge or beliefs in characteristic behavior of people or nature in order for the reader to accept the explanation as possible (McGuire, 1990).

The configurative analysis is produced after the storied events have occurred. Although the collection of the data may occur while the episode is in process, the analysis occurs afterward. The researcher is not simply producing a description of action but is writing a history. Although elements of the data may reflect the thoughts and plans of the protagonist at the time they happened, in the analysis these elements are transformed into historical data. From the point of view of the narrative analyzer, the nonintentional as well as the intentional effects of the actions are included (Carr et al., 1991). A narrative configuration is not merely a transcription of the thoughts and actions of the protagonist; it is a means of making sense and showing the significance of them in the context of the denouement. In the storied outcome of narrative inquiry, the researcher is the narrator of the story, and often the story is told in his or her voice.

In producing the story, the researcher draws on disciplinary expertise to interpret and make sense of responses and actions. Because the story is offered as a scholarly explanation and realistic depiction of a human episode, the researcher needs to include evidence and argument in support of the plausibility of the offered story. Manicas and Secord (1983) summarize the analytic process of the kind of research I have termed *narrative analysis*:

It is engaged in understanding the concrete person and his or her life history and particular patterns of behavior, including as reflexively applied, self-understanding. . . . As a scientific effort it requires also that the inquirer use whatever special knowledge is available regarding implicated psychological structures and mechanism as these operated in the

individual biography. And since the person is born and matures in a social world, this understanding inevitably also includes references to what is known about social structures pertinent to that biography. Finally, in contrast to our prescientific mode of understanding, hermeneutic inquiry as a science would be constrained by the systematic, public demands of establishing the evidential credibility of its accounts. (p. 407)

In judging the credibility of a story, a distinction can be made between the accuracy of the data and the plausibility of the plot. It is the researcher's responsibility to assure that the reported events and happenings actually occurred. The use of triangulation methods in which several independent reports of an event are sought can help in producing confidence that the event occurred. Although respondents may agree that an event happened, their interpretations of the meaning of the event may vary. Researchers need to treat interview-based data with care. Recollection of past events is selective and produced from the present perspective of the respondent. The significance and meaning of the event in the present may differ from its effect at the time of the original experience. Also, respondents do not have full access to those aspects of the experience that did not achieve awareness or to the complexity of their motives in undertaking an action (Lyons, 1986).

The question of the accuracy of the configurative plot is of greater complexity. Some writers, for example White (1973, 1981), hold that narrative configuration is a culturally derived literary imposition on what otherwise is a fragmented and disorganized reality. Other writers (e.g., Carr, 1986; Carr et al., 1991; Kerby, 1991) hold that a primitive form of narrative configuration is inherent in people's understanding of their own and others' actions. My position is similar to that of Carr and Kerby (Polkinghorne, 1991a). The storied narrative form is not an imposition on data of an alien type but a tightening and ordering of experience by explicating an intrinsically meaningful form. Because of the gap between experienced actions and the emplotted explication of them, it is possible that the same data elements can be configured by more than one plot (Stake, 1988). Thus, a sociological or psychological plot can be used to configure the data. The seven guidelines given earlier advance the ideal of an integrated plot that synthesizes the cultural, biological, historical, and individual aspects of the person into a unified story. Nevertheless, because configurative analysis is the researcher's construction, it is inappropriate to ask if it is the "real" or "true" story.

The purpose of narrative analysis is not simply to produce a reproduction of observations; rather, it is to provide a dynamic framework in which the range of disconnected data elements are made to cohere in an interesting and explanatory way (du Preez, 1991). Van Maanen (1988) states, "The criteria put forth for truth claims in the literary tale seem more similar to the fieldworker's 'personal experience' standard than the reporter's 'two people told me so' standard" (p. 143). The evaluation of the configurative analytic work of the researcher is based on the generated story's production of coherence among the situated, contextual, and particular elements of the data, that is, on its explanatory power (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and plausibility. The evaluation of the story has a pragmatic dimension in the sense that its value depends on its capacity to provide the reader with insight and understanding. The pragmatic dimension of the evaluation of researcher-generated stories is not to be confused with the pragmatic evaluation of therapeutic stories (Spence, 1984). The researcher's story should not only be useful; it should also be faithful to the actual historical happenings (Sass, 1992).

The classic examples of narrative analysis are Freud's case studies (see Brooks, 1984; Hillman, 1983) and studies by the symbolic interactionists of the Chicago School (Hammersley, 1989; Manis & Meltzer, 1978). Recent writers have called attention to the storied structure of the reports of anthropological field studies (Bruner, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988). Although the basic model of the story is the action of a single person (Ricoeur, 1983/1984), the notion of the

protagonist has been expanded by analogy to social groups and organizations; for example, corporate case studies have served as the basic teaching tool in the Harvard Business School.

Narrative inquiries often include a set of case studies related to the same topic. Seidman (1991) discusses the method of creating a set of profiles or vignettes that, alongside each other, provide greater insight and understanding of the topic than any single vignette. His study of community college teaching (Seidman, 1985) includes a collection of storied vignettes of faculty experiences based on extensive interviews. Forrester's (1993) study of depressed children consists of comprehensive case studies of six children with depressive symptoms. The six stories were based on a variety of sources: She interviewed the children's parents and therapists; she interviewed the children and observed their play and interactions with other children; her data also contained treatment process notes from the clinic where the children received therapy. The six stories of the children's experiences with depression depict the diverse effects depression had on the individual lives of these children. Often, a set of case studies is followed by a commentary chapter in which the differences and similarities among the cases is highlighted. Forrester's study has such a commentary in which she notes the variety of depression in the lives of the children and the limits of the single diagnostic category of childhood depression. The commentary chapter normally does not consist of a paradigmatic analysis because the stories are not those produced by subjects but those produced by the researcher him- or herself.

Conclusion

Narrative inquiry is one of the many kinds of research that are part of the research approaches that have been gathered under the umbrella of qualitative research. I have advocated the importance of identifying two types of narrative inquiry. Both share the general principles of qualitative research such as working with data in the form of natural language and the use of noncomputational analytic procedures. Although both types of narrative inquiry are concerned with stories, they have significant differences. The paradigmatic type collects storied accounts for its data; the narrative type collects descriptions of events, happenings, and actions. The paradigmatic type uses an analytic process that identifies aspects of the data as instances of categories; the narrative type uses an analytic process that produces storied accounts. The paradigmatic type is based on what Bruner has termed paradigmatic reasoning; the narrative type is based in narrative reasoning. Narrative inquiry of the paradigmatic type produces knowledge of concepts; the narrative type produces knowledge of particular situations. Both types of narrative inquiry can make important contributions to the body of social science knowledge.

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