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Narrative analysis in aging studies: A typology for consideration

By

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Abstract

This article seeks to expand our understanding on narrative and the analysis of stories researchers invite and collect in the domain of aging studies. To do so, we first offer an understanding of what narrative inquiry can be by laying out a theoretical basis for this kind of research, and making a case for the relevance of narrative as an alternative methodology. Painting with broad strokes, narrative analysis as a method is then considered before a typology of different ways in which stories can be analyzed is introduced. Illuminated by the typology are two contrasting standpoints toward narrative analysis—storyteller and story analyst—and three specific methods—structural, performative, and autoethnographic creative analytic practices—that each standpoint might use to analyse the whats and hows of storytelling. The article closes by suggesting that in order to assist us to understand the complexities of aging researchers might consider using a variety of analyses.

Keywords: Aging; Narrative analysis; Story analyst; Storyteller; Structural analysis; Performative analysis; Creative analytical practices

Introduction

According to Birren (1999), aging has become one of the most complex areas of study facing modern day science. Not least, this is because the process of growing older is something which is dynamic, interactive, subject to the twists and turns of life, chance, change and complication. Or, as Randall (2007) puts it, aging is a process which is exemplified by complexity. For him, we become more unique and more distinctive with age, not less. With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that narrative forms of inquiry have burgeoned within aging studies to the extent that narrative gerontology is now a recognized discipline in itself (Kenyon, Clark, & de Vries, 2001; Randall, 2007). Within aging studies, narrative has been used, for example, to examine social policy (Biggs, 2001), issues of masculinity (Jackson, 2003; Smith, Braunack-Mayer, Wittert & Warin, 2007), interpersonal and intimate relationships (Jones, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2003; Matthews, 2000), physical activity in later life (Dionigi & O'Flynn, 2007; Heuser, 2005; Tulle, 2007), narrative maps of aging (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006a, 2006b, 2007), body image and beauty work (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2003; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007a; Paquette & Raine, 2004), experiences of health and illness (Jolanki, 2004; Faircloth, Rittman, Boylstein, Young & Van Puymbroeck, 2004; Sanders, Donovan & Dieppe, 2002), carework (Ribeiro, Paú & Nogueira, 2007; Twigg, 2000), and retirement (Savishinsky, 2000). As part of this, narrative analysis has attracted interest and has been utilised.

In this article, we aspire to develop and extend our understandings of narrative analysis by introducing a typology that considers this method in the plural rather than in the singular. The rationale for doing so, following Elliot (2005), is that applying a classification or typology might be a useful way of making sense of different techniques and approaches currently operating

under the broad umbrella term of 'narrative analysis'. The typology we sketch is intended as a point of entry into a complex field and not as a way to securely close it down and finalize it. By using a typology, we intend to illuminate a range of ways in which researchers might analyse the stories they work with in aging studies. It is different from the rare few typologies already created (c.f. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, Zilber, 1998; Mishler, 1995) inasmuch as it introduces different layers or levels to analysis through the idea of narrative analysts as story analysts and storytellers. It differs in that it considers analysis as a systematic task (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006) and as a form of writing (Richardson, 2000). It takes explicitly into account both the hows and the whats of storytelling (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). It also outlines various strengths and weaknesses of each analysis. Accordingly, in presenting this typology it is hoped that our analytical repertoire is expanded and our understandings of narrative are enhanced. It is also hoped that scholars will have an additional resource to draw on to assist them in making principled and strategic choices regarding when and why to use different types of analysis. Before describing the typology, and what it may mean for aging studies, we must begin by clearing some ground. Most immediately, an understanding of what narrative inquiry as a methodology can mean is required.

Narrative inquiry: Some basic assumptions

It is difficult to give a single definition of narrative, or draw a precise boundary around its meaning. In part, this is because it means different things to different people and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines, often synonymously with story (Randall, 2007; Riessman, 2008). That said, for narrative to have conceptual and analytical force, and lest it be misunderstood as to mean anything and everything, it is useful to offer an understanding of what it can be, as opposed to what it is. The word narrative is rooted in the Latin *gnarus*, 'knowing.' Coupled with knowing in a particular way, narrative can be thought of as a big or small (Bamberg, 2006; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009) way of telling and showing.

This telling or showing often has such features as a point to it and characters embedded within it along with a plot connecting events that unfold sequentially over time to provide in relation to other people an overarching explanation or consequence. In this sense, we find Hinchman and Hinchman's (1997) definition useful: "Narrative (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offers insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it" (p. xvi), as such narratives are different from chronicles, or, for example, reports. Or, as Riessman and Speedy (2007), put it, "What distinguishes narrative from other forms of discourse? One answer is sequence and consequence: Events are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience" (p. 430).

Like the term narrative, it is difficult to give a single and clear-cut definition of narrative inquiry as a methodology since, in part, there are multiple meanings of it throughout the literature. As Smith and Sparkes (2006, 2008), and Sparkes and Smith (2008) point out, narrative scholarship is a varied, on-going, and contested enterprise rather than a singular, ossified one. That said, they also emphasize that there are points of contact between the different understandings of what a narrative inquiry is. For example, various forms of narrative inquiry share a commitment to viewing identities as constituted through narratives, emphasizing that we are relational beings, and taking seriously the storied nature of our lives and lived experiences as they unfold in time. Thus, for these authors it is neither beneficial nor fitting to prescribe that this is narrative inquiry. Instead, it is perhaps more useful and pertinent to propose what narrative inquiry can be. This is particularly so since, as Webster

and Mertova (2007) remind us, narrative inquiry itself “does not strive to produce any conclusions of certainty” (p. 4).

With regard to what narrative inquiry can be, rather than committing to (neo)realism or (post)positivism, it commits to and is informed by the philosophical assumptions of interpretivism (see Smith, 1989) or what more recently has been described as non foundationalism (Smith & Deemer, 2000). As such, it does not commit to the assumption that narratives can describe objects in a world out there, apart from and independent of the researcher(s). Narratives are not understood as a transparent window into people's lives as they age, but rather as an on-going and constitutive part of reality (Bruner, 2002; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). In this light, they are a form of social action, as Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003) explain:

[N]arratives and interview accounts—are themselves examples of social action. People do things with words, and they do things with narratives. They use biographical accounts to perform social actions. Through them they construct their own lives and those of others....Such accounts are certainly not private, and they do not yield accounts of unmediated personal experience. If we collect spoken (and indeed written) accounts of “events” or “experiences,” then we need to analyse them in terms of the cultural resources people use to construct them, the kinds of interpersonal or organisational functions they fulfil, and the socially distributed forms that they take (p. 117).

Indeed, narratives help constitute our realities and modes of being. We organize our experiences through and into narratives, and assign meaning to them through storytelling. Narratives help guide action, and are a psycho-socio-cultural shared resource that give substance and texture to people's lives. Narratives are also a way of telling, and a means of knowing about our lives (Richardson, 2000). Given such points, and if “we constructed by stories, or are storytellers by nature, or perhaps both, then narrative must, surely, be a prime concern of social science” (Andrews, Sclater, Rustin, Squire, & Treacher, 2000, p. 1). Echoing these sentiments, Atkinson (2007) has recently proposed that:

We are a storytelling species. Storytelling is in our blood. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story. Our life stories connect us to our roots, give us direction, validate our own experience, and restore value to our lives. Life stories can fulfil important functions for us, and, as we recognize now more than ever everyone has a story to tell about his or her life, and they are important stories (p. 224).

The importance of stories has also been emphasised within gerontology. For example, a number of scholars (e.g. see Diongi, 2006; Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Swindle, 2003) suggest that stories are potentially important in terms of operating as counter-narratives. These can provide alternative maps regarding aging in ways that can potentially displace the dominant story about aging within Western society. That is, the “narrative of decline” (Gullette, 2004).¹ These types of stories might operate to challenge and resist social oppression, and allow different body-self relationships to emerge. In this regard, narrative bears within it the promise of fashioning a kind of scholarship that seeks to practice the possibilities of societal and individual transformation. For example, with reference to social policy, Biggs (2001) argues that narrativity allows us to interrogate political attempts to fix definitions of later life,

which may or may not benefit older people themselves. Randall (2001) echoes these points and adds that a narrative perspective opens up issues to which we were previously blind and “furnishes us with a framework to get at the inside of aging” (p. 54). For him, a principal strength of narrative is that it can not only “open the inside of life for official consideration but it can provide a common and comparatively non-technical vocabulary with which to forge connections, theoretical and practical, between the various fields that address themselves to aging” (p. 5). In addition, various scholars (e.g. Becker, 1997; Laz, 2003; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006a, 2009; Tulle, 2007) suggest that whilst the body as personal and social is never knowable in unmediated ways, narratives are important because bodily experience is deeply embedded in narrative. Narratives are projected from, and inscribed into the body, and these stories can give us insights into our lived aging bodies and cultures that inscribe our bodies with its meanings of age. This is particularly so since stories are brought to life through relational embodied beings. As Frank (1995) points out, acts of telling are relationships and in making sense of our experiences, we not only tell stories about our bodies, but we also tell stories out of and through our bodies, potentially teaching ourselves and others within this process.

Ruth and Kenyon (1996) have also stressed the importance of narrative within aging studies by asserting that narrative provides an excellent medium for investigating both the similarities and differences of human aging over the life course. For them, narratives can reveal some of the complexities and contradictions that are embedded within the experiences of growing older, along with the construction of different selves and identities over the life course. Furthermore, these authors propose that through employing a narrative approach to gerontology, researchers may be able to describe how cultures, subcultures or family patterns are reflected in the life of the storyteller and how certain people adapt to or expand the possibilities and limits set by the historical time period in which they live. They are therefore central in facilitating an understanding of both personal and social aspects of aging as lives progress, and at a general level might assist in generating theories and interpretations of development of the life course.

More recently, Randall (2007) argued that concerning the process of aging “a narrative perspective is equipped to acknowledge the inescapably idiographic and interpretive elements that are entailed in being human and the intricate uniqueness of actual lives in time” (p. 4). In part, this is because it is in and through stories that we live our lives. Randall also pointed out that through stories, “whether they pertain to our life as a whole or to individual occurrences that last but one minute, we explain to ourselves—and others— what is happened to us and what it might mean” (p. 5). In so doing, we may gain valuable insights into the process of aging. Equally, partly because stories are a way of knowing, are a reflexive way of encouraging people to think critically about their habitual worlds, and can engage and move people emotionally and cognitively, in and through their bodies, stories may challenge and change over time negative views of aging. Thus, narrative holds pedagogical and personal and social transformative potential. This is particular so when a diversity of stories about aging are offered and made available so that people may have different stories to draw on to fit their experiences into and live life differently if they so wish, and as the needs of their circumstances emerge. All of this however does not mean that narrative is the royal road to change or understanding. Nor is it to say it has no risks attached to it, or that everything should be reduced to stories. Exploring narratives is but one way of doing research, and not the only way available in aging studies. That said narratives do matter. Having highlighted some philosophical assumptions and principles of narrative, and made a case for narrative research

in gerontology, attention is now turned to the delights and dilemmas of narrative analysis.

What precisely is narrative analysis?

Like trying to offer a definitive answer to both ‘what is narrative and what is narrative inquiry as a methodology’, any attempt to provide a conclusive definition of narrative analysis is problematic because there is no single narrative analytical method. Rather, there is a multitude of different ways in which researchers can engage with the narrative dimensions of their data (Elliot, 2005). Thus, narrative analysis should be thought of not in the singular, but instead in the plural. Yet despite this plurality, most researchers and narrative analyses share certain basic understandings and characteristics. Exploring these allows us to understand at a broad level what narrative analysis might mean and to consider some of the different analyses available.

Narrative analysis, as an umbrella term, is a method that takes the story itself as its object of enquiry rather than simply accounts, reports, chronicles, or a few brief words. For Riessman (2008), “Narrative analysis refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts [e.g., oral, written, and visual] that have in common a storied form” (p. 11). Narrative analysis can be described as a technique that seeks to interpret the ways in which people perceive reality, make sense of their worlds, and perform social actions. The purpose, notes Riesmann (1993), is to see how respondents in various settings, such as interviews, impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. It therefore points to the ‘in-process’ nature of interpretations and resists offering the final word on people's lives (Frank, 2004).

In addition, context can be a key analytical concern through being attentive to the wheres (e.g. place) and whens (e.g. time) of storytelling (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). Furthermore, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest, narrative analysis “is as much about “how things are said” as about what is said” (p. 77). Likewise, for Gubrium and Holstein (1998), on one side of narrative analysis we may focus “on how a story is being told”, whilst on the other side, we may have a “concern for the various whats that are involved—for example, the substance, structure, or plot of the story” (p. 165). This is echoed by Hiles and Cermák (2008) who write, “The point is that in narrative analysis we must focus on both the what and the how of the re-telling, upon both the story that is being told as well as the way in which it is being retold” (p. 155). Thus, an important goal of narrative analysis becomes understanding both what stories describe and how.

Despite such characteristics and understandings that at a broad level many narrative analytical techniques generally share, it needs to be recognized that there are many different kinds of narrative analysis. This is reinforced by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) who remark, “There are no formulae or recipes for the ‘best’ way to analyse the stories we elicit and collect. Indeed, one of the strengths of thinking about our data as narrative is that this opens up the possibilities for a variety of analytic strategies” (p. 80). With this in mind, in what follows we illuminate various ways in which stories can be analyzed through a typology. The one we sketch is a heuristic effort and is intended to tease out and untangle some of the analytical threads that make up the web of narrative analysis. Fig. 1 presents a summary of these. It also suggests additional ones not highlighted in this article. That said, it should be acknowledged that we do not cover all of analyses currently embedded within the literature. Further, the typology is not meant to be hierarchical or evaluative. In practice, different approaches may be combined; they are not

mutually exclusive and, as with all typologies, boundaries are blurry (Riessman, 2008). Moreover, a number of the studies on aging called upon in the remains of this paper might use more than one lens for their analytical purposes.

Narrative analysis: Story analysts and storytelling

Organised through the umbrella term narrative analysis, two standpoints toward analysing narratives may be teased out from within the literature (e.g., Atkinson, 1997; Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Bochner, 2001, 2002; Ellis, 2004; Lieblich et al., 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008; Richardson, 2000; Smith & Sparkes, 2006). These may be termed a story analyst and storyteller. A story analytic technique collects, invites and generates stories, and then conducts an analysis of them (Polkinghorne, 1995). As such, stories are considered as fundamental data for systematic, rigorous, principled narrative analysis (e.g. structural or performative). Rather than letting stories do the work of analysis and theorizing, the researcher steps back from the story and employs analytical procedures in order to abstractly scrutinize and think about its certain features. They also theorize it from a disciplinary perspective to develop theoretical abstractions. The findings of this process are then often told and represented using the conventions of the realist tale as described by Van Maanen (1988). These are experiential authority, the participant's point of view, and interpretive omnipotence. For Sparkes (2002), realist tales connect theory to data in a way that creates spaces for people's voices to be heard in a coherent context, and with specific points in mind. Producers of realist tales often do not claim to capture and produce 'The truth' or 'The reality' of a phenomenon, instead, as Sparkes and Smith (2008) note, realist tales done by narrativists are frequently framed by the assumptions of interpretivism and narrative inquiry as a methodology as outlined above.

Another preference one might adopt toward conducting narrative analysis is that of a storyteller. Like story analysts, storytellers often collect, invite and generate stories. In contrast to story analysts that conduct an analysis of stories however, for storytellers analysis is the story (Bochner, 2001; Ellis, 2004). Stories, it is argued, do the work of analysis and theorizing. This is because, as Ellis and Bochner (2006) suggest, a good story itself is theoretical. When people tell their stories, they employ analytic techniques to interpret their worlds. Stories are themselves analytical and show theory.

Given this shift in emphasis from telling to showing, storytellers move away from abstract theorizing, toward the goals of evocation, intimate involvement, and engagement with stories. To help achieve these, whereas story analysts most often write realist tales, storytellers produce written, oral, theatrical performances, and/or, for example, visual creative analytic practices (CAP) as described by Richardson (2000) calls. Here, textual, verbal, ethnodramatic, or visual representation cannot be divorced from analysis, and each should be thought of as analytic in its own right (Richardson, 2000; Sparkes, 2002). They are, as Richardson (2000) suggests, "a way of "knowing"—a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 923). Accordingly, whereas story analysts tell a story, storytellers aspire to show it and, in turn, a theory through CAP: data is recast to produce a story and the story is a theory.

Having distinguished between two preferences for viewing the kind of narrative analysis one might do, and with them in mind, we now move down a level of the typology and focus in more detail on story analysts and the techniques they may use to incorporate an analysis of the whats and the hows of stories.

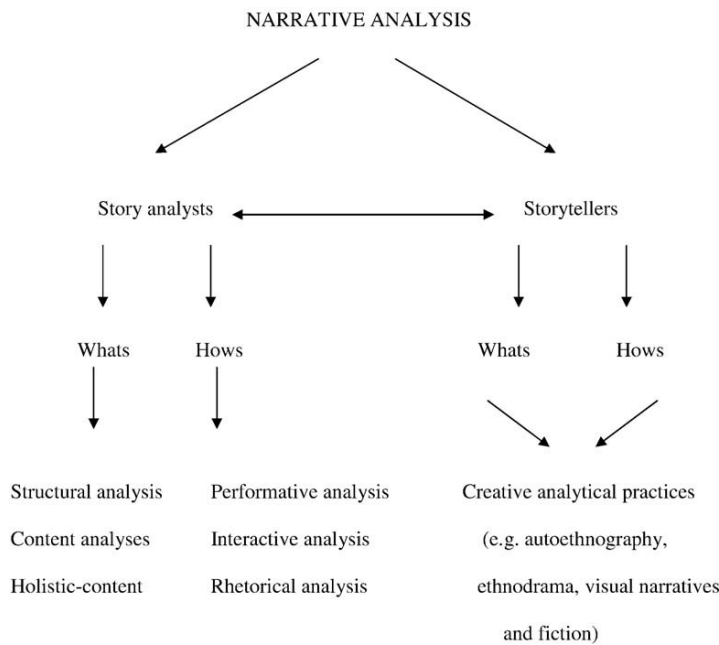


Figure 1: An analysis of narrative types

Exploring the whats of narrative: Story analysts and an analysis of structure

According to Webster and Mertova (2007), “The feature common to all stories, which gives them their aptitude for illuminating real life situations, is their narrative structure. It is not the mere material connection of happenings to an individual, but the connected unfolding that we call plot, which is important” (p. 19). Likewise, Riessman (2008) notes that personal narratives depend on certain structures to hold them together. As such, “narrative structure matters in human communication” (p. 77).

Therefore, rather than analytically scrutinising stories for central or paradigmatic units of content as some content analyses do (e.g. see Chambers, 2002; Clarke & Warren, 2007; Grant, 2002; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007a), a particular concern in a structural analysis is with the way the narrative is structured. As Holloway and Freshwater note, “Structural analysis focuses on the way in which a story is put together” (p. 85). There are various ways in which this can be done. For example, structure may refer to brief embedded moments in a conversation that take a poetic form, well illustrated in Becker's (2001) study of narratives of older people who live with pain. For other scholars, structure can refer to an overarching type of “storyline” (Riessman, 2008). In this sense, a structural analysis may also focus on the stories a person tells to tease out what type they draw on from the cultural repertoire available to them. General types of cultural storylines that can shape and frame an aging person's personal story include the regressive, progressive, crossroads, career, life curve, U-curve, and wheel, (Eichberg, 2000; Lieblich et al, 1998).

In research on aging, examples of story analysts that have explicitly used a structural analysis are relatively rare. An exception though, can be found in the work of Phoenix and Sparkes (2006a, 2007). This type of narrative analysis, they suggest, is valuable because the formal aspects of structure ‘express’ the identities, moral dilemmas, perceptions, and values of the storyteller. A structural analysis can also illuminate, without disregarding material conditions, what wider socio-cultural narrative types individuals or groups are connected to, and draw on

to shape their personal stories. In doing this, there is then the possibility of revealing the types of narratives that can constrain and/or empower people in relation to their aging process. One narrative type revealed by Phoenix and Sparkes (2007) in their work on narrative maps of aging within the sub-culture of sport was “hanging on”. This narrative type informed a feared self which currently framed several of the young athlete's life stories in their study. The basic structure of this narrative type (i.e., the ‘whats’ of this narrative) depicts the aging athlete persisting in competing with their team despite an age-related decline in their performance. The following extract from one young female athlete detailed in Phoenix and Sparkes' study, gives a flavour of this type of narrative:

I'd like to think that I'd stop playing completely before someone had to come and tell me that I should go. I'd like to think that I'd finish at a good level. You sometimes see other people who are holding on to forty, and refusing to step down even though they should because... their reactions aren't as quick, they're slower, they can't keep up with us anymore, ... I'd hate to be one of those. I think you need to recognise when it's time to go. Yeah, I'd like to think that I would have stopped playing sport by then (p. 9).

In line with a structural analysis, Phoenix and Sparkes (2007) argued that the narrative type “hanging on” could be located within wider socio-cultural narratives regarding the aging process (namely that of decline and deterioration), and also those circulating within the sub-culture of sport which position older athletes as less able and weak (Dionigi & O'Flynn 2007). This had implications for the participant's personal stories about growing older, as indicated this particular individual's assertion that she will give up playing sport whilst still performing at a good level. The above example also illustrates how this particular narrative type, identified via a structural analysis, goes some way to express the identities, perceptions and values of the storyteller. Indeed, these authors suggest that embedded within the participants conversations regarding older athletes were subtle episodes of ageism.

Whilst a structural analysis has various strengths, it also has weaknesses. For example, Riessman (2008) suggests that though a structural narrative analysis can be very useful for detailed case studies and comparisons across a few cases, it “is not suitable for large samples” (p. 103). Likewise, by itself it can fail to illuminate the manner in which narrative structures may be dynamic, fluid and accomplished in social action. Furthermore, as Frank (1995) notes, once we focus upon the broad storyline that can be recognized as underlying the plot of particular stories, there is the risk of creating yet another ‘general unifying view’ which individual stories are fit into. This can occur at the expense of recognising the particularity of that individual's experience. Thus, Frank cautions that no actual telling of a specific experience conforms exclusively to one, two, or, for instance, three narrative types, and that in any particular experience all types can be told alternatively and repeatedly. That noted, one theoretical and practical advantage of identifying underlying narrative structures is that it encourages closer attention to the stories that persons tell. This is especially so, Frank suggests, in terms of listening to and with individuals: “Listening is difficult because individual's stories mix and weave different narrative threads. The rationale for proposing some general types of narratives is to sort out those threads” (p. 76). Or, as Riessman (2008) puts it in an analogy to classical music:

To hear how a composition is structured and what each part contributes, musicians break the score down, see what each instrument or musical phrase adds, that is, its function in the overall composition. When we go to a concert, unless we are musicians,

we typically just experience the work; the performers, on the other hand, have done considerable “unpacking” in rehearsal to construct the unity we hear. Structural analysis of oral narrative requires the same level of scrutiny; we slow down a narrative account (so to speak)—step back from it—to notice how a narrator uses form and language to achieve particular effects (p. 80).

Analysing the hows: Story analysts and a performative analysis

Narrative analysis is as much about how things are said as about what is said. Asking how questions about the narrative initiates reflection on the performative dimensions of stories and to the manner in which they are artfully constructed for particular purposes at particular times, in specific contexts. Thus, rather than ask “What does the story tell us about X?” the question for story analysts becomes, “How is X constructed in the telling?” As Holloway and Freshwater (2007) note, “Performative analysis relates to how the narrative is communicated, the ‘doing’ of narrative” (p. 86). For example, in their study Gubrium and Holstein (1999) direct their attention towards how the nursing home serves as a discursive anchor for embodiment. Instead of asking “What do these stories as told by caregiving spouses, nursing home residents and staff tell us about the aging body?” they ask, “How is the aging body achieved and constructed in the telling within and about the nursing home?” Likewise, as Riessman (2008) suggests, a performative approach shifts from the ‘told’—the events to which language refers—to include both the ‘doing’ and ‘the telling’. It “interrogates how talk among speakers is interactively (dialogically) produced and performed as narrative” (p. 105). It thus asks such questions as: Why was the narrative developed that way, and told in that order? How does he/she locate herself in relation to the audience, and vice versa? How does he/she locate characters in relation to one another and in relation to herself? How does he/she strategically make preferred identity claims? What other identities are performed or suggested? What was the response of the listener/audience, and how did it influence the development of the narrative, and interpretation of it?” Therefore, according to Riessman, more than a structural analysis, this one requires close reading of contexts, including the influence of investigator, setting, and social circumstances on the production and interpretation of narrative.

In the domain of aging research, an analysis of the performative dimensions of narrative, that is, how aging is accomplished through narrative, has received a little attention (e.g. see Hurd, 1999; Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007b; Jones, 2002; Paulson & Willig, 2008; Wainwright & Turner, 2003). Yet, it holds various strengths and benefits. For example, Laz (1998) suggests the notion of age being something which is ‘performed’ and ‘acted out’ can draw attention to what often goes unrecognised in the sociology of age. That is, the performative, interactive work of accomplishing age, the emotional work associated with ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ an age and the strategies that people build and draw upon as they create and present themselves as being a particular age. Viewing age as an accomplishment shifts attention from matters internal to the individual and instead concentrates on interactional and institutional domains.

More recently, Laz (2003) has adopted a performative approach in her analysis of the ways in which a group of adults over 50 do aging. She illustrates how the body is central to the performance of age by identifying four distinct dimensions of embodiment that are frequently drawn upon in the accomplishment of aging. As they speak about age and their bodies, the domains of activity fitness and health, energy, appearance, and ailments and illness are commonly referred to. This is evident in the following account:

In a lot of ways I look much older than a lot of women 55. I have sagging skin and some of that is due to a lot of sun damage... And my legs, for example, that's a hereditary thing. Look, my thighs look older than women 65... Yes, some of these physical things that have happened, I feel like I'm 75 (p. 514).

Using this account, Laz (2003) illustrates how the 55 year old participant is able to narratively perform or accomplish the identity of someone who is aging. How is this achieved? For Laz, the accomplishment of aging is partly achieved here by utilizing the context of appearance. Specifically, by reflecting back on her youth, this lady's understanding of being a youthful and healthy woman—shaped by the broader social institutions of advertising and popular culture—was someone who was tanned. However, extended unprotected exposure to the sun makes it difficult for her to successfully present herself as a healthy and youthful woman in the present. Practices (e.g. sunbathing) which allowed her to 'do' and 'perform' age earlier in her life now restricts the way in which she can accomplish age at this later period (due to the resultant wrinkles). Thus, by drawing attention to how things are said, how the present is positioned against the youthful past, Laz offers us an insight into the ways in which aging can be constructed and performed in the telling.

In addition to drawing attention to the performative element of identity construction and how social reality is constructed through interaction, another good reason for choosing to use a performative analysis is that it is potentially sensitive to and respectful of the diverse stories being told, along with the contradictions and tensions within them. It is also an attractive method because it can explicitly illuminate how the researcher shapes and is shaped by the research process. In doing so, rather than remaining in the background, the co-construction of research stories can be brought to the fore. Likewise, Riessman (2008) suggests the following strengths:

Stories don't fall from the sky (or emerge from the innermost "self"); they are composed and received in contexts—interactional, historical, institutional, and discursive—to name a few. Stories are social artifacts, telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or group. How do these contexts enter into storytelling? How is a story co-produced in a complex choreography—in spaces between teller and listener, speaker and setting, text and reader, and history and culture? Dialogic/performance analysis attempts to deal with these questions...The investigator becomes an active presence in the text. As a kind of hybrid form, the approach pushes the boundaries of what is and is not included in narrative analysis. It draws on and extends theoretical traditions that emphasize the importance of interaction (p. 105).

Similar sentiments regarding how listeners can shape what tellers tell have been noted by Randall, Prior and Skarborn (2006) in their research on reminiscence by elderly interviewees. For these authors, being analytically attentive to the intricate interplay between tellers and listeners can contribute to our understanding of how talk about the past is socially constructed. It is therefore a useful analytical option for reminiscence researchers, life story researchers, and other qualitative gerontologists whose work involves inviting individuals to tell their story.

Despite these benefits, like all analyses performative narrative analysis has a number of drawbacks. For example, the hows of storytelling is the central concern of this analysis. Accordingly, the equally important whats of talk can be placed in the background. Further, because it focuses on the specificity of talk, and due to the cost in time in analysing a stretch of

narrative, it does not easily permit an overview of all the data generated in a study. In this sense, the time and effort spent analysing individual cases can restrict studies from going beyond reconstructions and comparisons. Likewise, for story analysts, there is the potential risk that sections of the individual narrative are separated from and therefore not interpreted in the context of other parts of the individuals' life story.

Against all this, it would seem that a structural analysis and a performative analysis are different kinds of narrative analysis. The former primarily focuses on what is said, while the latter considers how things are storied. Their similarities rest with the understanding that the researcher usually adopts the standpoint of a story analyst. There is, however, a different stance available to researchers that they might prefer to adopt. That is, a storyteller.

Showing the whats and hows: Storytellers, creative analytic practices, and autoethnography

As highlighted earlier, writing as well oral, ethnodramatic and, for example, visual ways of understanding can be thought of as analytic in their own right. Building on this, unlike story analysts that conduct an analysis of stories via a performative or structural analysis, for storytellers, analysis is the story—a written, oral, ethnodramatic or visual story. Further, in the analytic process of crafting a story, a storyteller may bring together a certain kind of tale that shows the hows and whats of narrative. This, however, is not to suggest that a distinction between the whats and hows should be collapsed. It does not; a distinction needs to be maintained (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). But, over the course of writing, as the researcher engages in writing process that alternatively shifts from showing what is said to how it is told, a narrative develops that results in a product which often shows both hows and whats. This storytelling product, and process involved, may be broadly labeled creative analytic practices (CAP).

CAP, as described by Richardson (2000) is an umbrella term for different kinds of writing, visual, oral, and, for example, ethnodramatic practices that are both creative and analytic. When written, for instance, as Richardson notes, they display “the writing process and the writing product as deeply intertwined; both are privileged. The product cannot be separated from the producer or the mode of production or the method of knowing” (p. 930). Storytellers that do this kind of narrative analysis, as Richardson also comments, aim to practice an artful, poetic, evocative, empathetic, multivoiced social science in which meanings stay open. Here, researchers and audiences know the ‘facts’ not just in their heads, but can keep them in their minds and feel in their bodies, the complexities of culture, society, and specific moments of lived experience. As part of this, the hows and whats of narrative may be alternatively shown.

According to Richardson (2000), there are various kinds of CAP. These include poetic representations, ethnodrama, fictional representations, and visual representations. Another example of CAP is autoethnography. Autoethnographies are “highly personalised, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural” (Richardson, 2000, p. 931). They are, as Ellington and Ellis (2008) add, an analysis of “a culture of which one is a part, integrated with one's relational and inward experience. The author incorporates the “I” into research and writing, yet analyses self as if studying an “other”” (p. 448). In this evolving form of evocative writing, multiple layers of consciousness are displayed as systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall are used to try and understand the experiences the author has lived through. The reader is invited

into the intimate, messy, and embodied world of the other in a way that stimulates them to reflect on their own lives in relation to that of the author. Further, Ellington and Ellis suggest that autoethnographies privilege the heart, emotions, and the moral centre of lived experience in ways that highlight people as relational beings and historically and culturally contingent.

Within aging studies, autoethnographies are relatively rare. That said, there are scholars who have produced them both about their relationships and interactions with older people (e.g. Milchrist, 2001; Rambo, 2005), and also detailing their own lived experiences of the aging process. With regards to the latter, the work of David Jackson (2001, 2003) is a notable example. Using autobiographical fragments, Jackson offers an insight into how he has negotiated his aging man's identities in relation to hegemonic masculinity, since the end of his (paid) working and performance selves. To give a flavour of what his autoethnography looks like, consider the following extract:

My ageing body is already scarred with the snail tracks of 1986 surgery. The stitched up, wavy path of heart surgery is still visible, stretching down the front of my chest. I've got a pacemaker under my left armpit, a plastic heart valve. My knee and foot joints used to often become gouty before I started to take Allopurinol on a daily basis. Signs of eczema are also clearly visible on the backs of my hands. My right hand, in particular, changes into a flaming crab shield especially in very cold periods during winter when the central heating is on all day. I have a scarred anxious body but one that I'm becoming more intimate with as I grow older. Putting in six eye drops for my glaucoma during the day helps me to pace myself in a more deliberate and aware way than before. After putting in the drops I often take a rest while closing my eyes to let the drops sop in. And that habit of resting has helped me to interrupt my often obsessive surges of activity. It has also helped me to know what my boundaries are, to be more self reflexive about the present state of my body. (Jackson, 2001, p. 108).

For Jackson (2001), autoethnography can provide an opportunity to write in a way that is embodied, emotionally charged and illustrative of the muddled, unruly, incoherent and haunting body selves that commonly frame the everyday lives of aging men. Another potential strength of autoethnography is that a good account is able to inspire a different way of reading. As Bochner and Ellis (1996) point out, "It isn't meant to be consumed as 'knowledge' or received passively... On the whole, autoethnographers don't want you to sit back as spectators; they want readers to feel, care and desire" (p. 24). As such, a good autoethnography can encourage connection, empathy and solidarity. There can also be emancipatory moments when powerful insights into the lived experiences of others are generated (Sparkes, 2002). This can inform readers (sometimes disturbingly) by illustrating their involvement in social processes about which they might not have otherwise been consciously aware. Once aware, individuals may find the consequences of their involvement (or lack of it) unacceptable and seek to change the situation. In such circumstances the potential for individual and collective change is enhanced. As Ellington and Ellis (2008) suggest, "Many people's lives have been transformed through the process of composing their own stories and of hearing those of others; others have been moved to action through telling and reading personal narratives... Thus autoethnographies certainly can be one tool in the social change tool box, particularly in its potential to spark creative and productive discourse" (p. 459).

Critically speaking, however, not only are there strengths, but there are also potential risks and limitations tied to autoethnographies. For example, given that they can allow another person's

world of experience to inspire reflection on one's own, this may not always be a pleasant experience. When an autoethnography strikes a chord in readers, it may change them, and the direction of change cannot be predicted. The disclosure of hidden details of private life, inner feelings and emotional experiences in autoethnography is also a risky business. Ethical issues, such as the inclusion of others (e.g. family), may increase the risk. Moreover, autoethnographies tend to be viewed with suspicion in the academic world, notably as universally self-indulgent. In response to such claims, however, Sparkes (2002) argues that rather than always being self-indulgent, autoethnographies can encourage acts of witnessing, empathy and connection that extend beyond the self of the author and thereby contribute to our understandings in ways that are self knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, and self luminous. As such, like Richardson and Pierre (2005), we believe in holding CAP to high and difficult standards. Certainly, mere novelty does not suffice. Nor, for us, will it suffice to choose to do an autoethnography simply for personal 'therapy'. Choosing when and why to use autoethnographies, like all narrative analyses, will depend partly upon the purpose, the point to be made and intended audience of the researchers work. Thus, for example, rather than being theoretically vacuous, an autoethnography needs to show a theoretical point about bodies and how they are shaped and help shape cultural narratives of positive and negative aging.

Autoethnographies are generally written. In order to go beyond this, we will offer one further example of CAP. The one chosen, since to date it has received little attention within aging studies, is visual narrative analysis. The starting point for this approach is that words are but one form of communication, and alternative forms which also continue to communicate meaning throughout the life course also exist. These alternatives include photography, video diary, and art work. Researchers therefore might tell a story with images (e.g. see Clark, 1995), or about images that themselves tell a story (e.g. see Blaikie, 1997; Featherstone and Hepworth, 1995). Whilst relatively rare within gerontology, working with images might be valuable in terms of contributing to our understandings of what it's like to be old. For instance, Riessman suggests that when undertaken rigorously, visual analysis can allow our interpretation of a given event to be thickened. She also asserts that images can evoke emotions and imaginative identification, too often absent in social science writing. Furthermore, images can generate collective critique, and bring back into focus forgotten moments in history. That noted, there are also a number of potential pitfalls associated with this approach including the ability for images to dull senses and provide a false sense of connection. Ethical issues can be rife, as can complications brought into the process of composing data through digital technology. Both of these aspects have contributed to the apparent tardiness of publishers and academic journals to catch up with what has been termed the 'visual turn'.

Closing thoughts

In this article, we have examined a number of issues related to narrative inquiry under the aegis of analysis. It should be acknowledged, however, that our purpose has not been to talk about procedures and present a 'how to' commentary about the ins and outs of actually doing a narrative analysis. Excellent sources already exist on this topic (e.g., see Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Elliot, 2005; Hiles & Cermák, 2008; Richardson, 2000; Riesmann, 1993). Rather, the intention of the article has been to describe different narrative analyses so that researchers might better understand narrative analysis in the plural and get a glimpse of what they look like. It is also hoped they have a resource to draw on to assist them in making reflexive, informed, principled and strategic choices regarding when and why to use different types of

analysis. This is not though to impose the typology suggested here onto people or their research. Nor is it an attempt to equip readers with a universal typology that fits all purposes, points, and needs. Indeed, we hope that others develop it, critically engage with it, and create alternatives so as to broaden our insights and develop more complicated understandings of narrative. Thus, rather than aspiring to offer the final word on narrative analysis, the typology we sketch is a heuristic effort designed not only for the purposes of potentially making some sense of complex field, but also for encouraging dialogue.

It is also important to recognize that story analysts and storytellers are seen here to exist along a continuum rather than being dichotomous. As such, we do not wish to privilege certain forms of analysis over another. Both standpoints at different ends of an analytic continuum are for certain purposes vital and useful. Moreover, we have not privileged either the whats or the hows of narrative. As Gubrium and Holstein (2000) and Holstein and Gubrium (2008) remind us, both are equally important in understanding how meaningful interaction transpires, what is going on within the relational dynamics of telling stories, and both need to be considered within aging studies whenever possible. In this light, advocating one kind of analysis over another seems less productive than asking how we might fruitfully combine different forms of analysis in order to explore the whats and hows of narrative, and generate different and more complex understandings of aging.

Given the situation as described, there is a need to be wary of approaches that focus exclusively on the hows of narrative and ignore the whats of stories, and vice versa. The two approaches complement each other and can be developed in tandem. This is not to suggest that any one researcher can focus on both at the same time. As Gubrium and Holstein (2000) and Holstein and Gubrium (2000, 2008) emphasize, there is an inescapable tension within narrative practice that needs to be accepted but cannot be completely resolved. This is because to designate an analytic point of entry and foreground one side of the practice, e.g., the hows, means that the other side, the whats, is placed in the background. The process Gubrium and Holstein (2000) and Holstein and Gubrium (2000, 2008) advocate for moving back and forth between the components of narrative, akin to a skilled juggling act, is that of analytic bracketing. Unlike a priori bracketing employed in phenomenology and ethnomethodology, analytic bracketing works throughout analysis and “employs an alternating or oscillating indifference to realities of everyday life, allowing the analyst to momentarily focus on the hows and whats of the construction process” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 391). It thus amounts to an orientating procedure for alternately focusing on the whats and then the hows of interpretive practice (or vice versa) in order to assemble both a complex picture of everyday language-in-use.

The objective is to move back and forth between discursive practice and discourses-in-practice, in turn documenting each, making informative references to the other in the process. Either the narrative machinery of social interaction, on the one hand, or the available discourses, descriptive resources, and institutional constraints, on the other, become the provisional concern. Interest in one or the other is temporarily deferred but not forgotten (Holstein & Gubrium (2000, p. 98).

Importantly, rather privileging one form of analysis over another, this alternating movement suggests the need for analytical diversity when considering narratives. This need for pluralism is supported by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). As they rightly note, advocating pluralism is not to support the simplistic idea of methodological triangulation. Such a view would imply that

aggregating different analysis and subjecting data to as many analyses as possible would allow one to get closer a single truth and the valid representation of the social world. On the contrary, Coffey and Atkinson suggest, analytical diversity is useful because researchers “can use different analytic strategies in order to explore different facets of our data, explore different kinds of order in them, and construct different versions of the social world” (p. 14). Equally important, they note, the combination of different analytical techniques does not reduce the complexity of our understandings. Rather, they argue, the more we examine our data from different viewpoints, “the more we may reveal—or indeed construct—their complexity” (p. 14). Revealing and constructing the complexity and diversity of people's stories told about aging are worthy goals and, as this article has attempted to illustrate, narrative analytic methods have an important contribution to make in this area.

¹ In articulating the relationship between ‘stories’ and ‘models’, ‘tropes’ and/or ‘templates’, we follow Eichberg (2000) who explains that the expectations, fantasies, and emotions we have of life form pictures. As models of representation, such models are culturally constructed. As pictures, they can enter into our everyday language, while simultaneously becoming the base for the practical dimensions of our life management and for its social organisation. One such model of representation outlined by Eichberg is the life curve, which locates the narrative of decline within a broader context.

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