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# From Story to Research: Storying Human Experience Narratives

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## From Story to Research ... Storying Human Experience Narratives

Emily Ford Associate Professor/ Urban & Public Affairs Librarian Portland State University forder@pdx.edu @femilyr <u>storiesofopen.org</u>

Hi everyone. Welcome. I'd like to thank the IRDL Speakers Series organizers for inviting me to be a part of this inspiring event, and to Sophie and Nicole for facilitating today, Carol and Marie for keeping things running. Additional thanks to all of the other unnamed people and institutions that have made this a possibility. And thanks to everyone who is listening and watching; you gave me a reason to wear something other than yoga pants.

My contact information is on this screen, and that URL is for my project website. I'd be so humbled if you checked it out. And I will try to to be better at Twitter.



Before I begin discussing stories as research, I'd like to share with you more about my physical environment and my worldview--both things that have shaped my own lived experience and my own stories.

Today I sit on the traditional homelands of the **Multnomah**, **Kathlamet**, **Clackamas**, **Tumwater**, **Watlala bands of the Chinook**, the **Tualatin Kalapuya** and many other indigenous nations of the Columbia River. I acknowledge that I am here today because the many sacrifices forced upon these peoples and their ancestors. By recognizing these communities, we center our work and honor the first peoples of this region.

I am an able-bodied, neurotypical, white, cis-gendered heterosexual woman. I call myself an atheist jew. I am an intersectional feminist. I believe that knowledge is never concrete, constantly shifting, and that it cannot be separated from our physical and psychic experiences.

Since today I will be talking about research methods and research methodology, I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to my friend Bob Schroeder. I witnessed and learned from Bob on his path of discovering critical indigenous research methods and autoethnography, and while I was on the search for my approaches, he supported me all along the way, Bob, if you're here today, thank you.

I also owe appreciation and gratitude to the many individuals who have shared their

stories with me, both formally and informally. Without their generosity, openness, and vulnerability I would not be able to work with the methods I'll be discussing today.



So what am I going to talk about today? Can we please pretend this is us, sitting in a circle together? And in that vein, PLEASE use the chat for reactions, chatter, sharing your own ideas and experiences. Questions to Q&A.

I'm going to share with you some of my influences, thoughts, and ideas that have been swirling in my brain since I began my project <u>Stories of Open</u>-- the book will appear sometime in summer. I'll attempt to present the influencing ideas for stories and narrative inquiry, and share with you some of the nitty gritty things about the methods I've used, specifically about Coralie McCormack's Storying Stories framework.

My sincere hope is that you hear about some approaches that you can take back into your own work. I also hope that if you are moved that you will start sharing your story in your way, and eliciting stories from others.



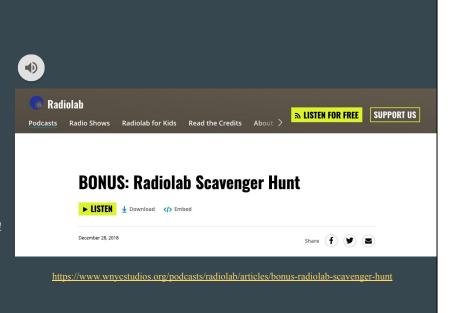
Part of my worldview is also my disposition when it comes to research and what it means to be practicing librarianship. Research is a human focused endeavor, and so, too is our praxis. And for me, what it means to be human is to practice radical love. I'd like to connect this bell hooks's writings. Many of you are probably familiar with her works, all of which is wholly undergirded by love. In *Teaching Critical Thinking* (2010), she says, "Genuine learning, like love, is always mutual" (p. 64). In her primer on feminism, hooks tells us "there can be no love where there is domination." (p. 103).

If we operate in a realm where the purpose of research is to learn, then we can connect research as a practice of radical love. Learning, like love, is always mutual. In love there is no domination.

bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010). bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000).

### Why stories?

*"There's actually an infinity of stories all around us more dramatic than any movie. For true story finders, the world is a scavenger hunt."* 

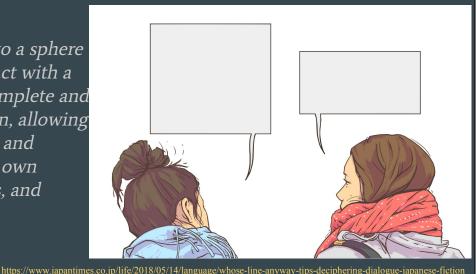


Why stories? Because we're human. But I also love the Latif Nasser, from Radiolab, explains stories. (minute 15-16).

https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/bonus-radiolab-scavenger-hun t

### Narrative Inquiry

"...invite readers to a sphere of possible contact with a developing, incomplete and evolving situation, allowing them to re-think and re-evaluate their own views, prejudices, and experiences."



Narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research that is focused on making sense of the human experience through personal stories. Jeong-Hee Kim, an educational researcher, tells us in her book, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry,* that the purpose of narrative inquiry is to "invite readers to a sphere of possible contact with a developing, incomplete and evolving situation, allowing them to re-think and re-evaluate their own views, prejudices, and experiences." (p. 235). That sounds like it's pretty akin to learning as a form of love.

From a methods standpoint, narrative inquiry is phenomenological-- the study of experience. It can be approached through interviews, photovoice, biography memoir, autoethnography, oral histories, etc.

I cannot say enough how much I relied on Kim's book, especially when I was just starting to explore narrative inquiry.

Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2016).

The other thing I should note about narrative inquiry, is that it is close to Participatory Action Research -- as argued by Debbie Pushor and D. Jean Clandinin

"...there is an interrelationship with action research, at least there is if we understand action research as research that results in action or change in the practices of individual researchers, participants, and institutional practices."

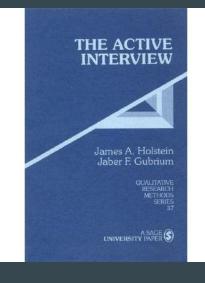
When people tell and retell their stories, there is opportunity for reflection, evaluation, and potential action based on that retelling and evaluative experience. I will note that for myself this has been true. Based on what I have learned with participants I have changed my actions, and some of them, have at least discussed re-thinking theirs.

And this is partly what I think is so powerful about qualitative research, but also about research that acknowledges the social context in which the research is occurring. (More on that in a second) Research that interrogates power structures, both in what is being researched, but in the act of researching itself.

Debbie Pushor and D Jean Clandinin, "The Interconnections between Narrative Inquiry and Action Research," in *SAGE Handbook of Educational Action Research*, 2012, 290–300, <u>https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857021021</u>.

### Active Interviewing

"[The interview] has a developing plot, in which topics, roles, and format are fashioned in the give-and-take of the interview."

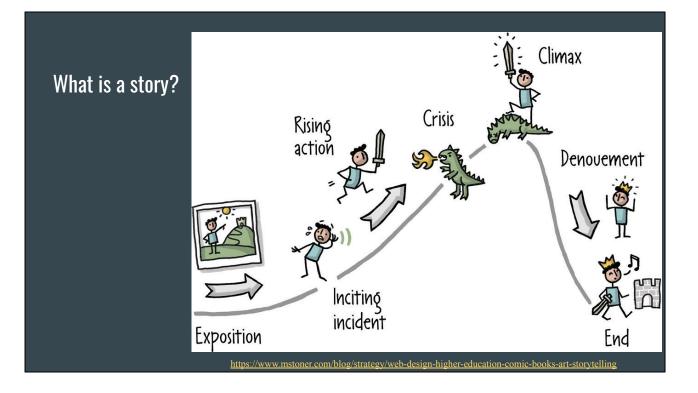


In my work I use interviews to gather stories. To listen. But there are many ways to interview, to be, to approach this method. I practice the active interview. Active interviewing, as described in the Little Blue Book *The Active Interview*, is an interpretive practice. Because interviews occur within a social context, It positions and acknowledges the interviewer and the interviewee as collaborators in making meaning. Time, place, experience all contribute to the meanings that are collaboratively made; and these meanings are ephemeral. Meaning is ephemeral. What is true today, might not be so tomorrow. In this acknowledgement, too, that we are operating in a social context, power is also part of that. Active interviewing, as a method, can invite the researcher to be aware of and reflect on power dynamics while they are actively engaging with participants.

The other thing about active interviewing is that it allows for the interviewer to be in partnership as themselves. They do not have to stick to a script. In fact, interviewers "converse with respondents in such a way that alternate considerations are brought into play" (p. 17). An active interview very much is about creating an environment where that allows for a "range and complexity of meanings."

Because active interviewing allows for the ephemeral, because it allows for and actively acknowledges social construction, it begins to break down power structures. Moreover, by looking at the interview process as a growth or action process, or a process that allows us to reflect and build upon our own stories, it gives participants agency and power in their own stories.

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). *The Active Interview*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.



This visual is what you might have learned in public schools in English class. There are a few things about this though, that I'd like to point out.

The structure shown here is in a graphic portraying what looks like a strapping young man, probably of European descent, acting out the events. The young man hears the distressed call of probably a long haired fair skinned princess who needs saved from the beast. He can save her! He runs to fight the best. The beast is slain! They fall in beautiful heterosexual heteronormative love because of course women must fall in love with the men who protect and save them, the young man is crowned king, and they live happily ever after.

I know I'm being cheeky here, but I have a point. And yes, I have a penchant for historical dramas that end in happily ever after.

The story structure is befitting this princess/savior narrative. Because, Yes, it represents how we understand stories in dominant Western culture. The methods and approaches I'm discussing today have not fully escaped this frame and bias.

Interviews, most often, do not follow this linear path. So let's move from high school English to sociolinguists.

## Labov & Waletzky

Abstract - what the story is about Orientation - characters, setting, plot Complicating Action - what happened? And then what happened? Evaluation - why the story was told/opinions or reflections Conclusion - resolution; what finally happened Coda - story is over, goes back to the main point or current time

So here is a basic model of the parts of a story or narrative as presented by William Labovc and Joshua Waletzky. This is a keystone work of sociolinguistics dating back to the 60s. I should note that this is a very useful model, but if taken wholly as presented and imposed upon stories as the only story elements or the only way to tell them, it is highly problematic and can be a colonization of story. It is a white, Western European understanding of stories. (Much like the the previous fairy tale slide). Stories, according to this model and other interpretations of it, have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Incidentally, this is also the advice given to people preparing tellings for the popular storytelling series, the Moth.

• Leitman, Margot. Long Story Short : The Only Storytelling Guide You'll Ever Need. Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2015.

However, there is some utility in this model and I'll show you in a few minutes how McCormack has enhanced it.

• William Labov and Joshua Waletzky, "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience," in *Sociolinguistics: The Essential Readings* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003.), 74–104. Reprint of article published in 1967

### Polkinghorne

Reconstruction of narratives

Two different types of analysis for narratives

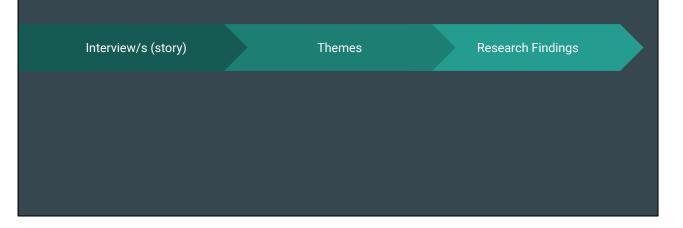


There are two major points that come from Donald E. Polkinghorne's work:

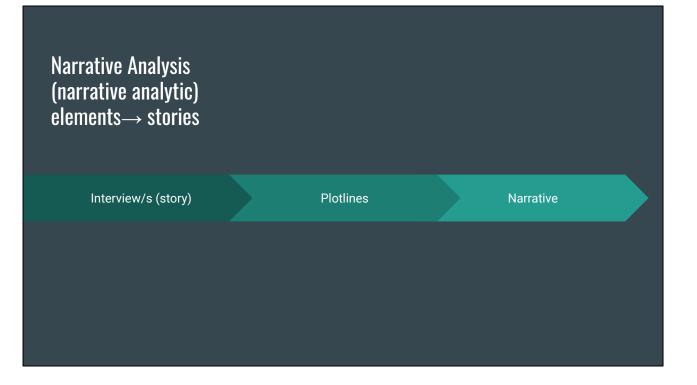
- Stories are not told in a linear fashion, particularly in an interview setting. 1. Therefore, as a researcher, you can identify the elements of a story and reconstruct it.
- 2. There are two different types of

DE Polkinghorne, "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis," Qualitative Studies in Education 8, no. 1 (1995): 5–23.

# Analysis of Narrative (paradigmatic type) stories $\rightarrow$ elements



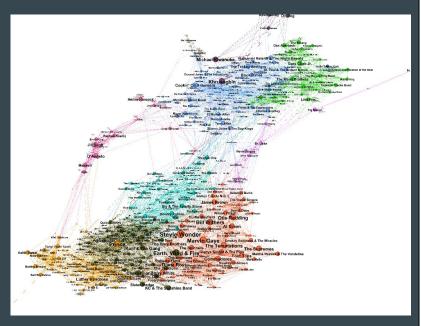
This would be like a grounded theory approach



This is the approach taken to identify the parts of stories, reorder them, and construct a new narrative document representing the interviewee's story. Allows for MORE social context.

### **McCormack**

Sociolinguistics; critical resistance; narrative analysis; identity construction; feminist theory; postmodernism; critical theory; educational theory...



https://medium.com/analytics-vidhya/what-kind-of-music-do-you-listen-to-exploring-the-network-of-spotifys-genres-56d188201a07

When I discovered Coralie McCormack's work I felt as if Godot has shown up. Or seeing a rainbow for the first time. Or like the first time I arrived in Oregon I stood next to a tree, for a very long time, and I stared at it in awe. I knew I was home. It felt like that.

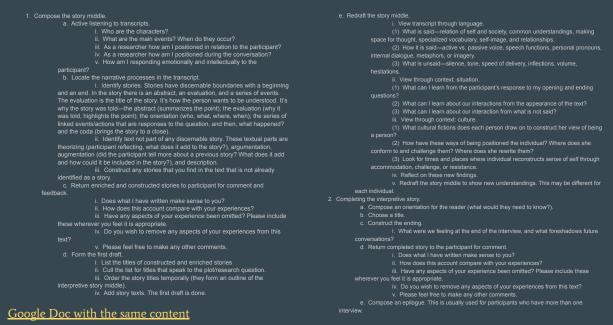
Coralie McCormack is an Australian researcher who developed storying stories while doing research for a dissertation on female graduate students lived experiences of leisure time.

Her work and method draws from so many different realms of theory and practice, from sociolinguists, to feminist theory, to educational theory and more. Her method works to unpack power and reflect on it in the research and analysis process. And it is collaborative with research participants.

Your final product is an interpretive narrative that is part interview transcript, part your reflection and analysis as researcher that has been informed in collaboration with the interviewee. The contents are "storied" because they are viewed through multiple lenses, stories within the transcript are identified and reordered into a narrative structure allowing the researcher to engage in narrative analysis as defined by Polkinghorne.

McCormack, C. (2004). Storying stories: A narrative approach to in-depth interview conversations. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570210166382

### **Storying Stories Process: Constructing an Interpretive Story**



What McCormack offers draws from Labov, Polkinghorne, Connelly and Clandinin, and so many others. Because, as I was doing my research I had to compile her approach to research, I created this document for myself that outlines her steps. I made this document publicly available via google docs, but it is also going to be printed in my forthcoming book.

In addition to the storying and reordering, the method looks for parts of the transcript that aren't parts of stories, it looks for audible tone, passive and active voice, where participants resist or accommodate cultural fictions, and so much more.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ba1wCO8pRt3RwK8Y\_GKOX08xe6yj4puug96 YTxFpRtc/edit?usp=sharing

### Unpacking Power via Storying Stories

As a researcher how am I positioned in relation to the participant?

As a researcher how am I positioned during the conversation?

How am I responding emotionally and intellectually to the participant?

So how does McCormack unpack power dynamics in the storying stories process? 1. Storying stories builds in reflective questions about power and the interviewer's influence into each step of the way. The method asks the interviewer to consider these questions:

iii. As a researcher how am I positioned in relation to the participant?

iv. As a researcher how am I positioned during the conversation?

v. How am I responding emotionally and intellectually to the participant?

### Unpacking Power via Storying Stories

Does what I have written make sense to you?

How does this account compare with your experiences?

Have any aspects of your experience been omitted? Please include these wherever you feel it is appropriate.

Do you wish to remove any aspects of your experiences from this text?

Please feel free to make any other comments.

2. Participants are invited to assist in the analysis process by responding to the following questions at least twice during the process.

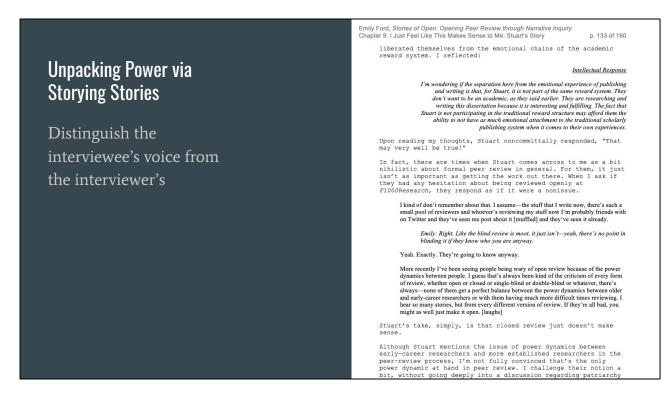
i. Does what I have written make sense to you?

ii. How does this account compare with your experiences?

iii. Have any aspects of your experience been omitted? Please include these wherever you feel it is appropriate.

iv. Do you wish to remove any aspects of your experiences from this text?

v. Please feel free to make any other comments.



Unique formatting is used in the interpretive narrative to distinguish the researcher's voice from the interviewee's voice.

#### then people can do what they want with it. And I think because it was the first time that this had happened, and that it was something I was excited about but especially frustrating to not be able to get it to that point of this shiny perfect thing. But yeah, the **Unpacking Power via** more it happens the more I'm like, "Meh When I thought about this later, I felt a bit frustrated with the publishing and editing process in general. In this part of our conversation and later, Bethany referred to her pragmatism and practical approach in editing: "At the end of the day it comes **Storying Stories** down to what is actually realistic, when that happens. It could also just be that the editor's like, 'Yeah, whatever.'" Certainly editors have to weigh all sorts of things in their publish decisions, but they can't necessarily pull the plug on publications that have been asked to revise but the author won't Incorporate responses do necessary revisions. I ruminated: from the interviewee This reality is a bit frustrating to my idealist naive self. What are the pressures and highlight on journals to publish things that are realistic rather than what would be the best work? Bethany has given some examples here, but I'm wondering where pressure for volume and issue production comes in, or if there are economic pressures if disagreements or the one is at a traditional journal? Or even political pressures from an editorial board, or if there are power relations between the editor/journal and the author? researcher's misguided Bethany's engagement with my intellectual response during her review of the draft interpretive narrative was enlightening. First, she disagreed with my statement that editors cannot pull the plug. She commented: interpretations in the I disagree-we can and do pull the plug when authors don't do the revisions we ask for. The edge cases (which are most of them) are where the authors did the revisions, but half-assed them, or they did most of final narrative them, but left out one or two. They put in some work and made some progress, but didn't get as far as you wanted them to. That's when it comes down to a judgment call, and we typically err on the side of giving them another chance to revise and eventually publishing an imperfect paper. We know that we could take a different approach, but this one is Next, she addressed my in-text reflection.

Emily Ford, Stories of Open: Ope Chapter 4: Roles of Peer Review

of Open: Opening Peer Review through Narrative Inquiry

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Intellectual Response

in line with our philosophy of editing.

In our case, it's a matter of (a) getting a manuscript to the point where it won't be a complete embarrassment to the journal to publish it, and (b) weighing the flaws against its potential to contribute to the scholarly w things where th

Unique formatting is used in the interpretive narrative to distinguish the researcher's voice from the interviewee's voice.

Because there is a danger of misinterpreting someone's words, and this allows them a chance to participate in the analysis and reflect on how YOU are thinking about the story and its meaning.

#### Orientation

Unpacking Power via Storying Stories The day that I speak with Stuart, I'm in my new home office. I haven't yet become accustomed to my new desk or setup; we've only lived in this house for a month, and my sabbatical has just started a week prior. Stuart is the first person I'm interviewing since my sabbatical started, and my thoughts are generally proccupied with my expectations of the coming year, unpacking the house, and my hew life with my partner and their kids. The cats aren't yet comfortable in the house, so my usual feline work

responding. Whatever the case, I'm still refining the art of interviewing, and because I have never before interacted with Stuart, I'm nervous. <u>My excitement to hear their story, learn</u> from them, and collaborate with them in order to create some meaning and gain new knowledge, leads me to, at times, interrupt <u>Stuart.</u> I catch myself the first time, and throughout our conversation I'm working hard to delay my responses until they've finished their thoughts. Perhaps it is because I see such

> Stuart, I'm nervous. My excitement to hear their story, learn from them, and collaborate with them in order to create some meaning and gain new knowledge, leads me to, at times, interrupt Stuart. I catch myself the first time, and throughout our conversation I'm working hard to delay my responses until they've finished their thoughts. Perhaps it is because I see such parallels in our experiences-we have both been immersed in founding journals and we both have a socialist and anti-

This interpretive narrative was written with Stuart Lawson.

I get to acknowledge when I mess up!



Okay, so how are stories research? Because we are asking questions of narratives. We are looking through multiple theoretical and applied lenses to unwrap and peel away the layers. We are working to create new knowledge. The problem lies in the dissemination, how do we disseminate findings using interpretive narratives? That's a whole other talk, and I welcome your suggestions and ideas in chat.

To me: 1- it's about people. 2 - it incorporates multiple lenses and is based in theory. 3 - we're creating new knowledge

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