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Series Foreword

Qualitative approaches have become accepted and indeed embraced as empirical methods within the social sciences, as scholars have realized that many of the phenomena in which we are interested are complex and require deep inner reflection and equally penetrating examination. Quantitative approaches often cannot capture such phenomena well through their standard methods (e.g., self-report measures), so qualitative designs using interviews and other in-depth data-gathering procedures offer exciting, nimble, and useful research approaches.

Indeed, the number and variety of qualitative approaches that have been developed is remarkable. We remember Bill Stiles saying (quoting Chairman Mao) at one meeting about methods, "Let a hundred flowers bloom," indicating that there are many appropriate methods for addressing research questions. In this series, we celebrate this diversity (hence, the cover design of flowers).

The question for many of us, though, has been how to decide among approaches and how to learn the different methods. Many prior descriptions of the various qualitative methods have not provided clear enough descriptions of the methods, making it difficult for novice researchers to learn how to use the methods. Thus, those interested in learning about and pursuing qualitative research need crisp and thorough descriptions of these approaches, with lots of examples to illustrate the method, so that readers can grasp how to use the methods.

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The purpose of this series of books, then, was to present a range of qualitative approaches that seemed most exciting and illustrative of the range of methods appropriate for social science research. We asked leading experts in qualitative methods to contribute to the series, and to our delight, they accepted our invitations. Through this series, readers have the opportunity to learn qualitative research methods from those who developed the methods and/or who have been using them successfully for years.

We asked the authors of each book to provide context for the method, including a rationale for the method, situating the method within the qualitative tradition, describing the method's philosophical and epistemological background, and noting the key features of the method. We then asked them to describe in detail the steps of the method, including the research team, sampling, biases and expectations, data collection, data analysis, and variations on the method. We also asked authors to provide tips for the research process and for writing a manuscript emerging from a study that used the method. Finally, we asked authors to reflect on the methodological integrity of the approach, along with the benefits and limitations of the particular method.

This series of books can be used in several different ways. Instructors teaching courses in qualitative research could use the whole series, presenting one method at a time to expose students to a range of qualitative methods. Alternatively, instructors could choose to focus on just a few approaches, as depicted in specific books, supplementing the books with examples from studies that have been published using the approaches, and providing experiential exercises to help students get started using the approaches. Other researchers will just use one book as they strive to master one qualitative method.

This book describes narrative analysis, a qualitative method that focuses on the individual as the unit of analysis, closely examines individuals' "voices" via their narrative data, and explores how individuals make meaning of their life experiences. Authors Ruthellen Josselson and Phillip L. Hammack describe the method's pursuit of understanding how people make meaning of their experiences; reliance on rich narrative data; adoption of a holistic, person-centered approach that emphasizes particularity and diversity; use of interpretation, induction, and discovery rather than deduction and confirmation; integration of the analysis of implicit and explicit meaning; and attention to coconstruction of meaning. Benefits of the approach include the preservation of the individual as the unit of analysis in exploring questions related to meaning of experiences.

—Clara E. Hill and Sarah Knox

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1 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE METHOD

In his early 20s, a young man we will call Lou found himself in an emergency room. He was hospitalized for "amphetamine psychosis." At the hospital, he was hallucinating. He saw a cup with the name "Maria" on it—his mother's name. At that moment—the lowest of his life—he remembered something his father had told him: "Your mother wanted to abort you." He was devastated, overcome with feelings of worthlessness. A few weeks later, after his release from the hospital, a friend invited him to get out of the city. They ascended a mountaintop. Lou took in the view. It was not one he had experienced much. He was a "city boy." He was overcome with a feeling of oneness with nature, and he determined to leave drug use behind him. Over 30 years later, he narrated this life story. Lou has not abused drugs for the past 30 years, but he has experienced—and overcome—plenty of other challenges.

How do we understand how Lou descended to his place of extreme worthlessness? How was he able to overcome this experience and create a life story characterized by resilience? How did Lou make meaning of this challenging moment in his life? Lou is a gay Mexican American man in his 50s who experienced most of his adulthood during the AIDS epidemic and the

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extraordinary stigma gay men experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. What role does identity (e.g., experience of gender, sexuality, race or ethnicity), culture (e.g., expectations and practices associated with being Mexican American), and history (e.g., the backdrop of the AIDS epidemic and its extraordinary stigma for gay men) assume in Lou's meaning making?

The method we describe in this book—*narrative analysis*—is uniquely positioned to answer these kinds of questions. The version of narrative analysis we outline in this book is a method that centers the individual as the unit of scrutiny, preserves the voice of the individual through close analysis and presentation of narrative data, and investigates how individuals make meaning of life's challenges and opportunities. The method fully contextualizes lives in a manner that affords analysis of such critical aspects of the self as culture, identity, and history. We return to Lou's story in Chapter 3 for a sample narrative analysis.

Narrative analysis is a method with a particular history and epistemology, and it is designed to answer certain types of research questions. As part of the growing recognition of the value and legitimacy of qualitative inquiry in psychology, narrative analysis is becoming increasingly articulated and refined. This book represents an effort to stimulate new investigators or seasoned investigators who want to stretch their methodological expertise to consider narrative analysis.

It is important to note that "narrative" is a broad concept in psychology, concerned with the role of stories in personality, human development, and psychological experience. Sarbin (1986) suggested that narrative be considered a root metaphor for psychology because human beings impose structure on the flow of experience by organizing accounts of actions into narratives. Bruner (2004) took this idea further by declaring that we live our lives as stories. More recently, scholars in personality, social, and developmental psychology have used narrative to describe any form of data collection that uses stories, regardless of the analytic approach (e.g., Adler et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2020; Rogers, 2020). In this book, although we make some links to these broader ideas in narrative psychology, we focus on narrative analysis as a qualitative method.

STORIES AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE: THE CALL FOR NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Stories are central to human experience. We create stories of ourselves to connect our actions, mark our identities, distinguish ourselves from others, and link past, present, and, perhaps, future. Across cultures and historical

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eras, from childhood to old age, we engage in storytelling to make meaning of life and our place within a larger social system. We inhabit a world in which experience is mediated through language, and our sensemaking process depends on the construction and internalization of speech in narrative form (e.g., Bruner, 1990). The mind depends on narrative meaning making for a sense of coherence, unity, and purpose in life (e.g., McAdams, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

As one form of qualitative method in psychology, narrative analysis provides a window into meaning making as a fundamental process of human development. Narrative analysis investigates texts that tell stories about people's lives, maintaining an analytic focus on the concept of *meaning*—how individuals position themselves in their worlds and make sense of themselves through stories.

Narrative research is premised on the idea that people live and/or understand their lives in storied forms, connecting events in the manner of a plot that has beginning, middle, and end points (Sarbin, 1986). In its simplest form, our experience is internally ordered as "this happened, then that happened," with some (often causal) connecting link in between. These stories are not constructed in isolation, however. Embedded in a particular culture, the stories we make represent variations on circulating narratives constrained by social expectation (Hammack & Toolis, 2019). For example, there are expectations about the structure and content of a "good" autobiographical narrative (McLean & Syed, 2015). There is cultural meaning ascribed to the particular social categories we inhabit—categories such as gender, race, class, and sexual identity (Hammack, 2008; Randall, 2015; Rogers, 2020). In other words, people construct narratives from a highly particular social position (e.g., a debutante, a gay man, or an unhoused person).

HISTORY AND EPISTEMOLOGY OF NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative theory—an effort to study the various structures, elements, uses, and effects of narrative—emerged in the 1970s in fields such as philosophy, history, literature, and psychoanalysis (e.g., Dray, 1971; Kermode, 1979; MacIntyre, 1977). The 1980s saw an explosion of theoretical work on narrative in psychology, with the growing recognition that psychology needed to center meaning, intentionality, and language in the study of the whole person (e.g., Bruner, 1986, 2004; Cohler, 1982; Freeman, 1984; K. Gergen & Gergen, 1983; McAdams, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). Ideas

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about the self consisting of multiple "voices" in dialogue with one another (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978) became influential to narrative researchers.

The 1990s saw several paradigmatic statements and empirical works in narrative psychology, spanning subfields of the discipline, including clinical (e.g., Howard, 1991), cognitive (e.g., Bruner, 1990), community (e.g., Rappaport, 1995), developmental (e.g., Josselson, 1996b), personality (e.g., McAdams, 1993; Singer, 1995), and social psychology (e.g., Baumeister & Newman, 1994). In the 21st century, narrative psychology has broadened to foreground life stories as culturally embedded, recognizing variability in identity development across cultural contexts (e.g., Hammack, 2011; McAdams & Guo, 2017). Importantly, researchers have increasingly acknowledged how narratives are constrained by power and social location on axes such as race and class (e.g., Bhatia, 2018; Hammack & Toolis, 2015).

To fully situate narrative analysis in the history of psychological science and its methodological and epistemological traditions, one must return to the birth of modern psychology in the late 19th century. William James (1890) envisioned psychology as a "natural science" examining mechanical mental processes in parallel to physics and chemistry. Wilhelm Wundt (1897, 1916) acknowledged a greater purview for psychology with his proposal for two distinct branches—the "experimental," which would use scientific methods, and the "cultural," which would use naturalistic and historical methods. A third, often forgotten, approach to psychology was articulated by late 19th-century philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1988). Dilthey argued that psychology ought to be a "human science" chiefly concerned with meaning making. Dilthey's vision of a hermeneutic psychological science was an interpretive one—one in which data would be subject to inductive analysis to understand human action and experience in context (Tappan, 1997). Dilthey's psychology eschewed the positivist or postpositivist quest for generalizable laws in favor of a contextualist, interpretive analysis of experience in context.

The epistemology of contemporary narrative analysis follows Dilthey's original vision in its primarily inductive and hermeneutic (i.e., interpretive) approach to data analysis. *Hermeneutics* is the science of meaning (e.g., Gadamer, 1976). The goal is to extract both the explicit and implicit meanings in texts (Josselson, 2004) and to do so with an analytic openness that facilitates the discovery of new knowledge. For example, when we consider Lou's narrative of drug abuse, we analyze not only his account of the meaning of this nadir in his life story but also the themes that lie beneath the surface of his account (e.g., his relationship with his mother).

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The meanings individuals make of life events occur in social context and historical time. Contemporary narrative analysis builds on Dilthey's philosophical foundation and is also influenced by the social constructionist movement of the 20th century that emphasized how reality is built through negotiation among people in a social context (see K. J. Gergen, 1985). This negotiation occurs through language in interaction—a social process that relies on joint meaning making (e.g., Vygotsky, 1934/1962).

Narrative analysts recognize that stories are recounted in a particular context (M. Gergen, 2001; Mishler, 1986) and often with a particular purpose. Thus, the focus is not only on the content of what is communicated in the narrative but also on how the narrator constructs the story, from what social locations the narrator speaks, and what impact on the audience may be intended. For example, a woman may recount, in a humorous tone to her friends, a story about how her father got angry at her, stopped the car, and made her get out and walk home. She may emphasize the amusing people she encountered on her walk. This same woman may tell the same story to her therapist as an example of her father's irrationality and abuse of her and how frightened she was of the people she encountered in the dangerous neighborhood she walked through.

Most narrative researchers agree with Spence's (1984) distinction between narrative truth and historical truth. *Narrative truth* involves a constructed account of experience, not a factual record of what "really" happened. The focus is on how events are remembered, connected to one another, and understood in relation to a person's life course and position in society, culture, and time. The question of "accuracy" is not the focus in narrative analysis. What matters is how the individual constructs meaning about life events through narrative. In this way, narrative analysis is aligned with an interpretive, constructionist epistemology rather than an essentialist, realist epistemology typically associated with mainstream psychological science (see Madill et al., 2000).

KEY FEATURES OF NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The method of narrative analysis we outline here is primarily concerned with a holistic, interpretive approach that focuses on form and content (see Lieblich et al., 1998). Narrative analysis is an inductive method that contextualizes understandings in relation to the narrative as a whole, to its constituent parts, and to the social location(s) of the participants. Here, we highlight six key features of narrative analysis.

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Research Question(s) and Design Are Concerned With Meaning Making

A good research question for narrative analysis foregrounds the experience of a phenomenon in a social world. Such questions are typically "how" questions about individual or collective experience rather than questions of event causality common in experimental research or questions of relationship among variables common in correlational research.

Narrative researchers begin with a conceptual question ("Big Q") that provides the framework for the research, and they construct questions about experience ("little q") that can be a launching point for interviews (Josselson, 2013). The conceptual question derives from the scholarly literature and contributes to the knowledge in that field. The little q directs the participant to the aspect(s) of their lives that the researcher wishes to learn about and invites the participants to describe in detail—tell the story of—either particular events or a significant aspect or time of life (e.g., a turning point) or to narrate an entire life story. We offer more specificity about these questions and their links to design and data collection in Chapters 2 and 3.

Because meaning making is a universal and constant psychological process, the breadth of research questions that can be addressed through narrative analysis is considerable. But the type of questions is more specific: They are questions about experience. They are often questions that are much broader than those typically constructed for either experimental or correlational research designs in psychology. A Big Q might be "How do men who are parents in partnered relationships manage the work–life balance?" or "How are young people using new vocabulary to describe their gender and sexual identities?" These kinds of questions are broad and require the collection of narrative data in which individuals can say something about how they are managing the work–life balance or what language they are using to describe their gender or sexual identities and why. The equivalent little q for each of these might be "Tell me about a typical day in your life" and "Tell me your current gender and sexual identity labels and how you came to use them."

Collection of Rich, Narrative Data

While it may seem obvious to highlight the detailed, contextualized data necessary for narrative analysis, many researchers trained in positivist or postpositivist approaches to qualitative analysis often collect brief written narrative accounts. The best example of this practice occurs when researchers administer surveys and then provide respondents with open-response areas