CHAPTER 12

Narrative Ethnography

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Once upon a time, stories were told and written for what they were about. The ancients wrote love stories, recorded histories of military campaigns, produced treatises on flora and fauna, medical texts, and philosophical discourses, and recounted oral histories of countless domains of experience. Some told of the emotions, some of strategic actions, and others of the principles by which these operated. Some stories were written by literate members of their societies; others have been collected as simple yet enduring folk tales. Pictorial renderings, such as cave paintings and decorative displays, attest to narrative's longevity. Extended accounts are a signal feature of the way we have shared the world.

It is one thing, however, to share accounts of battles or lost love; it is quite another to contemplate narrativity or the storying process in its own right. This is a relatively recent development. Reflections on the process might foreground the general structure of battle reports as opposed to love stories, for instance. The difference between sharing stories, on the one hand, and noticing, cataloguing, and analyzing the corpus of narratives for similarities and differences on the other, is a leap in imagination, highlighting narrativity as something separate and distinct from the stories themselves.

As a matter of practice, we do not draw a sharp distinction between stories and the storying process. Nevertheless, something important happens when a distinction is made between them, offering grounds for thinking about narrativity as something interesting on its own. The distinction might best be viewed as a dialogue rather than a categorical difference. This allows us to explore the possibility that narratives have different or similar formats and, in turn, that different formats relate to what is told, to how and where narratives take place, and to how they are understood. This chapter outlines recent developments in the study of narrative practice that take these contextual features into account and present the need for narrative ethnography.

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The Internal Organization of Narratives

The study of narrative has moved in two directions. The first of these "narrative turns" was launched by Vladimir Propp's (1928/1968) trailblazing book *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. Russian-born, Propp collected, but more important, called attention to the underlying features of Russian folk tales. He specified the internal shape of the folk tale, something that went beyond collection and appreciation. Like the myths and folk tales of other groups and nations, Russian folk tales dealt with diverse matters, from stories of family life, childhood, motherhood, birth, and death to villainy, loss, triumph, luck, desire, good, and evil. It was not the specific contents or moral twists that interested Propp, but rather how the actors and actions in a story functioned in the overall scheme of things.

Propp noticed similarities in otherwise diverse stories and argued that the fairy tale had a narrative form common to all storytelling. Actions and characters functioned in limited ways, despite the diverse subject matter. For example, a witch or a dragon provided the evil force in tales of struggle and victory. From a functional perspective, a dragon that kidnapped the king's daughter could serve the same function—as a force of evil—as the witch who snatched a baby from its mother's arms. Although dragons are not witches and king's daughters are not necessarily babies, it could be argued that they played identical roles in the accounts. As Terence Hawkes (1977, p. 69) explains, "The important thing to notice is that [Propp] is dealing with discernible and repeated structures [or functions]."

Since then, analysis of the internal organization of stories has flourished. Propp started a tradition of scholarship that now crosses linguistics, the humanities, and the social sciences, the aim of which is to theorize and catalogue the structures and functions of stories. For example, A. J. Greimas's (1983) interest in semantics led to a view of narrative structure modeled on Ferdinand de Saussure's (1915/1966) understanding of linguistic structure. In the following sections, we focus on the direction this view has taken in the social sciences. From psychologist Jerome Bruner's (1986) discussion of the narrative construction of mind, developmental theorist James Birren and his associates' (Birren, Kenyon, Ruth, Schroots, & Svensson, 1996) studies of life stories through time, and gerontologist Gary Kenyon and educator William Randall's (1997) work on autobiographical reflection to sociologist Catherine Kohler Riessman's (1990) analysis of the gender mediations of divorce talk, stories of inner lives and social worlds increasingly have been subjected to narrative analysis.

The Personal Self and Its Stories

Exemplary texts on the internal organization of narratives have distinct disciplinary flavors. Some deal with the personal self and its stories. Donald Polkinghorne's (1988) book *Narrative Knowing in the Human Sciences* is written from the perspective of a practicing psychotherapist. Polkinghorne's goal is to solve human and social problems. His disillusion with conventional social science research turned him to what he calls "narrative knowledge" as a way to understand how practitioners actually relate to their clients' troubles. Polkinghorne explains, "What I found was that practitioners work with narrative knowledge. They are concerned with people's stories: they work with case histories and use narrative explanations to understand why the people they work with behave the way they do" (p. x). Polkinghorne goes on to explicate the conceptual history of narrative knowledge as it developed in literature, psychology, and psychotherapy. One comes away from the book with a framework for orienting to personal accounts of experience in a new way.

Continuing in this vein, Dan McAdams's (1993) book *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* begins with a

question: "What do we know when we know a person?" (p. 5). As simple as the question is, it is a key concern of personality psychologists such as McAdams (see also Crossley, 2000, 2003). His answer is that identity is a life story. Personal stories and selves have parallel narrative tones and imageries. The life course is a developing story, riddled with beginnings, false starts, sudden turns, reconceptualizations, recurrent themes, and "nuclear episodes." These are the "high points, low points, and turning points in our narrative accounts of the past" (p. 296). According to McAdams, as the *dramatis personae*, plots, and themes of our stories crystallize or change, our selves develop and transform in the process. McAdams explains that "the story is inside of us. It is made and remade in the secrecy of our own minds, both conscious and unconscious, and for our own psychological discovery and enjoyment" (p. 12). The answer to the question of what we know when we know a person or ourselves is found in the variety and vicissitudes of the stories within, which we live by.

The stories we live by in today's world are put into critical perspective in social psychologist Kenneth Gergen's (1991) book *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. Gergen is similarly concerned with the personal self, but in relation to the difficulties posed by the plethora of ways in which experience is currently storied. As the back cover of the book explains, "Today's ever-expanding communications technologies force us to relate to more people and institutions than ever before, challenging the way we view ourselves and our relationships." Gergen argues that contemporary life floods us with so many narratives of what we can be that the self is saturated, unable to center itself on any source of meaning and development. We are headed in all directions and thus in no direction at all. The self is "under siege," lost in a morass of possibilities that a teeming world of self stories presents to us. The self within is shuffled through the countless stories outside, turning the story inside of us into a communica-

tive whirlwind. The self is besieged by a self-storying industry, whose cinematic and televisual images work against definitional closure, leaving the self anchorless in the process. The personal self echoes the narrative "collage of postmodern life" (p. 171), as one of Gergen's later chapters suggests.

The Relational Self and Its Stories

Not everything is this personal or this grim. Starting with George Herbert Mead's (1934) lectures at the University of Chicago on mind, self, and society, a tradition of thinking centered on the relational self has flourished alongside narrative research dealing with the personal self. Here the focus is on the self in relation to everyday life, in particular, the social interaction and situations through which self-understanding develops. Who and what we are in this context are not so much personal but relational stories; they are narratives that mirror the kinds of accounts we engage as we go about the business of living. Charles Horton Cooley (1903/1964) likened the relational self to a "looking glass," in which the narrative play of selfhood evolves through imagined accounts of who we might be (p. 184). This self is not so much located within as it is formed in communicative relation to others. The course of social interaction—both in real time and in our imaginations—inscribes the characters, plots, and themes of our identities.

The Chicago tradition came to early fruition in now classic research. W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's (1918–1920/1927) study of the immigration experience of Polish Americans in Chicago, titled *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, is a pioneering text of the genre. Indeed, except for a long introduction, Volume 1 of the two-volume compendium is composed solely of letters that the authors collected from Polish family members, written to each other between Europe and America. As the authors suggest, the letter writers' identities are located in the various accounts that depict

who they were and what they have become as they describe a world left behind in relation to a world being currently lived in. The bits and pieces of life presented in the letters are records of attitudes within, the authors argue, whose predispositions to act tell of the relational selves that construct them.

Another key text of this genre is Clifford Shaw's (1930/1966) *The Jack Roller*, subtitled "A Delinquent Boy's Own Story." The subject matter is the career of a young male delinquent named Stanley. Stanley lives in a poor, crime-ridden neighborhood near the Chicago stockyards, not far from downtown. His life is a career of petty crime, including "rolling Jacks," or assaulting and stealing from working men, especially those drunk after nights out on payday. Stanley's story is presented as an extended account in his own words, featuring a social world whose relationships shape Stanley's view of who he is and was and his hopes for the future. Coining the "own story" technique, Shaw provides a glimpse of the delinquent life as Stanley spins his narrative. It is "one of a series of 200 similar studies of repeated male offenders under 17 years of age, all of whom were on parole from correctional institutions when the studies were made" (p. 1). Stanley's story is portrayed as a life record, whose themes and plotline offer a genuine glimpse of the social world under consideration. In contrast to those who orient to the personal self and its stories, Shaw's perspective suggests that the self's stories are less articulations of experience within than they are accounts that relate significant features of everyday life that are widely shared. Shaw explains:

> A second aspect of the problem of delinquency which may be studied by means of the "own story" is the social and cultural world in which the delinquent lives. It is undoubtedly true that the delinquent behavior of the child cannot be understood and explained apart from the cultural and social context in which it occurred. By means of personal documents it is possible to study not only the traditions, customs, and moral standards of neighborhoods, institutions, families, gangs, and play groups, but the manner in which these cultural factors become incorporated into the behavior trends of the child. (p. 7)

Thus begins a tradition of narrative analysis centered on how stories reveal the relational selves of storytellers. In this genre, stories are viewed as windows on distinctive social worlds. As Ken Plummer (2001) might put it, the stories are "documents of life." Stanley's story is about Stanley only to the extent that his experience has been shaped by the social life he has led. Although it is depicted as his "own story," he does not own it; rather, he conveys "in his own words" the subjective contours of a shared environment and experience, one centered on migration, poverty, disadvantage, crime, and incarceration. The content and shape of this account are idiosyncratic only insofar as Stanley brings biographical particulars and individual narrative habits to his report. What Stanley says is a story about a social world, not just about Stanley. It is important to emphasize that, although there are individual twists to such stories, their contents are viewed as patterned by social experience. The accounts tell us how inner life relates to distinctive social worlds.

This focus has been advanced in countless ethnographic case studies of social worlds depicted in participants' "own words" and "own stories." From William Foote Whyte's (1943) magnificent account of street corner life in an Italian American slum to Elliot Liebow's (1967) study of "Negro street-corner men" in a poor African American neighborhood in Washington, D.C., to John Irwin's (1970) depiction of the social world of the felon and Elijah Anderson's (1976) portrayal of the "regulars," "wineheads," and "hoodlums" who narrate the social order and sociability of Jelly's bar and liquor store on the south side of Chicago, community members represent in their own words the lived features of particular social worlds and their related selves.

Catherine Kohler Riessman (1990) further develops the approach by analyzing stories not only for the ways plots depict social life but for the ways distinctive themes and the internal shape of accounts construct experience. Her book *Divorce Talk* shows how "women and men make sense of personal relationships," in this case divorce, through storytelling. The emphasis is on the way divorce is differentially plotted by men and women. The internal organization of the accounts Riessman discusses indicates *how* particular social experiences are put together by those under consideration, not just *what* those social experiences are like. Riessman offers us more active relational selves, selves that are not only shaped by their social worlds but that also, in turn, narratively inflect those worlds in their own right. Riessman is especially interested in illustrating how much difference the divorcing partners' gender makes in how divorced is storied. As the back cover of the book points out:

> To explain divorce, women and men construct gendered visions of what marriage should provide, and at the same time they mourn gender divisions and blame their divorces on them. Riessman examines the stories people tell about their marriages—the protagonists, inciting conditions, and culminating events—and how these narrative structures provide ways to persuade both teller and listener that divorce was justified.

The reference to "narrative structures" echoes Propp's pioneering functional analysis of Russian folk tales. The narrative turn in question is evident across the board. Stories are considered for their internal features, for their particular contents, and for the structural differences between individual accounts. Whether it is the function of a witch or a dragon, the true-to-life representation of a social world, or the construction of a form of experience by those differentially positioned in it, the internal features of stories have generalizable characteristics that move us beyond the idiosyncrasies of individual accounts. Fairy tales and reports of neighborhood experience have discernable narrative contours, in other words, suggesting that narrativity can be examined on its own terms for the manner in which it shapes what is known about its subject matter.

Analyzing Internal Structures

There now are several texts offering guidelines for conceptualizing and analyzing the internal organization of stories (see Clandinin & Connolly, 2000; Cortazzi, 1993; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2003; Herman & Vervaeck, 2005; Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993). Some are out of print and many are heavy on theory; two are exemplary because they are readily available and provide practical models for, and illustrations of, the analysis of life stories—Lieblich and colleagues' (1998) *Narrative Research* and Riessmann's *Narrative Analysis* (1993).

Lieblich and her associates distinguish three uses of narrative in social research. One is for exploratory purposes. When not much is known about a particular topic, narrative inquiry can be used to identify researchable questions. Small or strategic samples of narratives from focal populations might be collected as a prelude to the specification of variables that later can be operationalized for further study. Narratives also provide an in-depth view of the lifestyle of a particular group, such as a gang or a social movement. Developmental psychologists have used narratives to understand individual experience through time, especially in relation to significant life transitions. A second use is for research on stories themselves. This approach centers more on the formal aspects of stories than on their contents. Propp's contribution was pioneering in this regard. A third use of narratives is philosophical and methodological. Inquiry centers on what narrativity can contribute to our knowledge of individual and group experience and is often juxtaposed with the

typically flat, thin contributions of positivistic methods.

The bulk of Lieblich and colleagues' (1998) text is devoted to the discussion of four strategies for analyzing the internal organization of life stories. The strategies stem from the intersection of two analytical dimensions: whether the whole story or a part, such as an utterance or theme, is under consideration and whether content or form is of primary interest. A holistic-content reading of narrative material deals with entire stories and their contents. For example, one might compare the content of stories of recent versus long-time immigrants for the extent to which they deal with adjustment or acculturated experiences. This is the kind of analysis that Thomas and Znaniecki (1918–1920/1927) undertook in examining the contents of letters written by Polish immigrants to America and their family members. A second strategy involves a holistic-form reading. The plotlines of stories might be compared as to whether they progress along a continuum, such as from scene-setting, characterization, and plot elaboration to climax and wrap-up. A third strategy involves a part-content reading. In this case, specific parts of stories are considered, such as particular categories of words, phrases, or self–other relationships. The fourth strategy involves a part-form reading. Here one might examine the relationship between narrative coherence as a facet of stories on the one hand and how coherence relates to the beginning, middle, and ending of stories on the other.

Riessman (1993) starts her text by noting that we do not have direct access to experience, arguing instead that because life comes to us in the form of stories, the analysis of narratives becomes a way of analyzing experience. Inasmuch as storytellers are active and shape their accounts, in addition to communicating information, stories represent our identities and our social worlds. However, although Riessman's constructionist spin on narrativity is clear, her presentation is limited to the analysis of stories'

internal organization and does not extend to storytelling. The activeness she assigns to the storying process focuses on the textual results, not its practice. Still, it is valuable for the models she presents for doing narrative analysis.

One model is applied in Faye Ginsburg's (1989) study of the lives of 35 women activists in Fargo, North Dakota, who were divided in their views on the abortion issue. Riessman (1993) describes how Ginsburg explored the ways in which the women constructed their positions narratively, comparing the linguistic and substantive differences between pro-choice and right-to-life activists. The analysis showed that the women developed plotlines in very different ways. Using extensive excerpts from pro-choice activist Kay Ballard's story to illustrate Ginsburg's approach, Riessman notes in relation to several excerpts from the story:

> Kay illustrates the typical pro-choice plot line [absent in right-to-life stories]: being different in childhood (Excerpt 1); questioning the confines of motherhood through a particular reproductive experience (Excerpt 2); a conversion upon contact with feminism in the 1960s and 1970s (Excerpts 3 and 4); and a subsequent reframing of understandings of self, women's interests, and ideals of nurturance (Excerpts 4–7). (p. 30)

Another model is illustrated by Susan Bell's (1988) research on the stories of DES (diethylstilbestrol) daughters. Bell wished to explore how the women understood their risk for reproductive tract problems, including infertility and vaginal cancer. She was especially interested in what might have led to their becoming politically active in response to the adverse medical consequences for women. Bell used William Labov's (1972) structural categories and method of transcription in her analysis, coding stories into an initial *abstract* reference to the problem (e.g., "that sort of brought the whole issue of DES much more to the forefront of my mind"; Riessman, 1993, p. 36); followed by *orienting* information (e.g., "when I was

around 19"; Riessman, 1993, p. 35); *complicating* action (e.g., a discussion of what happened to the storyteller as a result; Riessman, 1993, p. 35), and finally a *resolution* (e.g., "and that's when I um began to accept the fact, y'know, once it made sense"; Riessman, 1993, p. 36). Such stories might be analyzed for the point at which the voice of medicine is incorporated into the plot or when and in what way resistance to medical discourse develops. Alternatively, one might ask whether those who resist medical discourse and develop counterstories set this up narratively at the start so that a triumphant resolution follows. Regardless of the result, the point is not that the daughters engage in narrative machinations but rather that differences in experience have discernable narrative contours.

Turning to Narrative Practice

A second narrative turn takes us outside of stories themselves to the occasions and practical actions associated with story construction and storytelling (Bauman, 1986; Cicourel, 1974; Goffman, 1959; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000b; Hymes, 1964). The focus is on *narrative practice*. Narrative practice is the broad term we use to encompass the content of accounts and their internal organization, as well as the communicative conditions and resources surrounding how narratives are assembled, conveyed, and received in everyday life. The complex and overlapping contexts of the storying process constitute *narrative environments*.

The transcript of a story provides limited information about the occasions on which the story was told. Certainly, chance utterances in a transcript might indeed refer to occasion, such as the question posed to the interviewer by the interviewee: "Is that the kind of thing you want to know?" But significant details about the setting are often missing. For example, the transcript may not reveal a setting's discursive conventions, such

as what is usually talked about, avoided, or frowned on when it is mentioned. It does not disclose the consequences of telling stories in particular ways. Although there is no strict line of demarcation between, in this case, stories and storytelling, we need to know the details and working conditions of narrative occasions if we are to understand narrative practice. These details, in turn, can only be discerned from direct consideration of narrative environments.

Stories are assembled and told to someone, somewhere, at some time, with a variety of consequences for those concerned. All of this has a discernible impact on what is communicated and how that unfolds. A life story might be told to a spouse, to a lover, to a drinking buddy, to an employer, to a clergyperson, to a therapist, to a son or daughter, or to a fellow team member, among the huge variety of audiences to which narratives are conveyed. The occasion might be a job interview, part of a pickup line, a confession, or a recovery tale. The consequences might be amusing or life threatening. As we noted at the start, the environments of storytelling shape the content and internal organization of accounts, just as internal matters can have an impact on one's role as a storyteller.

Let us revisit Shaw's (1930/1966) presentation of Stanley's story in this regard. References to storytelling do appear in the text as Stanley describes his world, but Shaw's focus on the content of the story eclipses what is textually in view. Shaw is concerned with what accounts such as Stanley's can provide in the way of practical information about delinquents' social worlds and what that, in turn, can tell us about delinquency and how to deal with it. Shaw is not interested in narrative structure, plot development, or thematic organization; his focus is on sheer information for its worth in understanding the delinquent life. As he explains, case studies, especially in the form of subjects' own stories, are ideal for getting beyond the surface facts provided by official statistics to reveal social worlds on their own terms.

In considering what Shaw understandably overlooks, it is important to keep in mind that Stanley conveys some of his story in the context of his experiences in the Illinois State Reformatory, to which he was committed when he was 15 years old. Shaw points out that this "institution receives commitments of youthful male offenders between the ages of 16 and 26" (p. 103), so Stanley had many other delinquent youths to look up to. Status, apparently, was an important factor in their social ties, something that becomes glaringly obvious as Stanley tells his story. It raises questions about narrative ownership and the experiential fidelity of individualized accounts, even of those for which it is assumed that the self in question is not personal but relational. If Shaw argues that the delinquent boy's own story reveals his social world, he fails to notice that that social world is variegated and that Stanley actively shapes his story to fit its circumstances.

Describing the daily round of life in the institution, Stanley refers to his first days in a cell, which make him "heartsick," along with the part his cell mate plays in helping him "get used to things": "When the whistle blew for breakfast the next morning I was heartsick and weak, but after visiting with my cell mate, who took prison life with a smile and as a matter of course, I felt better. He said, 'You must as well get used to things here; you're a "convict" now, and tears won't melt those iron bars' " (pp. 103–104).

Stanley looks up to his cell mate Bill and, interestingly enough, virtually steps out of his story to inform the listener–reader that what he says about himself is narratively occasioned. Referring to his cell mate, Stanley explains:

> He was only seventeen, but older than me, and was in for one to ten years for burglaries. He delighted in telling about his exploits in crime, to impress me with this bravery and daring, and made me look up to him as a hero. Almost all young crooks like to tell about their accomplishments in crime. Older crooks are not so glib. They are hardened, and crime has lost its

glamour and become a matter of business. Also, they have learned the dangers of talking too much and keep their mouths shut except to trusted friends. But Bill (my cell partner) talked all the time about himself and his crimes. I talked, too, and told wild stories of adventure, some true and some lies, for I couldn't let Bill outdo me just for lack of a few lies on my part. (p. 104)

Given the situated nature of this account—which narratively orients to Stanley's relationship with other inmates and what that means for his status in the setting—it is apparent that this is far from simply being Stanley's "own" story. Stanley actively shapes the account to enhance his standing with Bill and other inmates. The content and the theme of the story are as much a matter of his position under the circumstances as the story is a faithful rendition of his life. At this point in his narrative, Stanley virtually tells us that he occasionally does status work when he recounts his experience. His biographical work (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000a) cannot be separated from the circumstances of storytelling. We might figure in this regard that a particular narrative environment (the reformatory) and narrative occasion (a recollection within an interview) mediate the shape of the story being told. And there is reason to believe that other narrative environments and narrative occasions would do the same. The storytelling responds as much to the practical contingencies of storytelling as it reflects Stanley's ostensible experience. Stanley seems to know that the internal organization of his story and his role and circumstances as a storyteller are reflexively intertwined

There is other evidence of how Stanley's presence in the reformatory affects what he says about himself. In the following excerpt from the book, notice this time how Stanley laments his lack of narrative resources:

> So I listened with open ears to what was said in these groups of prisoners. Often I stood awestruck as tales of adventure in crime were related, and I took it in with interest. Somehow I wanted to go out and do the same thing myself.

To myself I thought I was somebody to be doing a year at Pontiac, but in these groups of older prisoners I felt ashamed because I couldn't tell tales of daring exploits about my crimes. I hadn't done anything of consequence. I compared myself with the older crooks and saw how little and insignificant I was in the criminal line. But deep in my heart I knew that I was only a kid and couldn't be expected to have a reputation yet. I couldn't tell about my charge, for it savored of petty thievery, and everybody looked down on a petty thief in Pontiac. I felt humiliated in the extreme, so I only listened. (pp. 108–109)

The lament is doubly charged in that Stanley has not yet acquired the experience to fashion "tales of adventure" and "daring exploits," as he knew only petty thievery. He did not have these in his experiential repertoire to report. So he only listened, the idea being that experience and narrative go hand-in-hand in telling one's story. Neither is a simple by-product of the other.

Stanley broaches a different narrative environment a bit later. The occasion no longer involves storytelling between reformatory inmates, but rather among those who gather at an urban street corner, as Whyte's (1943), Liebow's (1967), and Anderson's (1976) protagonists do. Stanley now puts his story to work for a different purpose, one aligned with the representational needs of this occasion. What he does with words this time is a combination of status work and masculinity work:

I went out to look for work, but it was scarce at the time. After a week of fruitless effort, I began to loaf around with the corner gang. These fellows were all working and doing well, but they had the habit of hanging around the corner and telling dirty stories about women. We took pride in telling about our exploits with such and such a girl, and tried to outdo each other in the number of women that we had conquered. (p. 118)

Storytelling and its occasions, then, are as important as the content of what is communicated. Both reflexively enter into the articulation of Stanley's inner life and social world, linking the fidelity of Stanley's story to the complex practices of narrativity.

The Need for Narrative Ethnography

We are fortunate that Shaw's (1930/1966) book reveals some of the narrative circumstances that shape Stanley's life story. But these come to us by way of Stanley, and Shaw, of course. What would we have learned had we been present in the reformatory or on the street corner in question? How might others' accounts have affected what Stanley talked about and how Stanley told his story? We do know from what Stanley says in Shaw's text that he was occasionally encouraged to enter conversations and even embellish his story; we also know that there were other occasions when he was reluctant to do so. His story apparently played a communicative role in some social worlds and was unheard in others. It is evident, too, that Stanley's feelings about himself and his identity as a young male delinquent and hanger-on were affected by these differences. All of this suggests that we might usefully turn directly to narrative environments—their occasions and practices—to understand the everyday contours of the storying process, as well as what is and is not put into words for communicating to others. Our analytical method needs to take account of not only what Stanley says and how he says it but also the narratively contingent conditions of assembling a story. In this particular case, it would include stories told by others about themselves, about Stanley, and about their common social worlds.

A word of caution is warranted at this point. We want to avoid judging Stanley's and others' accounts simply on the basis of individual memory, rationality, and communicative fidelity. Certainly, these characteristics affect what we know about people's lives. Some people remember very little, whereas others appear to communicate from photographic memories. Some seem eminently reasonable and straightforward in their accounts, detailing step-by-step what they have

been through or what life has meant to them through time. Others' life stories meander. There are those whose stories hardly conform to what is otherwise known to be true, which might prompt us to figure that they are, perhaps, lying or "denying" experience, as some might put it. But evaluating stories on individual grounds fails to take account of the profoundly social configurations of narrativity, which, if known, might cast an altogether different light on ostensible shortcomings.

It is the social dimensions of narratives that we highlight in this chapter and that call for an emergent method that takes us outside of stories and their veridical relationship to storytellers and experience. Broadly, that method is *narrative ethnography*, that is, the ethnographic study of narrativity. The need for such an approach is clear. Even though *ethnography* has taken on so many meanings and usages in recent years that it is almost synonymous with qualitative inquiry (see Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994), we have something more specific in view. It is a method of procedure and analysis aimed at close scrutiny of social situations, their actors, and actions in relation to narratives. This involves direct, intensive observation of the field of study—in this case, the multifaceted field of narrative practice.

Being on the scenes of story construction and storytelling and considering how stories are shaped by the contingencies of communication is not simply window dressing for narrative analysis. Settings are integral parts of narrativity. Whoever heard of a story being told nowhere, at no time? Even stories told to researchers such as Shaw—or to therapists or in job interviews—are occasioned and conditioned by the narrative endeavor in place. Erving Goffman (1961) put this succinctly when he wrote of the need for ethnographic access to experience in his own work. Writing about the seemingly irrational, even the mad, he noted:

> My immediate objective in doing fieldwork at St. Elizabeth's [psychiatric hospital] was to try to learn about the world of the hospital inmate, as this world is subjectively experienced by him. . . . It was then and still is my belief that any group of persons—prisoners, primitives, pilots, or patients—develop a life [story] of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject. (pp. ix–x)

Concern with the production, distribution, and circulation of stories in society requires that we step outside of narrative material and consider questions such as who produces particular kinds of stories, where they are likely to be encountered, what their consequences are, under what circumstances particular narratives are more or less accountable, what interests publicize them, how they gain popularity, and how they are challenged. In this regard, we might ask how Stanley's story is told in relation to the inmate banter at Pontiac as opposed to the conviviality of the street corners he frequents. We might wonder how the "daily round of petty contingencies" of each setting and occasion for storytelling shapes Stanley's accounts. This would require us to examine the scenes of these occasions, to turn to stories as they are being put together or told (or not told, as the case might be on certain occasions), to listen to and take account of how they are received, to consider what might be preferred tellings in particular circumstances, and to explore the consequences of storying experience in conformity with or out of line with what is preferred. It requires that we give serious attention to the possibility that narrative environments and their occasions have preferred stories. In short, we need to examine narratives in full social context.

Narratives are not simply reflections of experience, nor are they descriptive free-for-alls. Not just anything goes when it comes to storying experience. Rather, narratives comprise the interplay between experience, storying practices, descriptive resources, purposes at hand, audiences, and the environments that condition storytelling. Nar-

rative ethnography provides the analytical platform, tools, and sensibilities for capturing the rich and variegated contours of everyday narrative practice.

A growing collection of studies grounded in narrative ethnography has emerged in the past decade or so, although researchers have not necessarily adopted the rubric formally. Gale Miller's book, *Becoming Miracle Workers: Language and Meaning in Brief Therapy* (1997), is a rich, historical account of the shift in institutional discourse that led to altered ways of conceptualizing selves and doing therapy in an individual and family counseling clinic. Miller's approach to the ethnography of institutional discourse (Miller, 1994) has clear affinities with narrative ethnography as we portray it. His book is a powerful demonstration of how a comparative ethnographic approach provides insight into how lives, troubles, and their solutions are storied. Darin Weinberg's *Of Others Inside: Insanity, Addiction, and Belonging in America* (2005) pursues a similar theme. Whereas Miller discusses how therapeutic narratives changed over time in the same institution, Weinberg compares how two purportedly identical programs became dissimilar narrative environments to accommodate different residential treatment circumstances. Organizational differences are further highlighted in *Out of Control: Family Therapy and Domestic Disorder* (Gubrium, 1992), which describes narratives of family troubles in distinctly different therapeutic venues. Susan Chase's *Ambiguous Empowerment: The Work Narratives of Women School Superintendents* (1995) and Amir Marvasti's *Being Homeless: Textual and Narrative Constructions* (2003) offer nuanced examinations of the narratives of some of society's most and least successful members, accenting the contextually sensitive narrative work that is done to construct vastly different accounts of life and its challenges.

Before moving ahead, it is important to distinguish the version of narrative ethnography depicted in this chapter from another usage that focuses critically on the representational practices through which ethnographic reports emerge, a usage that especially works against the objectifying practices of ethnographic description. Some fieldworkers have used the term narrative ethnography to highlight *researchers'* narrative practices as they craft ethnographic accounts. This usage features the vibrant interplay between the ethnographer's own subjectivity and the subjectivities of those whose lives and worlds are in view. These ethnographic texts are typically derived from participant observation, but they are distinctive because they take special notice of the researcher's own participation, perspective, voice, and especially of his or her emotional experience in relation to the experiences of those being studied. Anthropologists Barbara Tedlock (1991, 1992, 2004), Ruth Behar (1993, 1996), and Kirin Narayan (1989) and sociologists Carolyn Ellis (1991), Laurel Richardson (1990a, 1990b), and others (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992) refer to "narrative ethnography" as their attempt to convey the reflexive, representational engagements of field encounters. H. L. Goodall's (2000) book *Writing the New Ethnography* is an exemplary rendition of this form of narrative ethnography.

In contrast, the narrative ethnography described in this chapter is less immediately self-conscious about researchers' representational practices. Accommodating naturalistic, constructionist, and ethnomethodological impulses and concerns, the approach focuses on the everyday narrative activity that unfolds within circumstantially situated social interaction, with an acute awareness of the myriad layers of social context that condition narrative production. The approach, although aware of the narrative practices of ethnographers, is more centrally concerned with the narrative practices of those whose experiences and lives are under consideration. We use the term narrative ethnography to signal the combination of epistemological, methodological, procedural, and analytical sensibilities that must be brought to bear to understand narrativity in social context.

Narrative Environments

Narrative ethnographers by trade, we have been in the habit of both listening to and taking systematic note of actual and possible stories in various settings. The methods of procedure have varied from in-depth life history interviews in nursing homes (see Gubrium, 1993) to courtroom observations that completely eschewed interviewing (see Holstein, 1993) to studies that combined observation, interviewing, and discourse analysis (see Gubrium, 1992). In systematically observing narratives-in-production, attending to the construction, use, and reception of accounts and textual material such as life records, we have found that the internal organization of narratives, although important to understand in its own right, does not tell us very much about the relation of stories to the worlds in which they circulate. Although the themes of stories such as accounts of sexual abuse or narratives of childhood sexuality might be identified and documented, discerning how these relate to particular social contexts requires an understanding of what people do with words in varied circumstances. As we noted in discussing Stanley's story, the same account might be appreciated in one setting or at one time and place but be disparaged, ignored, or unarticulated in others. The meanings of stories are poorly understood without careful consideration of the circumstances of their production and reception, which we broadly call their *narrative environments*.

Local Contingencies of Storytelling

Research reported in the book *Caretakers* (Buckholdt & Gubrium, 1979) is instructive. The ethnographic fieldwork centered on the social construction of children's emotional disturbance in a residential treatment facility called Cedarview. Through systematic participant observation, the study showed that narratives of children's inner lives, although available and occasionally communi-

cated, were marginalized in a therapeutic environment that featured behaviorist interpretations and interventions. At Cedarview, an official token economy and behavior modification programming valorized narratives of visible behaviors and "consequences." This was the privileged, if not exclusive, discourse of problems and solutions—the master narrative in place, so to speak. The working rule was "stay out of children's heads," which served to caution all concerned to honor behavioristic principles.

Still, occasional consultations with a child psychiatrist rather than a behavioral psychologist provided communicative space for competing narratives, encouraging staff members and treatment teams to temporarily peek inside for understanding and explanation. On such occasions, encouraged by the consultant's deep psychiatric gaze, narratives that thematized early childhood disturbances, deep feelings, and hidden motives were taken to be more consequential for treatment decisions than were behaviorized accounts of children's activities. This complex narrative environment sometimes elicited accounts quite at odds with official therapeutic commitments. On such occasions, particular communicative niches gave voice to what otherwise were institutionally discredited narratives.

The value of these local contingencies was not lost on the staff, as they periodically found it helpful to account for children's conduct and progress in treatment, especially to one another, in deep psychological terms. These insights, however, were not conveyed to funding agencies; those stories reflected, instead, the facility's official treatment philosophy. Audiences, in other words, were important ingredients in the production, editing, distribution, and circulation of stories (also see Gubrium & Buckholdt, 1982). Questions of "how to put it" and what themes to highlight for particular purposes were noteworthy in the everyday formulation of stories about the children. Just as Stanley aligned the content and tone of his story with the local contingencies

of narrativity in his social world, Cedarview staff members shaped their accounts in relation to the communicative contours of the circumstances they engaged in the process.

We should note that these actions were part of the local contingencies of storytelling and did not reflect a peculiar or cynical quality of Cedarview storytellers. Although the attitudes of individual staff members might indeed have been viewed as cynical by some, the systematic quality of narrative editing (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000b) throughout the facility—and, indeed, of any storytelling located in time and space—suggests that storytellers naturally attend to narrative circumstance in assembling their accounts. Except for biographical and institutional particulars, the stories of children's lives at Cedarview took shape in much the same way they would in similar narrative environments (see Goffman, 1961; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Such locally contingent features of storytelling are best captured ethnographically, a method that offers a view of the actual circumstances of narrativity. Without circumstantial knowledge, it would be too easy to turn, reductively, to the machinations or personal deficits of individuals or to a defective society for explanation. As the earlier quotation from Goffman (1961) reminds us, a significant share of the "meaningful, reasonable, and normal" is lost when we overlook "the daily round of petty contingencies" in everyday life.

Affirming Environments

Social settings vary as narrative environments. In our own work on narrativity within institutional settings, we have viewed them in terms of what Everett Hughes (1984) called *going concerns*. This was Hughes's way of emphasizing the work of maintaining particular ways of framing and doing matters of relevance to participants, including the work of formulating accounts. Such concerns vary in size, from families and friendship, support, and recovery groups to schools, courtrooms, correctional facilities,

nursing homes, and therapeutic enterprises. A going concern such as a recovered-memory therapy group, for example, is an organized activity with the goal of recollecting the lost or otherwise hidden memories of adult survivors of sexual abuse. Joseph Davis (2005) found that, in the therapeutic settings he studied, memory enhancement and retrieval techniques were applied; survivors were encouraged to recall stories of childhood sexual contacts. They were urged to relive these experiences narratively and eventually to emplot them in relation to current psychological difficulties. In a much different context, sexuality education programs such as Teach Abstinence Until Marriage deploy other orienting stories, which are racialized when applied to European American, as opposed to African American, children. As Jessica Fields (2005) explains, the emplotment of sexual misbehavior among European Americans typically relates to the theme of childhood innocence, whereas parallel stories for African American youths rest on the theme of innate sexuality. The meanings of the substantive elaboration and themes of any particular account cannot be separated from socially situated narrative practice.

Each narrative environment affirms certain established stories and ways of narrating experience; they are going concerns that narratively construct, reproduce, and privilege particular accounts for institutional purposes. Conversely, one would expect counternarratives to be marginalized, "repaired," or otherwise challenged, if not kept in tolerable spaces. Across therapeutic concerns especially, the widely applied and well-recognized rhetoric of denial can be highly effective in both suppressing unacceptable stories and affirming the articulation of acceptable ones. Because the affirmed stories of such going concerns are often larded with globalized narratives such as therapeutic—as opposed to fatalistic or cosmic—discourses, the layered interplay between the local, the national, and the transnational can become a confluence of narrative affirmation. Narra-

tive ethnography is necessary to capture this interplay in its full contextual richness.

Environments That Challenge Common Narratives

Narrative environments challenge, as well as affirm, various stories. Indeed, to theorize environments as either affirming or challenging particular narratives shortchanges the complex interplay between artful interpretation, institutional practices, and a constantly changing stock of narrative resources. It is unfortunate that so much theory building on these fronts is compartmentalized and specialized when many of the issues parallel one another. For example, the narration of selves and personal identity in institutional context is mediated by both official and unofficial structures and contingencies (see Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). But identity work (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000a) and biographical work (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995) are also abetted and sponsored by social movements that publicize rhetorics of preferred and disparaged frames of understanding (see Benford, 1993, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow, 2003). If Hughes (1984) applies the term "going concerns" to institutions, then the application can be extended to the going concerns of movements toward change as well.

The empirical linkages between the narratively affirmed and the narratively challenging can be amazingly transformative. Research on the start of the Alzheimer's disease movement in the 1980s (Gubrium, 1986), for example, showed that marked differences in both local and global understandings of senile dementia formed in less than 5 years. The (re)discovery of Alzheimer's disease in 1979 quickly became a medical and experiential story affirming both a new subject with a diseased, as opposed to a naturally aging, brain and the research activities of a soon-to-be-hugely-successful medical and psychological enterprise. The Alzheimer's disease movement transformed, virtually overnight, the way professionals, families, the senile, and significant others narrated their relationship to the aging brain and its associated cognitive functions. As the senile became victims of a disease as opposed to aging, parties concerned with the aging enterprise—from the new National Institute of Aging to local caregivers—went into high gear to construct a social problem that became an issue of national and international importance (see Fox, 2000). It became evident that what was new and what was being affirmed were interwoven.

The application of these ideas to the construction of subjectivity is full of possibilities. Selves are not straightforwardly obvious in society. They must be identified as a matter of communicative practice. This is not constructive magic, in which new narratives for identity are conjured up out of thin air and absorbed into the social worlds and inner lives of those concerned. The process of identification and rhetorics of persuasion are practical and take place in lived circumstances—in narrative environments whose varied stock of accounts differentially serve to affirm or challenge both old and new stories about social worlds and their identities. Self stories come from somewhere, relate to larger stories, are shaped by other stories, and are affirmed and challenged through time by yet different and transformed narratives. Stories are relentlessly drawn through the gamut of contingent interests that bear on their particular content and shape. Narrative ethnography provides an encompassing sensitivity to the fluid contingencies, in this case the challenges, of narrative production.

Narrative Embeddedness

Narrative ethnography provides analytical access to the multilayered embeddedness of stories in relation to other stories. The analogy of nesting dolls is useful in considering a story's complex relation to its narrative environment. The smallest doll is embedded or nested in all the larger ones; each doll next in size both contains a smaller doll and is en-

veloped by several bigger ones. Similarly, a life story such as Stanley's (Shaw, 1930/1966) is fully understood only when we take account of the other stories to which it relates and the occasions on which it is communicated. As Stanley almost glibly explains in passing, what he says or, in some settings, does not dare to say about himself is embedded in other stories that inform his own, as well as that inform him of the consequences of narrating his life in particular ways.

Stanley's story and the other narratives to which Stanley refers exist in complex relationship to similar accounts centered on "the" delinquent or "the" jack roller. This relationship has affirming and disconfirming facets. Stanley's own story is fueled by the bravado, status, and gender work of local storytelling. Shaw's (1930/1966) interest in understanding the lived experience of the delinquent and how this informs rehabilitation policy also tells us that Stanley's story is embedded in an environment of preferred narratives for wayward youths. Whereas Stanley's own story is deftly assembled, sharply thematized, and intriguingly developed through time, Shaw's, Stanley's, and our own reading of the account is nested in a variety of other stories, both local and more global. Indeed, a narrative of penal welfare and reform is the larger story in which Stanley's account and Shaw's narrative aims are nested. It is a story bound to a particular sense of criminal justice, told at a particular time and place (see Garland, 2001). Stanley's is hardly the singular narrative of a punk and small-time operator; its significance, although partially local, reverberates with the larger stories and circumstances in which it is embedded.

The idea of narrative embeddedness suggests that, in aiming to understand the broader meaning of accounts, it is useful to distinguish story from voice. As we reread Stanley's story, we can ask, Whose voice do we hear? The subtitle of Shaw's book—*A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*—implies that the text reflects Stanley's personal experience. As we read along, we ostensibly hear Stanley's

voice. And, indeed, it is colorful, often natively elegant. It is both hopeful and depressing. But we do not hear cell mate Bill's voice, Shaw's voice, or the voices of countless other storytellers in Stanley's world, not to mention the voice that resonates with the scientific and policy undergirdings of the text. So then, we might ask, whose voice do we hear when Stanley gives voice to the jack roller? Featuring its narrative embeddedness, Stanley's story can be viewed as multivocal, voicing experience in the varied ways in which he has learned how to tell and not to tell his life, which are reflexively related to the unfolding life he describes. All the nesting narrative dolls, Stanley's included, vocalize together to construct his identity.

An ethnographic focus on narrative practice helps to avoid the reductionist and often romanticized aim of seeking to obtain the lived subject's "own" story, to hear it in his or her "own" voice, or to derive texts that convey accounts in individual subjects' "own" words. Although it is important in studying narrative practice to ground research in the vernacular and the everyday organization of accounts, it is equally important not to valorize what is individually conveyed as somehow unaffected by the environments in which is embedded. There are no narrative heroes or antiheroes who stand outside of, or rise above, their circumstances. Stanley adds flavor to his story, and his individual experiences provide the spice, but the resulting narrative stew is simmered in a more complex stock of ingredients.

There is another reductionist tendency that narrative ethnography helps us to avoid—societal reductionism. If an awareness of narrative embeddedness steers us clear of a romanticized concept of narrative ownership, it also helps us to contain the tendency to read stories as straightforward reflections of social structures or society at large. There are many phenomenal layers between the individual on the one hand and society on the other. These include what

Goffman (1983) once called the "interaction order" and what Hughes (1984), as we described, refers to as the worlds of going concerns, or the institutional order. Individual stories are embedded in both orders; they are not spun as whole cloth out of either personal or societal narratives. The lesson in this instance is that we do well not to figure that the sympathetic understanding and publication of Stanley's story, for example, simply reflects a discourse of reform. The story evidently has wended its way through diverse narrative environments, stretching from interpersonal claims to institutional imperatives, something far more complex than a totalized societal discourse would suggest.

Pursuing a narrative ethnographic approach to life stories in this regard leads us to consider the interactive and institutional mediations of accounts. It cautions against seeking to document "the" life story of a particular subject. It is a caveat against framing experience and its narrative contours in terms of master narratives, dominant discourses, or other totalized ways of framing narrativity. Rather, the leading concerns direct us to the multifaceted social contexts in which a story is embedded and how these contexts reflexively relate to stories and storytelling.

Narrative Control

Narrative ethnography opens to empirical inspection the social processes and circumstances through which narratives are constructed, promoted, and resisted. We can actually see and hear how those concerned actively call on or otherwise respond to the contexts, contingencies, and resources of narration to fashion their accounts. In other words, we can actually witness *narrative control* being exercised as ongoing social interaction and competing going concerns come into play. Such control is hardly straightforward and takes myriad forms. Here, we feature the ways in which interactional and in-

stitutional forms of control make their mark on narrative practice.

We use the concept narrative control as a way to foreground the ways in which the content and internal organization of stories are mediated by the complex environments in which they are embedded. But we need to be clear that we do not conceive of control in any deterministic or totally constraining way. Rather, we view it in terms of factors that work to shape and condition, rather than permit or prevent. A degree of narrative control was evident in many of our previous illustrations, in which locally preferred narrative themes and forms were either adopted or contested. We highlight related aspects of control in the following sections, which focus, respectively, on interactional and institutional forms of control. These forms of control reflexively enter into narrative accounts; neither form operates apart from the other.

Interactional Control

People seldom just "burst out" in stories. It takes work. For a narrative to emerge, the teller must be able to string together multiple sentences while retaining the attention of listeners without having them intrude into the conversation with anything more than signals that they are being attentive. A narrative space must be established in the give-and-take of social interaction. For the narrative to run its course, the speaker must sustain the line of talk—in cooperation with those listening to the narrative. In other words, in one way or another, narratives must be invited, incited, or initiated.

Perhaps the simplest way to introduce a narrative into a conversation is by way of a direct invitation or a question. This virtually solicits storytelling, inviting an extended response. We can see this most clearly in situations in which one party formally requests information from another. Interviews are a prime example. Whereas some interview formats (e.g., the survey interview) intentionally constrain and truncate responses,

other formats (e.g., qualitative or life history interviews) intentionally activate or incite extended accounts (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995). The same is true of informal questioning in everyday conversation.

Stories, of course, are not always directly or explicitly invited. When they are not, they must be methodically introduced by the storyteller to be recognized as stories. Otherwise, they are likely to be viewed as gibberish or outbursts, so to speak. Harvey Sacks (1992a, 1992b) has noted that stories take more than a sentence to tell and that the initial challenge to storytelling is extending an account beyond that first sentence. Sacks and other conversation analysts have documented the range of conversational devices that may be used to secure the conversational "right" and "space" to extend a turn at talk, thus building it into a full-blown narrative production. Similarly, devices are available for continuing a story, staving off interruption, and sustaining a coherent line of talk across occasions at which the turn at talk might otherwise be brought to an end. Such continuations are artfully accomplished in concert between narrators and those attending to the narrative. Control, then, is not a property of one party to the conversation or the other but resides in the way that conversational partners cooperate in the emergence and development of a narrative.

Sometimes, complicity in actions that "keep the story going" also contributes to *where* the story is going. Listeners to stories can virtually induce the elaboration of particular dimensions of experience through their own story-facilitating actions. Consider the following instance taken from a nursing home interview. Grace Wheeler is a 70-year-old nursing home resident who shares a room with her 93-year-old mother, Lucy. Although Grace is the designated interviewee, in the following extract we can see how her story is guided, if not directed, by Lucy's contributions to the conversation, as Lucy vigilantly attends to Grace's telling of her life story.

INTERVIEWER: Why don't we start by your telling me about your life?

GRACE: Well that was quite a many years ago. I was born in Brinton Station, Ohio.

LUCY: She was a seven-month baby.

GRACE: I was a seven-month baby. That's what I was. [Elaborates story of growing up with her sisters and brother.] They've all been wonderful.

LUCY: They taught her. . . .

GRACE: And they taught me as well as my mom and dad. And then when radio and television came to the farm, why I learned from them. I love the quiz shows. (Gubrium, 1993, pp. 152–153)

It is clear that Lucy points the way for Grace's life story. But it is too simple to suggest that Lucy controlled Grace's story. Rather, Lucy offered resources and directions for Grace's narrative, but Grace herself picked up on Lucy's "suggestions" to elaborate and enrich her own account. They point here is not that the narrative is not really Grace's but that the narrative was jointly formulated out of this particular interactional environment.

Narrative ethnography allows us to see the sequence and circumstances from which Grace's ostensible life emerges. Such a view would not be available were we to simply track—by means of a transcript perhaps—the contours of Grace's story without noting the collaborative circumstances of its telling. Narrative ethnography gives us access to the myriad interactional practices that culminate in the production of narrative.

Institutional Control

Narrative control is not simply interactional. Indeed, many of its most profound manifestations are hardly visible because they derive from the most taken-for-granted aspects of a scene or setting. These features of control—preferred discursive regimes, for example—supply local accountability structures and conditions of possibility (Foucault, 1979) for how experience can be recounted. Inspec-

tion of narratives alone may not fully reveal the extent of control, but a comparative narrative ethnography can demonstrate how narrative environments figuratively speak the stories of their participants.

Consider, for instance, narratives of alcoholic lives that emerge under distinctly different organizational auspices. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is certainly the most widely recognized alcoholism treatment institution of our time. It is an especially ubiquitous and encapsulating narrative environment. In AA, alcoholism is construed as a spiritual and moral failure, not just a physical or mental disease. It is compounded by the victim's refusal to recognize that one's actions are not self-governed. Recovery comes about only when the victim accepts his or her weakness in the face of alcohol, turns over his or her fate to a "higher power," and takes the proper steps toward spiritual awakening and healing (see Denzin, 1987). This discourse of alcoholism provides an institutionally sanctioned way of understanding, and storying, drinking problems. Within the confines of AA, there is no other legitimate way of construing and talking about the problem of alcohol. The now-familiar "12 Steps" outline the institutionalized parameters of the problem and its solution. They provide a distinctive interpretive vocabulary for narrating alcoholism and recovery.

Within this narrative environment, alcoholism stories take distinctive shape. AA terminology offers familiar and available narrative resources that are available for accountable use in the countless contexts in which AA becomes salient. Although the language may not be formally imposed, its use is so pervasive that lives and experiences typically come to be storied in AA terms, as those terms are artfully applied by participants. This is evident, for example, in the following narrative conveyed by Jack, a member of an AA recovery group. Asked to share the meaning of his AA experiences with the entire group of recovering alcoholics, Jack stories his experience in this fashion:

Step One. I know I'm powerless over alcohol. I take one drink and I can't stop. My life must be unmanageable. I have bills up to the ceiling and the family is about to leave and I've been put on notice at work. Step Two. I want to believe in God. I used to but I got away from the Church. But this isn't the God of my church. It's different. I want a God of love and caring. I know I was crazy when I drank. The last time I went out, I ended up in a motel room across town under a different name. Now that's not sane! Step Three. I want somebody else to run my life. AA and treatment seem to be doing a pretty good job right now, I hope I can stay with it. (Denzin, 1987, p. 70)

This narrative explicitly offers the AA steps as interpretive guides for understanding the alcoholism experience. AA principles shape the way the alcoholic's story is formulated; they are a veritable set of rules for narrating alcoholism. All testimonials are not this formulaic, but they pervade nearly all AA-related discussions. Regardless of venue, the narratives that emerge under AA's auspices draw on a shared stock of narrative resources from which stories may be crafted. Although narration is always artful, it invariably reflects AA's narrative environment.

Consider another alcoholic narrative that reconstructs the experience of being hospitalized for intoxication:

I lay there on that hospital bed and went back over and reviewed my life. I thought of what liquor had done to me, the opportunities that I had discarded, the abilities that had been given me and how I had wasted them. . . . I was willing to admit to myself that I had hit bottom, that I had gotten hold of something that I didn't know how to handle by myself. So, after reviewing these things and realizing what liquor had cost me, I went to this Higher Power which to me, was God, without any reservation, and admitted that I was completely powerless over alcohol, and that I was willing to do anything in the world to get rid of the problem. In fact, I admitted that from now on I was willing to let God take over, instead of me. Each day I would try to find out what His will was, and try to fol-

low that, rather than trying to get Him to always agree that the things I thought of myself were the things best for me. (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1976, pp. 186–187)

This classic AA narrative draws on AA themes, idioms, and vocabularies. Indeed, it is a virtual recitation—in AA language—of the prototype alcoholic's story. The language of the 12 Steps is apparent at every narrative turn, serving as the detailed building blocks of the story depicting the descending alcoholic, his self-realization, and his eventual recovery. Of course, in practice, available resources alone do not determine how experience is narrated, but it is equally clear that AA stories are adroitly crafted from a common stock of narrative building blocks.

Now consider how alcoholism narratives are distinctively constructed in a Secular Sobriety Group (SSG; see Christopher, 1988). The following extract recounts a conversation between an SSG member and some friends. Note how the narrator assembles aspects of self out of the particular set of resources and in relation to the specific institutional orientations that his SSG membership provides for him.

> "As you know," I said, "I've never kept my alcoholism a secret. I'm proud of my sobriety. Some other things in my life I'm not so pleased with, but sobriety is my most precious asset, my priority, my life-and-death necessity. . . . Now, from a factual perspective, I am just as alcoholic as I was prior to achieving sobriety; that is, I must reaffirm my priority of staying sober *no matter what!* I go to the market, work, see movies, make love, eat, sleep—all as a sober alcoholic. I'm a person with an arrested but lifelong disease. I place my sobriety and the necessity of staying sober before anything else in my life. . . . Alcoholism results in the inability to control one's drinking. Sobriety requires the acknowledgment of one's alcoholism on a daily basis, and it is never to be taken for granted. I must endure all my feelings and experiences, including injustices, failures, and whatever this uncertain life doles out. . . .

> "So," I continued, "in answer to your questions: I have my alcohol problem licked only on a daily basis and I continue to stay alive by protecting my conscious mind, by staying sober and avoiding the muddy waters of religion. I can't deal with reality by way of fantasy. . . . That's too scary for me. The more I stay in reality, in rationality, the better my chances. So, yes, my sobriety is a state of mind rather than mindlessness." (Christopher, 1988, pp. 87–88, original emphasis)

Clearly, the SSG has a different view of personal control than that offered by AA. Most prominently, of course, are differences with respect to spirituality. The SSG, however, also offers a distinct set of resources for conceptualizing and narrating the "alcoholic self." In practice, this translates into personal stories quite different from those assembled under the auspices of AA. As we can see in the SSG narrative, the alcoholic self is storied in terms of personal responsibility, unlike the AA self, which comes into its own only by surrendering to a higher power. The "conscious mind" is the center of self-control, in contrast with the AA self, which abandons personal control in favor of divine guidance. In SSG culture, the self is firmly grounded in secular reality, as opposed to the AA self, which centers itself in spirituality. The two recovery organizations provide sharply contrasting narrative resources and descriptive vocabularies, which, in turn, contribute to the production of distinctly different narratives of the alcoholism experience. Comparative ethnography allows us to view these differences in bold relief.

The Interplay of Interactional and Institutional Control

Institutional conventions constrain, promote, and otherwise shape narratives, but they alone do not determine how stories are formulated or what they are about. Nor does interactional control proceed in an institutional vacuum. Rather, it is the *interplay* be-

tween the artful exertions of interactional control and the organized narrative resources and restraints that ultimately shapes narrative practice.

For example, courtrooms and other "legalistic" settings would seem to be the quintessential constraining narrative environment. Rules and procedures virtually dictate who can speak, when one can speak, and what can be said. Yet, without the courtroom or hearing actors such as attorneys, judges, and hearings officers taking the initiative to implement the rules of the courts, proceedings would not take an institutionally "legal" cast. Rules must be invoked, but when they are, they constitute a controlling discursive environment for all practical purposes, one that can forcefully promote certain kinds of narratives or even altogether eliminate narrative production (see Miller & Holstein, 1996).

Similarly, less formal narrative environments provide narrative resources and parameters, but they do not dictate application. An element of interactional artfulness is always necessary. Consider, for example, how even a strictly defined set of narrative resources must be interactionally mobilized in the formulation of narratives in a treatment program for sufferers of posttraumatic stress disorder. As we shall see, the use of institutional discourse is subject to direct management with respect to prevailing narrative conventions. The means of control may be less formally asserted than in a courtroom, say, but they nevertheless condition narrative practice, suggesting if not imposing locally preferred narratives in the process.

Allan Young's (1995) study of a psychiatric unit of a Veterans Administration center providing inpatient treatment for victims of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is illustrative. In this facility, individual and group psychotherapy is aimed at addressing the etiology and symptoms of psychic distress. The psychotherapeutic philosophy guiding the PTSD program is fundamentally psychoanalytic, so the keys to recovery are said to be lo-cated in the victim's past. Problems must first be uncovered before they can be therapeutically addressed. The approach relies on two assumptions about PTSD: (1) the psychodynamic core of PTSD is a repetitive compulsion; the victim is psychologically compelled to reenact the behavior that precipitated the disorder in a futile attempt to gain mastery over the circumstances that originally overwhelmed him, and (2) to recover, the patient must recall his traumatic memory, disclose it to his therapist and fellow patients during group psychotherapy, and subject the memory and its narrative to therapeutic scrutiny. The facility thus has a well-articulated model of the disease, which provides staff and patients with a way of conceptualizing and characterizing PTSD (Young, 1995, p. 183).

The use of the center's model is obvious to participants and develops quite naturally as each displays his or her command of the language of the model and its application. But narrative control can sometimes become quite explicit in relation to the local priority of the model. When narratives emerge in ways that do not accord with the model, group participants may be reminded to "use the model," to rethink or "re-story" experience in line with the center's therapeutic discourse. In such instances, we literally hear the narrative environment being imposed in ongoing interaction. Consider the following exchange in a psychotherapy session involving Carol, the therapist, and a group of patients:

CAROL: Say to yourself, I've been punishing myself and people around me for twenty years. Say Jack, you *can* choose to stop.

JACK: Listen, Carol. On some nights, I feel anxiety going through my body like electricity. It started in Vietnam. It wasn't just a feeling. It was anxiety together with terrible chest pains and difficulty breathing. . . . And I'm still getting them.

CAROL: What would you call it?

JACK: Well, I know that it's called a "panic attack." But I didn't know it then.

CAROL: No, I mean what would you call it using the terms of the model—the model that you learned about during orientation phase?

JACK: I don't really know, Carol. My mind is confused right now.

CAROL: The model says that we're dominated by two drives, aggression and sex, and that—

JACK: Listen, Carol. When I got these attacks, I sure didn't want to get fucked, and I can't believe it was my aggression.

CAROL: We've got to think of these events, your difficulty breathing, we've got to think of them in terms of *guilt*, of your wanting to *punish* yourself. We need to get in touch with your conflict. . . . (Young, 1995, p. 245, emphasis in the original)

Jack's short initial story about his anxiety calls on a commonplace clinical vocabulary for describing the psychic distress that started in Vietnam. His use of "panic attack" to portray his experience is neither clinically incorrect nor commonsensically unfamiliar. Nonetheless, Carol moves to bring the articulation of the problem under the narrative purview of the model, asking Jack to think back to how he had originally been taught to conceptualize his problem "using the terms of the model." She continues to specify just what the model might say in relation to Jack's problems, only to be interrupted by Jack's assertion that the model did not seem to apply in this case. Insisting that he felt that neither his libidinal drives ("I sure didn't want to get fucked") nor his instinct toward aggression ("I can't believe it was my aggression") were behind his condition, Jack resists the application of the model. Carol, however, perseveres, insisting that "we've got to think of them" in terms specified by the model. Although resistance is always possible, the model as a narrative resource was a constant presence, a source of control available to be asserted in practice. Jack's story emerges in relation to the narrative controls in place, which are visible only through ethnographic examination of the therapy setting.

Conclusion

Herbert Blumer (1969) once argued that concepts are as much procedural as they are theoretical. They not only provide understanding but also sensitize us to ways of embracing the empirical world. Such is the case with narrative ethnography. The concept is theoretical in that it specifies a field and an object of inquiry—narrative practice. It is procedural in that it recommends methods that are necessary to capture the empirical material of narrative practice in its contextual complexity.

By framing our interest in stories in terms of narrative practice—the whats, hows, wheres, and whens of narrative production—our approach to narrative ethnography expands research concerns beyond the internal themes, structures, and structuring of stories to simultaneously and reflexively include narrative's external, contextual organization. It is no longer sufficient to seek the meaning of narratives by examining only their internal organization. Instead, we need to consider the social organization of the storying process as meaning-making activity in its own right. Following Goffman and others, narrative ethnography orients toward the situated character of accounts and turns to the interaction and institutional order to better understand the relation between narrative, experience, and meaning.

Narrative ethnography is an emergent method in that it requires the researcher to recombine and reconfigure tried-and-true technical approaches to data collection and management with new analytical sensibilities and emphases. Traditional narrative analysis has profitably focused on the internal organization of stories and has developed effective ways of discerning and describing narrative structures. Narrative ethnography encourages the combination of these methods with the tools of the ethnographic trade—close observation and interviewing, to name the most prominent. This expands the research purview beyond the

narrative itself to the context of its production.

Narrative ethnography calls for new analytical sensitivities and emphases. The focus is on the contexts, conditions, and resources of the storying process. Narrative ethnography casts a wider net in an effort to describe and explicate the storying of experience in everyday life. The goal is to capture—through multifocal analysis—the contextual influences and dynamics that shape narrative. Narrative ethnography asks the researcher to be more inclusive in thinking about what constitutes appropriate data and how they should be analyzed. It prompts new questions about the storying process, directing attention textually outward as much as textually inward, so to speak. Existing analytical tools from conventional narrative analysis, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, textual analysis, ethnomethodology, deconstructionism, and other cutting-edge orientations to the dynamics of interaction provide a solid stock of analytic resources, but they need to be incorporated into the field of narrative analysis.

Narrative ethnography is informed and guided by an emergent stock of concepts and terms that describe narrative practice. This chapter has presented a number of these terms: narrative resources, narrative environments, narrative embeddedness, and narrative control. The challenge for the future is to expand the vocabulary to account for the widest possible range of analytical possibilities. Each new term or concept prompts new research questions. For example, the concept of narrative control leads us to ask what the mechanisms and sources of control might possibly be. This, in turn, points us to both interactional and institutional realms for possible answers. The terms narrative horizons, narrative composition, and narrative linkage (see Gubrium, 1993; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000b) point researchers to questions about possible realms of understanding and how they are combined into meaningful constellations by virtue of the procedural connections that are asserted in the process. Like all ethnography, the new questions for narrative ethnographers are open-ended. The research enterprise is exploratory and explanatory, aiming to shed light on the narrative process as much as on narrative products.

Of course, process and product are reflexively related. Perhaps the most innovative contribution narrative ethnography might make is to help researchers rethink taken-for-granted views of narrativity. Viewing narrative practice as situated social action allows the researcher to reconfigure traditional understandings. Structures that have conventionally been viewed as given and frequently treated as explanatory variables can now be seen as contextually conditioned social constructions—storied realities. Narrative ethnography provides us with the conceptual and methodological tool kit to empirically discern and describe narrative structures such as the family (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990), the self (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000b), and the life course (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000a). It provides a way of making visible the socially constructed and organized contours of these seemingly obdurate realities by featuring their storied presence in everyday life.

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