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ANALYZING NOVELTY AND PATTERN IN INSTITUTIONAL LIFE NARRATIVES

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Life narratives are continually subject to reconstruction. Mundane as they might be, chance encounters, events such as career downturns, and occasions like psychiatric consultations prompt life revision. Emphasized are terms that reference the present, points of departure for the pragmatist analysis of experience through time. In a seminal lecture titled "The Present as the Locus of Reality," philosopher George Herbert Mead (1959/1930) flagged this decades ago, explaining that, in practice, "a reality that transcends the present must exhibit itself in the present" (p. 11). As Arthur Murphy indicated in prefatory remarks, "(It was Mead's view that the irrevocable past is the past of any given present, that which accounts for its occurrence" (p. xviii).

Mead was especially concerned with novelty in experience. According to Mead, it was the ongoing accountability of the past in the present that served experience's reconstruction, which would otherwise be irrevocably patterned. Mead did not ignore patterning in experience, but considered it rooted in the practice of everyday life. He advocated reflexively combining a view to the everyday practice of reality construction with a working sense of the irrevocability of pattern in life. Mead's perspective and his sense of the immediacy of novelty in experience inform this chapter's analysis of institutional life narratives.

Analytic bearings

Today's world is saturated with institutions — schools, churches, human service agencies, clinics, work organizations, and team sports, among many others. From childhood to old age, they pattern the flow of experience through time in relation to what Everett Hughes (1984) called their "going concerns" (also see Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). In this environment, life narratives cannot be viewed as organized on their own into personal wholes. They are more accurately seen as the practical accomplishments of diverse sites of narrativity. In institutional reckoning, personal wholes are configurations of concern continually subject to reconfiguration. Accordingly and hyphenated, there is the personal-life-story-under-the-auspices-of-schooling, say, just as there

is the personal-life-story-of-athletic-careers, and the personal-life-story-of-those-institutionalized-for-dementia — each further hyphenated by the contingent presents of narrative events, occasions, and locations.

Ethnomethodology provides Mead's pragmatism with analytic bearings, offering concepts that work empirically to showcase the operation of novelty in experience (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984). Ethnomethodologists use the term "artful" to highlight experiential novelty, parallel to Mead's use of the concept of experiential "emergence." As the chapter will illustrate, the everyday construction of life narratives, while "presentist," is not automatic, but is a practical accomplishment that is locally contingent, methodically organized, and demonstrably novel as well as patterned.

Narrative ethnography

Participants in the construction of life narratives not only reference patterned senses of the whole, but simultaneously work at assembling wholes in locally pertinent terms (see Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). As this increasingly unfolds in institutional context, it requires a narrative ethnography, a method sensitive both to communicative practice and to its *in situ* conditions. It is a method of procedure we have applied in a longstanding program of research on the construction of life narratives in institutional settings (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008, 2009).

Narrative analysis is well established across disciplines concerned with the storied flow of life (Clandinin, 2007; McAdams, 1993; Riessman, 2008). Much of it centers on the analysis of texts, the output of a construction process that produces diaries, memoirs, letters, reports, case files, and interview transcripts. Analysis entails discerning and categorizing themes or particular narrative structures, for example. Narrative output, not the practice of narrative production, is the focus of attention (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). Analysis of the production of locally accountable narratives requires something more — narrative ethnography. It is a form of ethnography that pays equal attention to novelty and pattern in the construction process.

Institutional environments

Life narratives constructed in institutional environments may appear quite different from those produced in formal interviewing. They are often, but not always, shorter, semantically truncated, and relate, often openly, to the working conditions of their production. Being practical, their patterning or coherence relates as much to participants' perspectives, institutional preferences, and interactional contingencies, as to internal textual matters such as emplotment, thematization, and characterization. They are constructed by all manner of speakers besides the individual who is the subject of a life narrative, such as professionals and family members. As Michael Bamberg (2006) suggests in distinguishing big and small stories, extended life narratives (big stories) may be more the product of the duration and individualizing conditions of life story interviewing, than the otherwise smaller narratives that are the product of real-time accounts of experience.

Local pertinence

The local pertinence of life story material can be conspicuous when narrative production comes into focus. Rather than being irrevocably lodged in life history, the past becomes virtual fodder for real-time challenges and reconstruction. Accounts are not only subject to standard credibility criteria such as validity and reliability, but simultaneously run the credibility gamut of participating

stakeholders' views and preferences. Institutional stakeholders are now legion, extending from those whose lives are being storied, to significant others such as family members and professional agents like career counselors and psychological consultants.

Local pertinence is not just an abstraction. It is a concept that is hearable and can be documented. Nor is it just an ideal, as ideals in practice relate reflexively to varied and shifting institutional preferences. In real time, pertinence operates by rules of its own making, which in the process produces novelty, as the first of our illustrations below will show. The universalized criteria of "accurate accounts" and "objectivity" are rather farfetched in this context. If they come into play, they are accountable to local relevancies.

There is nothing extraordinary about local pertinence. Hearable accountability comes in endless ordinary cautions and requests such as "the way to put that," "the right way of describing it," "what will sell," "what we need to know," "let's think of it this way," and "what they expect to hear." In practice, local pertinence is a process of invoking rules for patterning experience through time. As far as the work of narrative production is concerned, rule-use reflexively is the patterning that results from it. But this remains largely invisible or otherwise ignored by both participants and researchers as important when patterning is the focus of attention. Were it not for its analytic bearing, the sheer mundanity of local pertinence would cause us to overlook its persistence presence in life narrative construction (Pollner, 1987).

Biographical work

We refer to the practice of life narrative construction as "biographical work" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000a). Referencing a life, the term "biography" is used to flag the substantive goal of those who are the subjects of, as well as those who engage in constructing, related narratives. The goal is to produce suitably patterned accounts of experience through time. As we illustrate, in institutional reckoning, the local pertinence of biographical particulars often prominently leads the way. The life histories psychologists need to do their work, for example, can contrast with the accounts social workers need to carry out their responsibilities. Neither is likely to have much use for really big stories, but rather just enough to shed light upon and facilitate professional responsibilities. More can be much less under the circumstances.

The term "work" serves as an analytic reminder to keep practice in focus. Individuals do not automatically or just suddenly break out into patterned accounts. They are prompted in some way, under specific institutional auspices, and work at it with particular aims and preferences in tow. A story of crime and a criminal career, for example, would hardly pass as seductive and exciting – as a crime story – if it weren't told with the flair and dramatic tension expected of such accounts by listeners (see Katz, 1988). A crime story is a patterned outcome of the work entailed in producing it. In institutional context, biographical work is especially strategic, operating not just to produce biographies, but biographies pertinent to organized concerns.

Rule-use and novelty in a psychiatric review

The first illustration is taken from childhood and showcases rule-use and novelty in the biographical work of a psychiatric review. It presents an exchange reconstructed from fieldnotes between a social worker and a psychological consultant on the occasion of a semi-annual review of a child in residential treatment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Buckholdt & Gubrium, 1985/1979). Under consideration in the exchange is the pertinence of family life material drawn from the child's case file. Reading through the exchange, you will notice how the social worker and consultant figuratively step into and out of the case material, reflexively

both reading the material for its informational value and simultaneously negotiating its narrative pertinence.

The occasioned *ad hoc* use of rules is where novelty develops (see Wieder, 1970). The rules invoked on this and other occasions can be viewed as indexing their respective particulars, which in the case under consideration, like in others, references specific case material, situated sentiments about the case material, *in situ* descriptive challenges, and local professional preferences. While experiential patterning in the case emerges out of the consultation, and the case can be compared to cases like or unlike others of its kind, there is no guarantee that the concrete process and contingencies that led it to be described and categorized the way it is will be repeated later. An entirely different configuration of invoked rules might generate the same case description the next time around. A focus on textual outcomes could elide significant differences in textual production.

Ethnographic information is helpful in further understanding what is transpiring in the exchange, in particular how novelty relates to institutional preferences. The residential treatment center served children 6 to 14 years of age, who at the time of the study were referred to as "emotionally disturbed" and behaviorally "out of control." These childhood behavioral conditions are now commonly diagnosed as ADHD and can overlap with the spectrum of autisms and Asperger's syndrome. The center's service intervention mandate was officially behaviorist, combining an elaborate behavior modification regimen of assessment and treatment with half-day schooling on the grounds and 24-hour residential care for a period of two years, counseling, speech therapy, and recreational activity.

Most of the professional staff used behaviorist terminology for official purposes, produced case material and reports reflecting that, and justified interventions in the same terms. While children's family histories were an abiding concern, the home was formally construed as a behavioral environment with diverse reward contingencies and outcomes, largely bereft of past considerations. Visible and countable behavioral acts were emphasized, not thoughts and feelings. For all intents and purposes, families were domestic configurations of stimuli and responses, the behavioral effectiveness of which for children hopefully led to better self-control. In behavioral reasoning, domestic life was construed as a "cool" environment, whose dynamics could be understood in terms of the contingent rationalities of visible activity. In sharp contrast to Christopher Lasch's (1979) contemporaneous concept of family as a "haven in a heartless world," whose warm and supportive interior defended members against the harsh realities of life, the effective family in official reckoning kept members' emotional lives firmly under control (also see Gubrium, 1992).

At the time of the study, psychiatric reviews at the center were outsourced to three consultants – one was a behavioral psychologist, another was a psychologist who viewed himself as eclectic, and the third was a child psychiatrist with Freudian sensibilities. This in itself produced novelty in practice, especially when different consultants occasionally guided the reviews of the same child. For reporting purposes, their narrative preferences had to be reconciled, usually by the social worker, in writing up case material that reflected the behavioral emphasis of the institution, especially to funding agencies. Normally, consultants were assigned to specific children and, for the most part, the consultants followed up only on the children assigned to them, thus maintaining consistent narrative patterning over time.

While the psychiatrist especially brought a non-behavioral perspective on family and experience to his exchanges with staff members, his opinions and advice were nonetheless widely admired and valued. He was, understandably, professionally concerned with family history and children's pasts, which to the front line staff was repeatedly described as shedding important light on a child's present conduct. Oddly enough, in this context, a warm and supportive domestic environment was key to children's emotional maturity, a view quite contrary to formal institutional reasoning.

Now for the exchange. The speakers are the child's social worker and the behavioral psychologist substituting for the child's regular consultant, the psychiatrist, who is currently on vacation. Narrative pertinence on this occasion centers on the issue of how to translate past-oriented case material generated under the auspices of child psychiatric consultation into equivalent present-oriented information of professional interest to the behavioral psychologist. Pseudonyms have been assigned to persons and places here and throughout the chapter.

Social Worker: (Reading from case material) Says that the home is pretty shattered emotionally. (Elaborates)

Consultant: (Offering an equivalency rule) Do you mean everyone's out of control at 671 Bradley Street?

The consultant and social worker discuss the semantic equivalence of shattered emotions and being out of control, eventually settling, for the time being, on the following reverse equivalency rule offered by the social worker.

Social Worker: No, what I mean is just that the parents really feel bad about it and can't seem to get over that. Just that. It's not that things are out of control, more like just deep feelings. (Elaborates)

The discussion of meaning and pertinence continues, focusing next on what "feeling bad" and "deep feelings" connote in behavioral terms. This is guided by the invocation of rules for translating these particular emotions into behaviors, and reflexively leads eventually to rule justification by the very case material the rules were initially meant to translate.

Consultant: (Turning to case material dealing with the "homework" assigned to the parents for managing their child in the household) So then they're still adhering to the assignment, making sure Tommy's on task and making sure what the consequences are, right? (Requests information about how the child is being consequence) But they're not exactly happy that it's come to that?

Social Worker: Pretty much, but they're perfectionists and can't seem to handle failure. (Elaborates)

At this point, following a consideration of Tommy's low grades, discussion shifts levels in rule-use, from the presentation of equivalency rules, to the invocation of a rule about ruling.

Consultant: (Offers a rule about ruling) Okay, let's not get into their heads. (Moving away from the parents' alleged perfectionism and now referring to a "contracted" or formally agreed upon at-home behavior modification assignment) How are the parents handling the contract? That's the point. They feel they could be doing better. Tommy was never this bad; he was a happy kid until recently. What could have changed? As I said, they're perfectionists.

Social Worker: (Elaborates from case material) (Reminding the social worker of the rule about ruling) Let's never mind that, okay? Just please stick to what's going on right now. Feelings aside, they're following through (on the contract), right?

Social Worker: That's right.

Points in time and novelty in a career narrative

The second illustration is taken from midlife and showcases the role that events at various points in time play in constructing novelty in a career narrative. As part of a study of American professional athletes at the end of their careers, former National Football League (NFL) players were asked to describe their lives (Holstein et al., 2015). While players came from broad range of backgrounds and had encountered myriad experiences along the way, their career stories invariably began with childhood "dreams" of becoming football players and ended with their "retirement" from the game. The pattern was strikingly uniform despite the differences in players.

James Fox, a retired nine-year veteran of the NFL, offers a typical formulation of an NFL career.

When I was a kid, I was going to be a football player . . . I really got involved at nine years old officially, when I started playing Pop Warner . . . I turned the television on and there was a Monday Night Football game on. I went and got my shoulder pads, my uniform, and put it on while I watched the game . . . I said, "I'm gonna play on Monday night!" From that day forward, I said I am going to do everything I possibly can to make that happen.

Fox proceeds to build his story, step by step, moving from his fanciful childhood dream, through Pop Warner football, middle school, and into high school. At each stage, he tells of meeting with success and encouragement, and, in his words, the dream became more of a "process." He describes an evolving plan, and the measures he took along the way to promote his football success: "There was a lot of work. And college had to be a part of that . . . You had to go to college to play in the NFL." Fox recounts how he abandoned all other interests to single-mindedly pursue football, quitting other sports and pastimes and devoting countless hours to "working out": "I focused on football all of the time." When he eventually earned a football scholarship to attend college, football took on an even more demanding role. According to Fox, the game consumed nearly all day, every day, year round. He tells of eagerly pushing his studies aside to further his football training. Summing up, he noted: "I felt good about the course that I was on."

After college, Fox desperately hoped to play in the NFL, but his dream came crashing down. He wasn't drafted by an NFL team; he wouldn't get the opportunity to try out for a spot on a team roster. "Draft time came. My name didn't get called. I cried like a baby." Fox dropped out of school and got a part-time job that would allow him the time to work out most of the day to improve his game. "Football was my deal." As he recalls, his "big opportunity" came a few months later when he was drafted to play in the newly formed World League of American Football. As his story goes, he performed well, caught the attention of NFL scouts and eventually signed to play with the Green Bay Packers of the NFL. "I was on my way . . . After I got put in the starting lineup after my sixth game of my rookie year, I never came out during my whole career."

As with any life story, there are countless details that could have been included in Fox's career narrative. Like other players, he tells of wins and losses, awards, injuries, huge contracts, and crises of confidence. These narratives establish a familiar career trajectory – a recognizable pattern, as it were – assimilating diverse experiences into the career arc, with players looking back from the terminal points of successful careers, descriptively turning football from a dream into a journey, and ultimately a fulfilling obsession.

It is tempting to call these stories "career clichés" in the manner that Donileen Loseke (2001, 2012) once described the "formula stories" of battered women in human service shelters. Like

stories of alcoholism and recovery told under the auspices of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA, 1976), NFL career stories present lives in cliché-like terms, but with institutionally distinct patterning. AA stories typically involve a downward spiral into alcoholism, "hitting bottom," then resurrecting viable lives by traveling a "twelve step" path to recovery. The discursive pattern of an NFL career has a similar institutional cast, but with a consistently upward trajectory.

But the rubric of formula stories emphasizes pattern at the expense of novelty — in this case the biographical work of assembling diverse and multifaceted details into a coherent career narratives at different points in time. Comparing accounts across time, the stories are not merely trite or purely formulaic, but reconstituted in temporally and institutionally appropriate terms that accord with each present's novel circumstances. As trite as career narratives might be at particular points in time, their variety at different junctures shows considerable novelty. When asked to recount their careers from the vantage point of retirement, say, different "trite" accounts emerge. Putting it in Mead's terms, the irrevocable past follows from the perspective of different presents. Even the irrevocable futures of discernible pasts are implicated. Asked to consider their futures, recently retired players revisit and reconstruct past events in light of present circumstances. What might have been at an earlier point in life the story of successful careers, is composed with alternative outcomes in play when told at a different point in time. Pasts reflexively change in light of the descriptive contours of the present past's future.

The sports and news media recently have highlighted the post-football troubles of retired players, especially their financial woes. It's been said that most players are on the brink of financial ruin shortly after they quit the game, despite the enormous amount of money they earned while playing. In relation to these circumstances, players typically compose their careers in ways that explain and justify a formerly unforeseen pattern leading to post-football travails. Taken together, the resulting accounts are complex compositions of then, now, and the future, told from the perspectives of the working presents.

Consider how Fox reconstitutes aspects of his career when asked what he plans to do to make a living now that he's out of the game.

When we was off playing football, our (college) classmates . . . were doing internships. They were working their way up the ladder. While we were on the practice field learning how to tackle, they were learning the game of life. Now, all of a sudden, you played 10 years, now I am 32 years old, I'm out of the league, and my classmate that was in my industrial technology classes, he is 32, but he has had 10 years on me, going through the interview process, closing deals, so now, I am at 32, trying to compete with him. That's tough.

Narratives cast in an earlier timeframe as positive developments — the single-minded pursuit of football skills at the expense of other skills and pastimes — are recomposed as drawbacks in the biographical work of accounting for a problematic future. Fox recalls experiences at the periphery of his previous career story that now coalesce into a currently coherent account for why job prospects at the moment and into the future have been dampened by a newly salient past. A juncture in his career that was previously constructed as a positive turning point — where he began to devote all his attention to football — is reformulated as a detriment to present-day occupational development.

The presentist lesson on this front again features the novelty of life patterning. Institutionalized sports career narratives don't so much construct players' lives, as they serve as stocks of knowledge for formulating sports careers according to one's current circumstances. Rather than a formulaic pattern institutionally rendering "the" career narrative, specific events in time work to

invoke circumstantially pertinent formulations. Formerly irrevocable pasts are transformed narratively into new and equally irrevocable pasts that reflexively accord with the events of the present.

Standpoint and the novelty of the end of life

The third illustration is taken from old age and showcases how occasioned standpoints can shape constructions of the end of life. Its point of departure is the concept of "narrative foreclosure," which Mark Freeman (2011) coined in his research on narrativity in relation to dementia. Freeman was troubled by the common assertion made by disease sufferers and those otherwise troubled that one's "life is over" when the speaker continued living. Trouble derived from Freeman's sense of the mismatch between the life and living. Tying life and living to each other, he asked how it was possible to assert that one's life was over when living clearly continued beyond the present? Untying the two and taking a different tack based on the idea of biographical work, the illustration shows that the assertion is not so much a misstatement of fact, but an assertion that flags a rhetorical project.

The illustration draws from extracts of narrative and ethnographic material dealing with accounts of the quality of life in nursing homes (Gubrium, 1993). The study did not aim to access residents' evaluations of the quality of the nursing home or its care, but rather with how residents constructed their lives in their present circumstances. Here, particular attention is paid to how the assertion "life is over" accords with the circumstances of its application. When compared, the occasional use of the assertion presents considerable novelty in meaning.

The first extract is from one of several interviews with 84-year-old resident Alec, who had been in skilled care at Holly Plaza for three years at the time. He suffered from diabetes and the continuing pain of a double leg amputation. He had been a heavy smoker, now also suffered from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and according to the staff exhibited signs of dementia. In the course of the study, interviewer Jay Gubrium came to know Alec and his family very well, especially his 82-year-old wife Cora and their adult children Mark, Nina, and Kitty. The family visited Alec regularly in the nursing home.

It did not take much prompting in interviews for Alec to speak about his life, both before and after living at the Plaza. He was naturally chatty and didn't hesitate to reminisce about what many residents called "the old days," more recent times, and their present and future lives in the nursing home. Described by staff members as enduringly "active and busy," Alec was a big man and reported to have lived with "adventure in his veins." One of his daughters claimed he was the Ernest Hemingway of the family. As a young man, Alec had been a lumberjack and later continued to work in and out of the lumber industry.

The following is a portion of one of many chats with him that converged on a narrative of life now living at the Plaza. Note the eventual assertion of narrative foreclosure. The bold contrast of then and now not only communicates an ending, but is persuasive and emotionally palpable.

Alec: You know how it is when you're that age (*his twenties*), you're as active as all get-out. (*Elaborates*) Look at me now; you wouldn't know it, would ya, Jay? I'm a big guy. Shit, buddy, I was a really a big lunk then; I got around like none of the other guys (*at work*). What a life! I was looked up to, too. No messin' around with Alec. No sir! (*He elaborates about himself and his life at that time, pausing here and there, marveling and then sighing, as if to convey what he once was in relation to what he's become*) Hey, what a difference; I'll bet you can't believe it, can you, Jay? (*Pause*) Can you believe that this ole dying body once upon a time coulda had a life? Can ya, buddy? That's amazing, Alec. Tell me about it.

Jay:

Alec: Aw, come on. What's to tell? You heard me a hundred times by now. (*Laughs*) I'm like a broken record, right buddy? Well, hell's bells, they take good care of you here; don't get me wrong. (*Elaborates*) But this ain't no life. I'm dead meat, man. I sit here (*laughing*) and I shit here. Right here, right? (*Points to his bottom and ivc both laugh*) Sit and shit. You wouldn't find me doin' that before I got here. Don't get me wrong, the gals (*nursing aides*) are good about it; they better be or else! (*Chuckles*) Big talk, huh? Can't wipe my own ass. (*Sighs*)

Jay: Well, life . . .

Alec: Well, life nothin', period. (*His voice breaking*) That's it. That's gone. It's over. Farewell.

But, right or wrong, this wasn't the whole story. If a common pattern of institutional despair is evident in this account, other renderings tell a different story. Standpoint could figure significantly in constructing the end of a life. Family members especially were part of Alec's story and also spoke of his life "then" and "now," with accompanying judgments about whether Alec's life was over. Listen to how Alec's wife Cora and their children spoke about his life on the occasion of an evening's departure from the nursing home after visiting Alec. It is a novel configuration of both sameness and difference, casting doubt on a familiar institutional usage. For Alec's family, the same life experiences meant something quite different.

What Alec clearly and sometimes emotionally demarcated in interviews was a source of contention in the family circle. If Alec forcefully stated time and again that his life was over, encounters with family members could produce different employments, contesting what Alec otherwise firmly communicated. For example, in the Plaza's lobby one evening, far from Alec's room, Cora and the children weighed in differently on the matter before they left for home. The encounter produced an opportunity for another formulation, one that contrasted with the common assertion of life being over. At one point in the following reconstruction from field notes, Alec's son, Mark, sarcastically dismisses Alec's references to life being over as a dramatic trope without real meaning, contesting its common designation.

Cora: (*Facing Jay*) I'd take some of what he (*Alec*) says with a grain of salt. (*Recounts the "truth" of the matter*) You know what he's like, Jay. (*Explains*) At the same time, I know you know what it's like for him. Like it would be for you, too, if you were as active as he was, right? (*Whimpering as she elaborates*) I could cry when he tells me like that, that his life is over . . . So many of them here are just, I hate to say it, just vegetables, but not my Alec really.

Mark: Come on, Ma, don't get yourself all riled up. He's being dramatic. You know Pa. Always puttin' on a show. (*Sarcastically*) His life is over, my foot! Give him a drink and you'll see whose life is over. (*Elaborates*) Good thing he can't drink anymore. That's why his life is over.

Cora: (*Annoyed*) That's not true and you know it! Don't talk about your father like that. I know exactly what he means and he's right, goddamn it!

Kitty: You guys, geez. Stop beating yourself up, Ma. Now you're going to make me cry. (*Nitin comforts her with accompanying sympathies*)

Nina: (*Gathering the family*) See ya later, Jay. Thanks for looking out for him.

Contrasting accounts of foreclosure in the preceding extracts were not unusual in the empirical material. From one individual or group to another, what was evident when each spoke of life, even the same life, could be an irrevocable narrative, one heard over and over in stories of life in nursing homes. At the same time, the novelty of particular stories could cast a familiar pattern into something considerably different in meaning.

Conclusion

There is a line of thinking about institutions that takes a perspective on life narratives than differs from the one that informs our illustrations. It has roots in Max Weber's (1958) likening of the bureaucratization of society to an "iron cage." Weber used the metaphor to refer to what he viewed as the inescapable consequences of the rationalization of society, which organize our lives and our life narratives into patterns bereft of discretion and novelty. The view resonates strongly in critical social theory, from Jürgen Habermas' (1984, 1987) idea of the "colonization" of everyday life, to overdetermined portrayals of Erving Goffman's (1961) idea of "total institutions." In this view, the rationalization of modern life overshadows its everyday practice, novelty taking a distant back seat, if any seat at all, to the iron-clad patterning of experience.

Instead and following Mead, this chapter has applied the view that however irrevocable the presence of patterning in life, especially in institutions, novelty is an ongoing and inexorable feature of everyday meaning-making (see Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000b). We have used the microscopic advantages of narrative ethnography combined with a perspective on the occasioned, eventful, and encountered salience of the seemingly insignificant in everyday life to make the point. The biographical work and local pertinence of life narratives continually pattern experience in terms otherwise figured to be fully colonized.

The novelty and pattern of life narratives is not exclusive to institutions. These are co-present in all biographical work, as those concerned attend to local pertinences in sorting personal particulars into constant and comprehensible wholes. Institutional pertinences do matter on this front. It is the hallmark of the agents of going concerns to take account of the formal mandates of organizational conditions in doing their work, biographical work included. Yet, taking account of mandates of this kind, while increasingly prevalent, is not the same as totalized control and formulaic patterning. This chapter has argued that paying concerted attention to the working contours of accountability in life narrative construction – even in institutional reckoning – allows us to discern both novelty and pattern in everyday practice.

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