Notes on Research Methods in Narrative Psychology:
How Can We Use Stories to Learn About People?

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October 6, 2024

Summary Overview

A. Big Stories vs. Small Stories
B. Qualitative vs. Quantitative Methods
C. Qualitative Strategies for Analyzing Narrative

A. **The Notion of Big vs. Small Stories** (based on Bamberg, 2006 & Freeman, 2006)

"Big Stories" (or "Grand Stories")
Mark Freeman

- Lifestory
- Autobiography
- Memoirs
- Episodes that were "life determining" or "life threatening."
- Focus upon identity more broadly conceived, e.g., how I became a doctor, an advocate for the poor, a parent, etc.
- Searching for "meaning" to what we do and will do.
- Occur in specific kind of settings which requires personal reflection & elicitation by another.
- Often make use of culturally-supplied schemes, categories, or genres, e.g., redemptive life stories of McAdams
- Rarely told by individuals at any length &, thus, may be considered unusual and, even, artificial (?)
- Also, one must "step out" of life to fashion the lifestory.

"Small Stories" (or "Little Stories")
Michael Bamberg

- Short in length
- Told in everyday life
- Told in interaction with others
- Often *about* everyday, mundane events of life
- Told by individuals who assume roles in the telling
- Spontaneous
- Positioning of self vis-à-vis others
- Linked to "socio-linguistic" analysis

B. Qualitative vs. Quantitative Methods

1. Some Critiques of Quantitative/Positivistic Science (Lincoln & Guba, 2000)

Internal Problems	External Problems
1. Context is stripped out of research	1. Facts are often theory-laden
2. Exclusion of meaning & purpose as objects of study	2. Problem of induction (theory is underdetermined) • can't be proven; only falsified
3. Grand theories don't fit local context (*etic*/outsider vs. *emic*/insider perspective)	3. Facts are value-laden
4. General theories can't be applied to the individual	4. The interaction of the inquirer and the inquired (they are in a dyad)
5. Failure to consider how the theory was originally discovered (it must have an interpretive basis to start with)	

2. Examples of Qualitative vs. Quantitative Data (Cresswell, 1998)

Qualitative	Quantitative
• Interview transcripts	• Reaction & response times
• Observations, e.g., descriptions of public behaviors; focus group discussions.	• Biometrics, e.g., skin conductance, breathing rates, rate of heartbeat
• Documents, e.g., diaries, letters, autobiographies & memoirs	• Error or success rates on experimenter-presented tasks, e.g., number of remembered words
• Visual Sources, e.g., photographs, movies, videotape, drawings, artwork	• Questionnaire responses, e.g., 5- or 7-point Likert-like scales; true-false judgments

Five Traditions of Qualitative Research
(Cresswell, 1998)

- Biography
- Case Study
- Ethnography
- Grounded Theory
- Phenomenology

C. Some Qualitative Strategies for Analyzing Narratives

Abbreviations used in summary below: [KC] = Charmaz (2005); [EGM] = Mishler (1995); [RFL] = Reid, Flowers & Larkin (2005); [TAS] = Schwandt (2001); [RES] = Stake (2005).

Note: For all the methods that are described below which use data from an interview with one or more participants, the researcher will record either on video or by audio the interview itself. Then, the recording will be carefully transcribed into a written text. Each line of the text is numbered. This is a time consuming and an often difficult task to transform what was said into a text without losing a sense of how it was said. Many qualitative researchers use a version of the "Jefferson system" (Howitt & Cramer, 2011) by which different characteristics of the spoken interview are expressed by characters on the written page, for example:

[Yeah]	
[Okay]	Overlapping speech
WORD	Capitalized word was expressed with great emphasis
(2.3)	Pause of 2.3 seconds between utterances
Wo::rd	Colon = prolonged vowel or consonant; stretched sound

Narrative Analysis (NA)

- A family of interpretive methods focusing specifically upon stories or narratives generated in research. May involve:
  - (a) *formal & structural means of analysis* (e.g., how a story is organized, how it is developed, where it begins and ends, does it use poetic devices such as metaphor?),
  - (b) *functional analysi*s of what a story is 'doing," or what is being told (e.g., a cautionary tale, a success story, a coming-of-age story); and
  - (c) analyses of stories as a kind of *oral performance*. [TAS, p. 169; also EGM]

- Interview analysis (Josselson & Hammack, 2021)
  - Transcription: Interview must be transcribed into written form while noting pauses, lapses in speech, emphases, and other qualities within the spoken interview.
  - Collaborative grouping: Tendency to work in groups of one to three other researchers who can comment upon conclusions and interpretations.
  - Member checking: NA tends not to share interpretations with participants.

- Approaches to Narrative include (Josselson & Hammack, 2021)

  - Labov & Waletzky's (1967) guide to parts of a narrative, i.e.,
    - *Abstract*: summary of the story to come
    - *Orientation*: Introduces person, place, time
    - *Complicating Action*: What happened
    - *Evaluation*: What is significant about the story; how is it to be understood
    - *Resolution or Coda*: Return to the present

     o   Alexander's (1990) "markers of salience" = what researcher(s) ought to pay attention to in the text of the interview:

-    *Primacy*: Where does the story begin?
-    *Frequency*: What is repeated since this must have some specific meaning
-    *Incompletion*: Sequence of story ends without closure or there are discontinuities in the story
-    Uniqueness: Something the participant points out as unusual or expressions in which participant clearly departs from his/her usual language of expression
-    *Negation*: What is declared to be not true or what the participants says they did not think or feel
-    *Omission*: What might be left out of the narration and why might this be?
-    *Emphasis*: Attention is called by participant to something important
-    *Contradictions*: Do these represent multiple layers of the story?

- Multiple Re-readings of the Transcript (Josselson & Hammack, 2021)
  - 1st Reading: Read transcript while listening to recording to identify "preliminary thematic content and overall gestalt (i.e., shape, configuration, or structure) of the narrative." (p. 37)

  - 2nd Reading: Voices & Dialogue: When we speak, we use or respond to multiple "voices," that is, themes, ideas, concerns that arise from within ourselves or from the culture around us, e.g., gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual identity, political or religious beliefs, etc. Identify in the text the differing "voices" the participant is "appropriating, repudiating, or silencing" and "those with whom [the participant] is clearly in dialogue" (p. 41)

  - 3rd Reading: Patterns & Unity: "How do all these voices and the thematic content they produce create coherent patterns within the narrative?" (p. 49)

  - 4th Reading: Engagement with Theory With a high degree of familiarity and interpretive work with the text, the fourth reading then affords the opportunity for a closer engagement with theory. The analyst shifts the gaze from a more inductive mode in which ideas are generated from the text to a dialogic mode between data and theory" (p. 60)

  - 5th Reading: Cross-Case Analyses: "The fifth reading of a narrative might involve a comparative analysis based on other cases in the data set. This reading is vital to establish what may be unique about a particular narrative versus common across a group that is the focus of study in the narrative research project" (p. 63)

Case Study (CS)

- A "case" can be an individual, a group as group, or multiple individuals studied & compared.
- Focus upon knowing the specific "case" using multiple documentary sources [TAS, RES]
- Tries to answer "how" and "why" questions about the case [TAS]
- Organized around a small number of key issues [RES]
- Does not seek to "build theory" as its primary purpose.

Conversational Analysis (CA)

- A method "for textual analysis" that "arose out of ethnomethodology"[1] [TAS)]
- Examines the structure of talk to reveal how speakers produce orderly social interaction. [TAS]
- CA assumes that words & phrases function pragmatically, i.e., they do or accomplish various purposes such as inviting, complaining, rebuking. [TAS]

Discourse Analysis (DA)

- Like CA, discourse analysis focuses upon recorded talk with an emphasis upon the *content* of what is said somewhat more than *how* it is said. [TAS]
- Often used interchangeably for the term CA

Ethnography (Eth)

- Arising from cultural anthropology's "field work," *Eth* is the activity of describing a culture of a particular people or group.
- *Eth* requires "prolonged time in the field, generation of descriptive data, development of rapport and empathy with respondents, the use of multiple data sources, making of field notes, etc." [TAS, p. 80]

Grounded Theory (GT)

- A "specific, highly developed, rigorous set of procedures for producing formal, substantive theory of social phenomena" that arose in the late 1960s from the work of Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss [TAS]
- Experience with data generates insights, hypotheses, and generative questions that are pursued through further data generation. As tentative answers to questions are developed and concepts are constructed, these constructions are verified through further data collection. [TAS, p. 110]
- Constant comparison is made between coded categories or concepts and empirical indicators.
- Grounded theory methods "consist of simultaneous data collection and analysis, with each informing and focusing the other throughout the research process." [KC, p. 508]
- This might be likened to a kind of "bootstrap" operation in which the researcher's own efforts help him or her to move further and further up toward the goal of eventually understanding the focus of the research.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

- Using the technique, researchers gather qualitative data from the individual using one of several techniques such as interview or focus group. The responses given are then interpreted by the researcher to extract themes relevant to their research question. The technique is similar in

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[1] *Ethnomethodology* refers to an interest "in how everyday people accomplish the interactions we take for granted in everyday life – for example, promising, trusting, agreeing, and negotiating. It is the study of social action as the product and achievement of knowledgeable and reflective social actors. It focuses on the ways that various aspects of the life-world are produced, experienced, or accomplished interactionally and discursively" (TAS, p. 81). The term was first coined by the sociologist Harold Garfinkel.

approach to grounded theory in that the researcher does not start the data collection with hypotheses already in mind. Instead, the data defines how the research question is answered. IPA can be used to answer such questions as why soldiers decide to enlist or what is it like to lose a limb. [Wikipedia, RFL]

- IPA is "phenomenological" because, rather than trying to make objective descriptions, it focuses on the uniqueness of an individual's thoughts and perceptions. Thus, it relies on a researcher's capacity to become immersed in the private world of each participant as a phenomenological insider. Nevertheless, IPA is "interpretive" because the researcher must also make sense of the participant's experience in a way that addresses a particular research question. [Wikipedia, RFL]

- Data used in an analysis may come from structured one-on-one interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, experience diaries, and other qualitative methods of data collection. An IPA analysis typically involves 5 to 15 participants and includes a number of verbatim excerpts from the data. [Wikipedia; RFL]

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