Narrative Analysis

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There are a number of different connotations that are commonly connected to the use of the terms narrative research, narrative inquiry, and narrative analysis--connotations that intersect and often contribute to the impression of narrative research as complex and multilayered, if not confusing. One of the most central ways this complexity plays out is in what can be taken as the most basic intersection, namely between research *on* narratives, where narratives are the object of study, and research *with* narratives, where narratives are the tools to explore something else-- typically aspects of human memory or experience. One of the goals of this chapter is to work through some of the complexity and to make recommendations for how to follow methodical procedures when working *with* narratives--procedures that are built on, and follow insights gained from, work *on* narratives.

The chapter is divided into two parts, followed by a brief summary and reflection. The first part presents an overview on the topic of narrative methods with the aim to show how different research questions and different research traditions have informed and led to what falls broadly under the purview of narrative methods. The second part of the chapter features an analysis of a story that will illustrate how traditions and questions sampled in the first part of the chapter can be applied, and contribute to answer a number of different research questions. Thus, in contrast to the traditional recipe approach starting with a question and from there moving on to using the methodologically appropriate toolbox to answer the question, this chapter proposes a different route: It presents a sampling of methods in order to reveal different strategies for how to pose interesting research questions. In essence, the reader is not given a recipe for how to arrive at good narrative research; rather, if the insight is along the lines of "oh, now I know how to

pose my research question that can be followed by use of narrative methods," the goal of this chapter has been accomplished.

Part 1---The project of narrative analysis

Why narrative?

An examination of narrative analysis must begin with a definition of what we mean by narrative. Let me start with a provisional definition of *narrative* that will be revisited throughout this chapter: When narrators tell a story, they give 'narrative form' to experience. They position characters in space and time and, in a very broad sense, give order to and make sense of what happened--or what is imagined to have happened. Thus, it can be argued, that narratives attempt to *explain* or *normalize* what has occurred; they lay out why things are the way they are or have become the way they are. Narrative, therefore, can be said to provide a portal into two realms: (i) the realm of experience, where speakers lay out how they as individuals experience certain events and confer their subjective meaning onto these experiences; and (ii) the realm of narrative means (or devices) that are put to use in order to make (this) sense. In the first instance, we typically encounter research *with* narrative and in the second, *on* narrative. At this point, we have not specified whether narrators employ narrative means to make sense to others in communicative and interactive settings or whether narrators attempt to make sense to themselves, as when writers write for themselves, or clients speak 'in search of their selves' in a therapeutic setting. We have further left unspecified whether narrators talk about themselves, i.e., tell personal experiences they imagined or underwent in person (first-person experiences), or whether they talk about the experiences of others--even fictionally invented others (third-person experiences). Further below we also will look more closely into *the kinds of* experiences or

themes that are configured into meaningful units by use of different narrative means. While all these issues are important, we will start with a closer characterization of narrative analysis.

The project of narrative analysis

While it is perfectly reasonable to collect narratives of people's experiences and archive them in textual, audio or video format so they can be accessed later on by those interested in them, the project of narrative analysis involves more. Starting again from a provisional and broad definition, one that requires more specification, narrative analysis attempts to systematically relate the narrative means deployed for the function of laying out and making sense of particular kinds of, if not totally unique, experiences. Here, narrative analysts can place more weight on analyzing the narrative means; or the intention may be to extrapolate and better understand particular experiences. Of course, in the best of all worlds, both approaches inform each other, i.e., that learning more about narrative means improves or analysis of what narratives are used for--and vice versa. In any case though, narrative analysts are required to lay out the relationship between narrative means and experience that is constituted by such means in order to make transparent and document how they arrive at their interpretive conclusions.

Whenever the analytic focus is on the narrative means, qualitative and quantitative approaches have been employed side-by-side with little joint consideration. Explorations of how children learn to use narrative means that establish characters in a story, how to tie clauses together into meaningful episodes, or how to evaluate what is going on from an overarching perspective, have turned up elaborate coding systems that allow cross-age and cross-linguistic quantitative comparisons, delivering insights into the acquisition of narrative competencies. Further research into comparisons between first- and second-language learners' narrative means and the means and strategies used in atypical populations (e.g. Down syndrome and autism) have

led to interesting applied fields such as literacy education and parental training in narrative intervention programs.

Narrative inquiry that is more interested in how meaning is conferred onto experience, especially in narratives of personal experience about concrete life situations (starting from experiences such as menarche or first romantic involvements to larger research questions such as divorce, professional identity--all the way up to aging and life satisfaction) has traditionally leaned more toward the employment of qualitative research procedures. The relationships between the use of concrete narrative means for the construction of highly subjective and very specific life situations up to retrospective evaluations of life courses is open to both quantitative and qualitative analytic procedures. However, in the following, I will focus more strongly on narrative analysis as a qualitative research method--though pointing toward possibilities for other research practices, whenever appropriate.

The emergence of narrative analysis

Having clarified that narrative analysis is invested in both the means and the way these means are put to use to arrive at presentations and interpretations of meaningful experiences, we can turn to a brief genealogy of the emergence of narrative analysis in the social sciences, and, more specifically, in the discipline of psychology. In order to get a clearer conception of what spurred the recent surge of interest in narrative and narrative methods, as well as to better understand debates among proponents of different analytic practices, it is worthwhile to distinguish between (i) how it was possible that narratives have become accepted as a genre that seems to closely reflect people's sense making strategies--particularly narratives of lives, as in (auto-)biography, life writing, confessions and other disclosures of identity; (ii) how narrative could catapult into the role of a method--one that is said to be the main portal into individual and

communal sense making, experience, and subjectivity; and (iii) how there are differences (and commonalities) between a variety of narrative methods that are seemingly competing with one another as analytic tools. I will turn to briefly consider these distinctions under the headers of *narrative as genre*, *narrative as method*, and *narrative methods*.

Narrative as genre

Stories and story-telling practices are assumed to be closely tied up with the phylogenesis of language, human social formations and the historically emerging vision of individuality and the modern person. Early narrative forms, reaching back as far as 1500 BCE, reflect forms of recorded historical experience in epic formats and are argued to be instrumental in the creation of communal (tribal) education. In the course of sociogenesis, the epic form is joined and partly replaced by folk tales, fables, travelogues--all already foreshadowing the rise of the romantic fiction and the novel, starting around 1200 and culminating in Europe between 1600-1750. The new and innovative narrative techniques put to use in these genres--in concert with the development of the print culture--gave rise to the writing (and reading) of letters, confessions and memoirs. This in turn fed readers' interest in personal histories, the biography, life history, and auto-biographies--all making use of temporal sequences of lived events for a systematic and self-reflective quest of the (authentic) self. Notably, the story-character in these quests, the person the story is centrally about, is becoming more and more open to be construed in terms of change and personal *development*. En route from the epic via the novel to the biography, narrative has emerged as a new but central formatting device for the organization of self and (modern) identity. It successfully fed the commonly shared belief that who we are, or who we think we are, is realized in the stories we tell about ourselves; everyone not only *has* a story but also has a right to tell their story (Bamberg, 2010b). Thus, not only is the quest for the modern

self in the form of the *who-am-I* question deeply rooted in the history of narrative, but, in addition, the story actually becomes the very data to be analyzed when seeking answers to the who-am-I question.

The realization that the (modern) self is open to change, and that the means for actual change have to work through the narrative, has led to a second wave of interest in narrative. In keeping with the "therapeutic narrative of selfhood" (Illouz, 2008) and its injunction "that we become our 'most complete' and 'self-realized' selves" (p. 172), we are continuously urged to seek out *the problem* in our narrative, the one that is causing our lack of fulfillment and the suffering that comes in its wake. Grounding 'the problem' in some previous events, often reaching back into childhood experiences, and establishing a narrative connection that has led to the problem, not only is said to enhance self-reflection but is regarded the first step in a healing exercise that is supposed to free the narrator of 'the problem' and the suffering it causes. Narrative self-reflection, in conjunction with narrative self-disclosure, are taken to form the cornerstones of a narratively grounded approach to a rationally-reflexively monitoring of selfhood.

Narrative as method

While the relationship between narrative and identity has been theorized by philosophers, historians, literary critics and psychologists (among others), credit for moving the narrative mode of sense-making into a special status belongs to Bruner (1986, 1991) and Lyotard (1984). Lyotard and Bruner have argued cogently that there are two kinds of sense-making modes, which stand in opposition to one another: one best characterized as a "logico-scientific" mode, and the other, often underrated and neglected, as a *narrative* mode of ordering experience and making sense. Both methods of knowing rely on different procedures for verification, with narrative

knowing centering around the particularity and specificity of what occurred, and the involvement (and accountability/responsibility) of human agents in bringing about these specific and incidental events. Thus, viewing narrative as a basic human method to make sense is more than sharing how sense has been made in the form of stories. The term *narrative as method* implies a general approach that views the individual within their social environments as actively conferring meaning onto objects in the world, including others and selves; the way this happens in everyday situations, as well as in interviews or surveys, is necessarily subjective and interpretive. If narrative is elevated into "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1), then it makes sense to argue that the stories we tell are such because they reflect *the stories we are* (McAdams, 1993; Randall, 1995).

Tapping into these narrative processes of meaning making though is not unproblematic. For one, there are different stories about ourselves (or what we tell our experience to be) at different occasions. And the ways these occasions are brought off impacts on the internal organization of what is being told, its content matters, and the meaning that both teller and audience may take from them. A further problem is the often claimed assumption that the sharing of narratives about situations in which narrative meaning has been conferred onto others and selves is open to reflection and seemingly transparent to both narrator and audience (see Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, for a critique of this assumption). Although narratives can become, and in particular settings can be used as, reflective means, there is no a priori reason to render stories unanalyzed as reflections of subjectivities or presentations of participants' "own" voices (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). However, a more dangerous stance may be lurking in the narrative as method metaphor when life and experience are leveled as narrative so that not only human knowledge but also interactive practices, particularly interviews, become narrative inquiry and

blur the boundaries between us as living our stories and us as analyzing the stories of others. It should be noted that even if narrative is elevated into a central or even primary method of sense making, it still needs to be open to interpretation and reinterpretation; and interpretation requires laying open the angles and perspectives from where meaning is being conferred, and scrutinizing the methods employed by narrators in arriving at their stories (and lives).

Narrative methods

While the argument for *narrative as method* was instrumental for a great number of inquiries into the personal sense making of experience (in different disciplines and on different experiential topics), *narrative as method* is to be kept separate from what has traditionally been held under the purview of *narrative methods*. Narratives whether acquired through particular elicitation techniques, such as interviewing, or "found" in natural (private, public, or institutionalized) interactional settings, typically are the result of a research stance or orientation. Critical vis-à-vis traditional survey practices, the narrative interview was designed and aimed to overcome the common tendency to radically decontextualize and disconnect the respondents' meaning making efforts from the concrete setting for which they originally were designed and from the larger socio-cultural grounds of meaning production (Mishler, 1986, p. 26). In recent years, a number of qualitative, in-depth interviewing techniques have been designed to elicit explicitly narrative accounts--some open-ended and unstructured, others semi-structured and guided; the *free association narrative interview method* (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008), the *biographic-narrative interpretive method*--an interview technique that leads into personal experience, lived situations and life-histories (Wengraf, 2006), or *narrative oriented inquiry* (Hiles & Cermák, 2008), to name a few.

While the focus on different methods in 'narrative interviewing' has led to interesting insights into the relationships between narrative form and content in the face of different elicitation strategies, others have taken this to push more in the direction of carefully considering the conditions under which narrative means are employed in narrative practices. The notion of narrative practices here incorporates interviewing practices of all kinds, including focus or brainstorming groups, and also opens up the field for narrative inquiry into institutional and everyday storytelling practices such as during dinnertime, sleepovers and on schoolyards, in courtrooms, AA meetings or during medical anamnesis.

One way to differentiate between narrative methods is to rely on the distinction between structure and performance (Bamberg, 1997). Gubrium and Holstein suggest a similar bipartite division, one that draws on narratives as texts and narratives as practice (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). The study of the textual properties of narratives typically is concerned with the textual structural properties as well as with content in terms of themes and the ways characters are presented in (narrated) time and space. The focus on narrative practice "takes us outside such accounts and their transcripts to varied storytelling occasions" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 210). Riessman (2008) suggests a tripartite division with regard to different analytic stances regarding narratives: She differentiates between thematic, structural and dialogic/performative approaches. While thematic approaches are primarily interested in what topically and thematically surfaces in the realm of a story's content, those analysts concerned with a story's structure orient more strongly toward the linguistic phenomena as well as the story's overall sequential composition. Analysts who fall into the third group combine aspects of the previous two analytic orientations, but in addition ask "who an utterance may be directed to, when, and why, that is, for what purposes?" (Riessman, 2008, p.105).

In the following, I briefly work through three analytic traditions that differ in terms of their background assumptions, their basic units of analysis, and their procedural analytic steps. These three analytic traditions are grounded in different disciplinary orientations, but also ask distinct questions and have different purposes. This next section aims to show more clearly what kinds of questions open up when adopting different analytic procedures. The first analytic orientation is textual in the sense that its focus is on the linear sequence of clauses--the way narratives are forming cohesive sequences of referred-to events. The second orientation centers around the overall conceptual structure of the text--the way events are conceived as parts of episodes, which in turn are parts of larger thematic structures such as plots. Both of these traditions typically deal with texts, but with two different orientations; the first one in terms of a bottom-up formation process, the second one in terms of a top-down formation process. In addition, both analytic orientations are dealing with what can best be characterized as monologues. A third orientation comes close to Gubrium and Holstein's (2009) analytic focus on narrative practice and Riessman's (2008) suggestion to foreground the dialogic/performative features of the act of telling in the analytic process. I am calling this kind of analytic focus interactive-performative (Bamberg, 1997; 2010b).

Narrative methods and analytic concepts

In working through various approaches a tri-part distinction will be made, though it is important to note by way of caution that in actual narrative research the three different approaches that follow are often not clearly distinguishable. Nevertheless, as ideal types they follow particular principles and guidelines. The purpose of the next sections is to be able to conceptually move within each of these frameworks toward their different goals.

Texts as linguistic structure: words, sentences and topical cohesiveness

The preferred definition within this first method is that a narrative consists of minimally two narrative (event) clauses, such as: *The king died. Then the queen died of grief.* Both referred-to happenings result in the second event, not only temporally following each other, but seen as connected by some form of causal contingency. This approach to narrative assumes that events don't happen *in* the world. The flow of continuously changing time needs to be stopped and packaged into bounded units: events and event sequences; and this is done by use of particular verb-type predicates in conjunction with the kinds of temporal marking that particular languages have at their disposal. Stringing these events together forms the backbone or skeleton of a story (Labov, 1972). Whenever speakers step out of the sequence of stringing events into their story, they usually pursue other business (e.g., summarizing or evaluating what happened) by way of adopting a more overall or evaluative perspective.

However, temporality is only one among several options to make a story cohesive. Other means are the use of spatial markers and the marking of character continuity. Taken together, narrators make use of linguistic devices to move characters through the spatial and temporal contiguity of what happened and in doing so *build* characters and position them in relationships with one another. In English for example (as in most Indo-European languages), there are intricate options to employ shifts from proper names (*Jennie*) to nominal forms (*this girl*) to pronouns (*she*) to simply not mentioning the referent (zero-pronoun). A narrator employs these shifts skillfully, in conjunction with temporal and spatial devices, to build small thematic units, those that resemble paragraphs or episodes, when it comes to sequencing of otherwise random clauses into larger units that ultimately surmount to the narrative and what it is about.

Note that this way of approaching narratives starts from the clause and its lexical-syntactic make-up as the basic analytic unit and assumes that tying clauses cohesively together

follows the language-specific practices and norms of cohesion-building. In following these procedures, a fuller, episodic structure emerges--one that resembles and is typical for stories. Stories, according to this view, come into existence by use of lexical and syntactic devices that speakers put to use as indices for story-formations. The devices continuously signal (contextualize) where the narrator is in the construction of the overarching unit. Thus, based on the smallest unit of analysis, the clause, the linguistic devices employed mark, and as such are interpreted as, what the speaker assembles as a given narrative to be *about*. Note also that this approach can be stretched into the semantic organization of cohesion building: Shifts between lexical devices that seemingly refer to the same character also can be significant. Referring to a female character by use of gendered terms, such as 'great body' or 'slut,' positions her in membership categories that obviously mark different positions vis-à-vis this female character but also locate a different sense of self of the speaker vis-à-vis the audience (Bamberg, 2004).

Texts as cognitive structure: plots, themes and coherence

Although it is possible, as Labov (1972) suggested, to describe the units that emerge in the course of narrative cohesion-building in terms of elements that ultimately result in some structural whole, the emergent whole is more than its linguistic components. In other words, the emerging units are as much products or outcomes of bottom-up construction processes as they are reflections of an overall structure that organizes its components from the top to the bottom. Typically, this top-down kind of process is conceived of in terms of conceptual units that have their origins in (universally) shared story grammars. These kinds of conceptual units have found support in cognitive research on story comprehension and story retellings (cf. Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Thorndyke, 1977). The argument is that these units are more conceptual and less linguistic in nature. They are units that speakers and story comprehenders bring to the telling

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situation as templates to embed or make fit the story particulars. These units typically consist of an (optional) *abstract*, followed by an *orientation* (or *setting* or *exposition*), followed by the *complication* (also called *problem* or *crisis*), maybe an action or action orientation toward a resolution, resulting in the *resolution* (or occasionally *failure*), which then is ultimately followed by a *coda* (or *closure*). The *orientation* takes the listener into the there-and-then where actions take place, and the *coda* is taking the audience back into the here-and-now of the telling situation.

The characters in the story are the exponents of intentionality (and emotions) and it is their action orientation--based on the interiority of their minds and emotions--that leads up to what action (or non-action) unfolds. However, not unlike actions and action orientations in the epic, individual actions in story grammar approaches are held together and called out by larger motivational scripts that resemble plots, if not aspects of the 'human drama.' Take for instance a story that is played out in a major Hollywood movie that involves a barfing incident, that happened in a pie-eating contest, which actually figures as an intentional part within a revenge plot (*Stand by Me*): Although the characters in each of these different plot configurations engage in the same kind of activities--they all barf, while competing in (and watching) the contest, and act (unknowingly) within the revenge scheme of the protagonist--they offer different options for identifications for teller and audience (cf. Bamberg, 2003).

Thus, in spite of story characters conceived of as intentional agents, the cognitive orientation vis-à-vis narrative research integrates the sequence of events (as intended or not-intended) into more or less coherent configurations that contain a purpose. However, purpose here, in a top-down fashion, gains its meaning from the narrative whole. The whole lends meaning to the components of the story and their sequential arrangement. And the way the

components are arranged is to be viewed as a function of the whole. Consequently, the analysis within this analytic frame proceeds from the whole to its parts. The general theme of a narrative is established through the examination of this part-whole relationship typically through multiple readings of the narrative, often as part of a team exercise. Through this process the components of a narrative can be divided and undergo their individual analytic scrutiny in addition to relating them to a larger whole.

It is essential to note that both the linguistic-cohesive and cognitive-coherence approaches described above focus on monologic texts. Although for both approaches, striving for stronger cohesive ties and better coherence are in the service of easier and better comprehension, the purpose of the story according to these approaches is to encode information, and the way the information is structured is relevant for the effect of the story on the audience. The linguistic and conceptual structures of the story are functions in the service of the theme, the overall plot, and the content. It is as if the content and its organization are central to the narrator's concern, and he or she follows the linguistic and cognitive conventions that are appropriate to encode this content. Consequently, any research interest that is primarily concerned with content and thematic structuring, will gravitate toward these methods.

Beyond the text: why this story here-and-now?

In contrast to the previous two more monologic and textually oriented approaches, an interactive-performative orientation works with narratives as situated in dialogue (we will use the term interaction--cf. ten Have, this volume; Potter, this volume) and performed--not only with linguistic means but in addition with o*ther* bodily means.[1] The focus here is on storytelling as

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[1] The implication that language is *another* bodily means of expression and communication is purposely used in this context. One of the reasons is to take language out of the (purely)

activity, including what has been going on before the speaker enters the floor, and what happens thereafter (e.g., the story's up-take). Thus, we see a clear shift in terms of what enters into the focus of analyzing such narratives: Examining stories in terms of their cohesive and coherence (thematic) components and analyzing the means that are taken to be the building blocks simply is not sufficient. Such stories, irrespective whether they are 'small' and short or whether they constitute a lengthy turn in the form of a full-blown life story, have antecedents and consequences in situations in which they emerge. These situations are taken to be part of narrative practices that heavily impact how a story is told, and what their thematic and structural make-up turns out to be. This, however, does not imply that an interactive-performative approach to narrative analysis is oblivious to content and structure. According to this third performance type approach, linguistic and cognitive structuring is part of what speakers accomplish with their narratives. But what speakers do with their stories may serve multiple purposes--and most of them often cannot be read directly off of the stories' structure or content necessitating appeals to larger contextual issues and their analysis.

What narrators accomplish with their stories is first of all highly local business. They may claim to *explain*, but simultaneously engage in acts of apologizing, gaining their audience's empathy, or attempting to re-gain their trust in order to be reelected (see the analysis of former US Senator John Edward's confession to having had an extramarital affair and repeatedly lying about it--Bamberg, 2010a). According to an interactive-performative approach to narrative, although narrators often may *appeal* to their core identity, who speakers *really* are is most often not what a close analysis of their stories reveals. Thus, the analysis of narratives-in-interaction is

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cognitive realm and place it in the realm of interactive activities in which we *make* sense and display a sense of self. Analytically, we place language at the same level as *other* bodily means.

limiting its focus to assist in answering two questions: Why this story here-and-now? and more concretely, What is being accomplished with this story?

The interactive-performative approach to narrative has not gone without critique. For one, it has been noted that an approach that views such narratives as concrete activities in local interactions places limits on what can be generalized. A second, and as such potentially further limiting aspect of this approach to narratives and narrative analysis, is its focus on other than textual components of storytelling. Inquiry for instance into narrators' use of intonation and gaze to navigate their activity on the floor, and how this is in the service of the actual story performed, are questions that are only possible to follow up by close and time-consuming analytic procedures. Nevertheless, an analytic stance that dismisses this type of approach as *only* local and irrelevant with respect to the larger questions (such as identity issues *behind* the stories told) may in fact do so prematurely and as such confer interpretations that are difficult to follow and may not hold if more detailed scrutiny was considered. At this point, the issue is not one of which approach is "best" or correct. In laying out these approaches the perspective presented is that each comes from a distinct tradition, focuses on different forms of narrating and usually pursues different types of research questions.

Part II: The Jennie Story

In order to exemplify the aforementioned methodological procedures, a *small* story was chosen that allows for demonstrating the multi-layers of narrative analysis. The story emerged in a group discussion between four ten-year-old boys (Billie, Martin, Victor and Wally) and an adult male moderator. The boys are in the same grade of an inner-city elementary school, spread across different classrooms. They know each other but do not consider each other to be friends. The story itself is short but complex. It is embedded in Victor's turn (below) but does not have a

clear beginning, and, as we will see, it does not have a clear ending either. Its plot and theme also are ambiguous, and why this story may have been shared also, at least initially, is unclear. The story nevertheless is what we would consider a typical story that emerged in relatively mundane multi-party talk--here about girls--and presents itself as a perfect ground to demonstrate how narrative analysis proceeds in the attempt to make transparent how narrators operate in their narrative practices.

The study itself started as an exploratory project with the aim to follow up twenty 10-year-old boys in their interactions in and outside school for a period of five years. They were audio- and videotaped at different occasions engaged in talk so that we as researchers could 'participate' in their narrative practices. The overall frame of the research project fits Potter's characterization of attempts to work up the narrative repertoires of 10-14-yer-old males (although we analyze them as *positioning strategies*, Bamberg 2003, 2004) and their sequential and conversational occasionings (Potter, this volume). The particular topic chosen for the purpose of illustration in this chapter comes from a larger stretch of talk on the topic of girls. Although the original intent was to simply develop a large archive of records of interaction in which we then could identify storied accounts, we specified our research questions in the early process of collecting records of their interactive practices, and one of our questions became formulated as the representation of self and other around issues of gender and sexuality. In the example chosen here, the original guiding question was how the male ten-year-old (Victor) positions a sense of self vis-à-vis a particular girl named Jennie.[2] We will start analyzing the story out of context and, in a second step, expand the transcript to include previous and

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[2] *Jennie*, as all other names of participants in this chapter, is a pseudonym. The study was approved by the IRB, and consent was given by the participants and their guardians that granted us permission to use excerpts from their interactions for educational purposes.

subsequent thematic information as well as extra-textual modalities that assist to disambiguate the story told. The first transcript follows a division into clauses that will help make transparent the cohesive linkages between lexical choices and clause-linkages, and how they contribute to the thematic build-up of the underlying plot.

Turning to the question of transcribing narrative data, it should be kept in mind that transcripts attempt to manage three general and complex tasks: (i) rendering reality, (ii) transforming (as in actually *changing*) reality, and (iii) picking out and communicating what is considered relevant about that reality to the reader and to the interpretive task at hand. Placing the task of transcription at this intersection requires managing the claims of realism to represent faithfully what is happening in an objective reality with the requirement of transforming what is assumed as happening into lines on paper by use of conventions that not only reduce but also enrich the complexity of reality and make visible what is considered relevant. This transformation is by necessity one that simultaneously veils and unveils, makes the strange familiar and the familiar strange. It is comparable to the task of describing what happens in slow motion or in fast-forward modalities of watching actions and events emerge. Transcribing further requires decisions regarding what is being picked from the universe of observables and made communicable. Therefore, there is no right or wrong transcription. And transcription systems, definitive and principled or not, always are prescriptions of interpretive procedures.

The following transcript represents what is transmitted verbally in a clause-by-clause format. Clauses are units that include a predicate and its satellites (subject, object, etc.) and capture the syntactic and lexical make up of these clauses. Displaying each clause as a separate line orients the analytic eye to the language specific word order--such as in English subject-verb-object, German subject-object-verb, or Maori verb-subject-object--so that parallel constructions

or syntactic shifts come to the fore. Transcripts that highlight the syntactic constructedness and linkages between clauses help to make transparent how characters are introduced and followed up, and how the sequential arrangements of spatial locations and temporal connections are constructed--in short, they lay open how characters are given shape in space and time.

A transcript of this sort is still relatively reader-friendly, in contrast for instance to transcripts that use the international phonetic alphabet or incorporate an overload of symbols that readers first have to learn in order to follow. Not all prosodic information (stress and intonation) is captured in the transcript. However, at occasions in which the accent or voice quality is accentuated, this is indexed as contextual information <<high pitch>>. Arrows are used to index rising↑ or falling↓ intonation, CAPITALS for special stress on syllables or words, and short breaks are indexed by dots (.).

(91)   Jennie used to call me her little honey

(92)   for some STRANGE REASON

(93)   we used to go to preschool together (.) right ↑

(94)   and there was that big mat

(95)   like it was a big pillow

(96)   in the little in the reading area

(97)   and I used to like to get there wicked early

(98)   cause my Dad used to work for the city (.) right ↑

(99)   and I used to hide in that pillow

(100)   so Jennie couldn't find me (.) right ↑

(101)   and she used to run up there

(102)   and she used to pounce on the ball

(103)   she said VICTOR I'M GONNA FIND YOU   <<in high pitch>>

(104)   and then I just sit there going oughhhh ↓ <<ducking down – shaking hands>>

When taking a first stab at a transcript like this, I'd like to suggest to take a number of highlighters and start by marking the different actors by use of different colors from start to end (including so-called zero-pronouns). In a second step, the predicates will be marked for their temporal sequence--those that move the action forward in a different color from those that encode stative information; followed by marking locations that are being referred to--again with an eye on changes and movements. This first level of analysis seems to approach the transcript excessively detailed, particularly for those who are in good native command of (English) literary (narrative) conventions. However, imagine someone who speaks Maori as her first language (or Chinese, a language that has no tense marking) and thus is familiar with very different narrative conventions to weave characters into their spatial and temporal relationships. In addition, this level of transparency further enables us to make initial assumptions as to where the story begins and what it consists of in terms of delineating main (*Jennie* and *Victor*) from secondary characters (*father*), and probably even tackle the question how the two main characters (*Jenny* and *Victor*) are positioned vis-à-vis one another. In the following I will lay out this first stab and take the reader through this kind of (dry) exercise.[3]

Words and sentences--and their linkage into topical cohesiveness.

The example outlined above begins with a person-reference in turn- and sentence-initial position (line 91) in the form of a name: *Jennie*. Three other referents in subject position follow: *we* (line 93), *I* (lines 97 and 99 and again in line 104), and *my Dad* (line 98). Jennie is

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[3] Please note that I am not suggesting that these analytic procedures have to be laid out in this kind of detail when published. However, if a decision is necessary with regard to what the narrative consists of, as in the case of the transcript under investigation, the analyst has to be able to draw on this analytic procedure.

reintroduced in subject position in lines (100-3) and reference to the speaking self reappears in object position (*me*) in lines (100) and (103). The cohesive flow of the participating characters in this segment is indexed by the shifts between proper names and pronouns: from *Jennie* to *us* (me and Jennie), with *my Dad* briefly intersecting, then returning to *Jenny* as the main character, ending with the speaker referring to himself in subject position (who previously was positioned in object position, subjected to Jennie's actions).

In terms of the temporal flow, all actions and events are clearly marked as having taken place in the past--except for Vic's action in line (104), which is stated in the present tense. However, most actions are marked as having habitually occurred (*used to*), not clearly establishing event boundaries to the left and right of each singular event, as for example in "*one day I hid in the pillow*, *she ran up*, *pounced on the ball*, and *said…*"--in which case we would have three clear temporal boundaries between four events so that they would be read as in sequence. Nevertheless, there is an implied temporal and contiguous sequence of habitual occurrences of actions that resemble a hide-and-seek scheme, where the *hiding* action has to be completed, so that *running up* to the location and the *pouncing* can follow and establish what can be considered the overall activity frame of hide-and-seek.

In terms of the spatial lay-out, the first orientation to space is implied in line (93) by mentioning their *preschool*. Lines (94-6) remain within this location and add descriptive detail. With lines (97-8) the speaker remains at the same location (*there*), adding a temporal marking (*wicked early*), but from a different perspective. While the description of the school-room's interior seemed to have come from within this room (both speaker and audience are visualizing it from within), the mentioning that it was *wicked early* came from a perspective outside, setting up an earlier temporal reference frame: He had been dropped off by his father, with reasons added

as to why this was the case (line 98). With line (99), the speaker returns to the focalization point inside the room, hides behind the pillow, and remains there until the end of the story (104).

Each of the three mentioned characters are positioned in two relational set-ups: the father as the agent dropping off his son (who in turn is positioned in object position as undergoer). The relational positions between Jennie and Victor are spelled out similarly: Jennie is positioned as agent (line 91) and reappears in this position in lines (100-4). Intermittently there is the *I* that *got* (not *went*) to preschool early (not through his agency) and the *I* that went into hiding (line 99). Hiding itself is an agentive move, though requiring another agent with respect to whom going into hiding is a reaction. It also implies the intention not wanting to be seen or found--resulting in line (104) in a self-positioning as put, not moving, with the unspoken agenda to remain in a non-agentive position for the rest of this narrative.

Let us reflect briefly on the analytic procedure thus far. What we have tried to accomplish is to trace the way cohesive ties, are put to use so the characters could be identified and viewed as relating to one-another, in line with the temporal and spatial arrangements in which the characters are situated. Remaining within the analytic layer of words and sentences and focusing on the emergence of cohesion, it can be noted that the narrator positions himself as undergoer, if not victim, of the actions of others. The presentation of these actions, as having taken place about five years ago, as having happened repeatedly, and as not under his control, can be read as designed to downplay his agency and eschew accountability. This much we can assert from a bottom-up scrutiny of how clauses are presented as following each other and from how the cohesive ties between them are set up. And although there seems to be some overarching temporal sequence, the actual narrative skeleton, existing of a sequence of event clauses, is very thin. The description of the preschool's interior (lines 94-6) as well as the aside about his father

dropping him off early on his way to work (lines 97-8) do not contribute to any plot

development, and neither do the first two opening lines (91-2).

Summarizing the examination of spatial, temporal and character references and tying

them together, the local orientation, and by implication also a temporal setting, come to the fore

in line (93), marking the start of a story. From here an action orientation, and with it a particular

character constellation, can unfold and move forward (lines 101-3), resulting in an outcome (line

104). The first two lines (91-2) are marked off as a different incident, though one that may

thematically be related to the story that starts in preschool. According to Labov's definition, cited

above, the first two lines do not establish a narrative, because with line (92), by use of a free

clause, the speaker removes himself from the event formation. Thus, having established line (93)

as the orientation (with lines 94-6 as further detailing the setting), and lines (99-100) as the

establishment of an action frame for this setting, lines (101-3) can then be taken as a possible

complication, though not resulting in a resolution (line 104). In case we didn't know that we

were in a here-and-now five years later, one could assume that Victor may have stayed in hiding,

or, symbolically speaking, may be interpreted as 'still in hiding.'[4]

The choice of particular formulations will become more relevant when analyzed below

in terms of their interactive functions. However, at this point, it is noteworthy that the narrative

starts with an attribution that originated from the person who will subsequently be developed into

the main character (at least in terms of her agency) of the story. The specific formulation that is

attributed to him (*honey*), further elaborated by a diminutive (*little*), and claimed to be owned

(*my*)--*my little honey*--draws on a semantic field that is typically connoted to lovers' talk or

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[4] The question that is looming already at this level of analysis is: What is the point of telling this story? What is it that telling this story contributes and makes relevant for the situation speaker and audience are currently in? Is it (more) about Jennie? (More) about me? Or is it about our relationship? Back then? Here-and-now?

parental (most likely mother-child) terms of endearment. The fact that Victor claims that this formulation was a habitual attribution by Jennie, and that Jennie's pursuits also happened habitually, point to the interpretation that he neither views these categorizations as accidental nor motivated by anything he did to encourage her. To the contrary, Jennie's actions are marked off, not only as repetitive and therefore extreme, but also as unreasonable--clearly underscored in his evaluative stance expressed in line (92). The aside in lines (97-8) that establishes the events as taking place in the morning before school was in session (with little supervision present) also may add to his overall evaluative stance of not agentively involved, not protected by the 'normal' frame of adult supervision, with his father gone, and subjected to the mercy of a female protagonist who is his age.

Plots and themes--toward the production of story coherence.

Having started working through the narrative with a focus on the sequence of clauses and their lexical and syntactic make-up, we were able to sort through some of the eventive (the temporal sequence of what happened) and evaluative (where Victor gave insight into his evaluative stance vis-à-vis what happened) components of the story. Separating the events that reportedly happened from evaluative stances left us with the question: What functions do the particular lexical and syntactic choices of the speaker serve--in service of the larger question what this story means. We now turn to analyze the segment of discourse from the perspective of the second layer that pursues the question of story coherence, linking the plot with its contents.

In terms of its overall structure, the first two lines (91-2) need to be dealt with separately. The story starts with an orientation into the there-and-then with line (93). Topically, the story focuses on Jennie--with the narrator positioned in recipient role--and its theme is her (habitual) pursuit of him. This theme is not marked as a typical hide-and-seek game-like activity in the life-

space of five-year-olds, but as an activity that did not result (at the time) in play and fun for the sake of play. Moving from this overall interpretation of lines (93-104) back to the first two lines, the thematic link becomes more transparent: The two structural segments speak to the (same) issue of Jennie's habitual actions, and both are strongly characterized from the same evaluative orientation. In the first segment (lines 91-2), the evaluation of Jennie's actions (*for some strange reason*) is marked off by stepping out of the there-and-then and giving his evaluative position from the here-and-now of speaking time. In the second segment (lines 93-9), the speaker's evaluative position is more implicit and signaled by use of lexical and grammatical choices that characterize him not only as uninvolved but also as not approving of the position into which he is placed by Jennie. To support this interpretation, we may take additional (performative) means into account, such as using his "telling body" (both expressing his emotion *<oughhh>* and his bodily display of posture and hands): Both can be taken to index what it must have looked and felt like hiding behind the pillow. In this last line of his story (104), in which he highlights his affect, he also switches from the use of past tense to the present tense (*sit*). This can further be taken to index the relevancy of this part of his story--not necessarily the high point, but something that has enduring relevance.

At this point, it may be relevant to keep in mind that Jennie is a girl--while Victor is positioned as a boy. In English, this distinction most commonly is implied by names culturally typifying boys and girls, and, of course, by the marking of personal pronouns (*he* vs. *she*). Note, however, that Jenny simply could have been referred to as *a friend* (or *my friend*), leaving her gender less accentuated. Focusing on this categorical distinction, the question can be asked whether this story is at its core *about* girl-boy relationships (i.e., heterosexuality). At the same time, this story is about something that happened in preschool: a long time ago which can be

interpreted in two ways: (i) as still currently relevant, or (ii) as something that happened in the remote past, with no or only little relevance to the state of affairs in the present. In the first instance, picking up on the theme of heterosexuality, Jennie's thematic role was to make the point that the narrator views himself as still having to go into hiding: Nowadays, though twice their age, Jennie, or other girls, position him (as a male) in the same plot-like configuration. In this second case, we are dealing with an account that characterizes the actions of a female child in the distant past, and how these actions back then have impacted on a male child. Though if this is not being made explicit, why then tell the story?

Having conducted a thematic analysis of the underlying plot configuration of Victor's story, we are ending up with at least two options for what kind of plot is in circulation. According to a first option, Victor could be heard as configuring the particulars of what happened as part of a general conflict between males and females. Being called '*my little honey*' and in addition being physically pursued are examples of intrusion and therefore unwanted actions of females into what is being constructed symbolically as male space. In this type of plot configuration, the reasons for these kinds of actions are inscrutable and enigmatic, and thus potentially resulting in conflict. Whatever Victor's motives may have been to borrow this kind of plot--maybe Victor is heard as a young boy for whom girls "still have cooties", maybe he is heard as speaking from the position of "male angst" vis-à-vis women in general, or maybe Jennie's attempts (cumulatively, or one of her approaches in particular) have left Victor traumatically scarred; the way the characters are positioned in the there-and-then may invite these kinds of interpretation.[5] In a second option, another interpretation suggests that Jennie is

[5] These three interpretive conclusions were suggested by colleagues and students after watching and having worked through the first two analytic layers, (i) the words and sentences, and (ii) the themes and plots.

configured as a member of the category of females who pursue males as part of a romantic or heterosexual plot configuration. Within this interpretive scenario, Victor presents himself back there-and-then as declining, but borrowing this kind of stance to be relevant and potentially still holding in the here-and-now. Within this plot configuration he could be read as borrowing the persona of someone who is popular but uninvolved--the mainstay of *male cool*. And maybe it is this feature in the way he constructs his relationship to the other gender that is foregrounded and made relevant for the here-and-now of the telling situation. At this point, the analysis of the layer of story coherence does not resolve whether either of these two thematic configuration attempts is appropriate.

Interaction and performance--why this story here-and-now?

Having started with a close look at the actual wording and their composition into a linear and cohesive text that was feeding into a common topical theme, followed by an analysis of the overarching thematic organization of the plot of the story, we will now expand our analytic focus to incorporate the third layer outlined above. Here the excerpt is examined in terms of the question what the story is about to the participants in their ongoing negotiation of what is topically and interactionally relevant. It is with this layer that we are opening the analysis to more contextual information such as how the participants are trying to signal what they consider relevant, and how this is being negotiated. As noted earlier, the goal is to continue to disambiguate what thematically is being negotiated and to make the cues that are used by the participants transparent to the analytic eye. Here we not only go beyond the (original) text by considering previous and subsequent textual elements, but in addition we will draw on *other* bodily cues such as gaze, gestures and posture.

One of those cues we had spotted earlier in the analysis was Victor's abrupt introduction of Jennie by use of her name in line (91). Starting a turn, narrative or not, by use of a referential form that is highly specific indexes a context in which the referred to character is taken as presupposed; in other words, this form pointed participants toward previous mentionings of Jennie as thematically relevant. Other cues are to be uncovered in how Victor has taken up on what has been said immediately before and how others are taking up on his story after his turn completion.

Starting from the two kinds of plot configurations revealed in the analysis in the first two layers in Victor's overall structuring, we can see that both plot configurations correlate with two different types of speech activities at the interactive-performative layer: While the configuration in which females make unexplainable and unwanted moves vis-à-vis males lends itself for the speech activity of complaining, the plot in which female approaches contribute to a gain in social status and popularity, and consequently are likely to fall into the 'wanted category,' can translate into speech acts of boasting or flaunting a male (heterosexual) identity.

Starting from a slightly expanded transcript (below),[6] we can see that Victor (line 91) cuts into Billie's turn (line 98). However, at the exact moment when Victor's and Billie's turn begin to overlap, Billie's complaint story is not fully developed. Instead, at that point Billie just had claimed to have had a girlfriend, and that this girlfriend seemed to have been very experienced with boys. From the visual cues available (particularly his gaze orientation), Victor does not hear Billie out and his turn seems to deliberately interrupt. In light of these observations, it remains unclear whether Victor is telling his story about Jennie as boasting about

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[6] The contextual information on the right-hand side of the transcript is shaded so it can be distinguished from the textual information. In addition, square brackets [are used to mark the beginnings of overlapping speech.

girlfriends; or whether Victor is contributing to a theme that lends itself more for a complaint, namely that girls intrude male territory. Furthermore, in order to better understand why Jennie was made relevant in response to Billie's conversational contribution, we are forced to look further for earlier mentions of Jennie in the conversation and will return to this shortly.

<<everyone sitting>> <<gaze distributed around>>

(96) *Bil* my ex-girlfriend had like twelve ex-ex-ex-ex boyfriends   <<all gaze at Billie>>

(97)   she had twelve of them

(98)   and she takes the [good stuff   <<Vi gazes at moderator>>

(90)   and she breaks up   <<Vi continues gaze at mod>>

(91) *Vic*   [Jennie used to call me her little honey

          for some STRANGE REASON

          we used to go to preschool together (.) right ↑

          and there was that big mat

(95)   like it was a big pillow   <<gestures outlining pillow>>

          in the little in the reading area   <<everyone tuned to Vic – posture + gaze>>

          and I used to like to get there wicked early

          cause my Dad used to work for the city (.) right ↑

          and I used to hide in that pillow   <<participants gaze at Victor>>

(100)   so Jennie couldn't find me (.) right ↑

          and she used to run up there

          and she used to pounce on the ball

          she said VICTOR I'M GONNA FIND YOU   <<high pitch>>   <<everyone smiling>>

(104)   and then I just sit there going oughhhh ↓   <<ducking down – shaking hands>>

<pause + little laughter> <<gaze + body postures reorienting>>

(105)   she was tall when she was in preschool

(106)   she was like [<<Vic gesturing tall>>

     Bil   [she is short now

30

Vic   no she is huge (.) Jennie Thompson ↑   <<Vic standing up>>

Bil   yes to YOU ↓   <<gesturing small>>

(110) *Wal*   she is taller she is shorter than [me

Bil   [she's shorter than me

Mar   [shorter than me

Vic   no she isn't Billie↓

she is taller than you

(115) *Bil*   neh

Vic   I know I know one girl who is taller than ALL of you <<topic change>>

Victor's story (ending in line 104) is taken up in the form of laughter conjoined with everyone moving their bodies back to a more relaxed position and a reorientation of gaze from Victor to other orientation points in the room. These bodily reactions typically signal the recognition of the end of the story and open the floor for someone else to follow up--often with an evaluation or a second-story. This, however, does not happen. Victor reenters the floor with a brief descriptive claim regarding Jennie's size when she was in preschool. This claim, although topically cohesive, is post-narrative. With line (104), he had marked his turn (and thus his story) as completed. So the question is what his continuance is supposed to accomplish. The subsequent argument among the participants about Jennie's nowadays size reconfirms that everyone knows Jennie, but doesn't necessarily answer questions raised by Victor's story about Jennie.

Another way of providing thematic continuity between the topic of Victor's story and his post-narrative claims to Jennie's size can be provided by moving out of the textual representation and into Victor's bodily self-representation: going into hiding and ducking down, i.e., making himself purposely small and invisible. When playing hide-and-seek, this may be an appropriate

move, though when boasting about being approached or pursued by a girl, this may be construed as a form of anxiety or un-readiness for the challenge of (mature) sexuality. If this thematic strand is woven, or emerging at one or another point in the interaction, Victor's post-narrative comment on Jennie's size is most likely to be heard as an inoculation attempt against this kind of interactive positioning by the present participants. Standing up from his chair when challenged on his size and making himself oversee the other participants (see transcript, line 108) is likely to be read in support with this interpretation.

Reevaluating where we are in our attempt to disambiguate the thematic relevance of Victor's story from a contextual-interactive vantage point, and entering the contextualization of his story from an analytic angle that is grounded in the conversational-interactive fabric of relational work between the participants, opens up new questions originating from the expansion of the text and its interactional embedding as the new unit of analysis: Where and how was Jennie originally made topically relevant? How did this topic progress from there on and how is Jennie positioned in this topical progression? What is interactively accomplished between the participants of the conversation? Questions like these, and maybe others, all are central to the analytic layer of the performance approach under investigation here, though there is not enough space to lay this out in detail. So let me describe how the story emerged at this point in the conversation among the participants.

Earlier, in a discussion of how long one has to know someone in order to count as best friend, Victor had mentioned Jennie whom he had known from when he was born. Later on, this statement was recalled, and Victor claimed her as a *best friend*. Challenged by Wally who objected: *you can't trust girls*, a new topic emerged namely whether you can trust Moms and sisters. At this point, Victor sided clearly with those who trust. Over the next turns, initiated by a

(small) story from Billie on the topic of his Mom showing always his baby pictures, a number of more stories were called up by all participants, including the moderator, which all shared experiences in which mothers embarrassed their children by taking and showing their pictures. Dads were explicitly excluded from and positioned as strictly opposing if not undermining such practices. Wally summed up the discussion with the words: *you can't trust your girlfriend either 'cause they tell their friends*--with Victor agreeing: *yeah, you're right it's nuts*--thereby overtly calling into question his earlier claim that he trusted his Mom and sister. It is at this point that Billie joined the conversation with his story about his ex-girlfriend who had broken up with him, followed by the Jennie story.

In light of the unfolding topics in the form of complaint stories, Victor's Jennie story oscillates between two orientations. On the one hand, Victor can be heard as flaunting his authority of knowing about girls' pursuit of boys. And presenting himself as uninvolved and unresponsive vis-à-vis such attempts, he brings off a certain stance of (typically masculine) cool. On the other, he can be interpreted as joining the chorus of second stories that complain about girls' (and mothers') tendencies to embarrass them. Within this version, he presents himself--just as Billie did in his turn--as subjected to the actions of the generalized female other; and simultaneously as deeply vulnerable. Note that this latter interpretation goes beyond the interpretation of Victor's story as a complaint. In the sharing of their stories, the singular and unique experiences of the five participants have gained the status of generalizable knowledge that is collectively disclosed. Telling these personal experiences in storied forms itself is vulnerable territory--and this seems to be highly reflected in Victor's story about Jennie and his post-narrative attempt to negotiate Jennie's size. In spite of the fact that these stories are carefully navigated territories, sharing such stories is relational work that has the potential to

build trust and intimacy among the participants. To sum up, in our attempts to disambiguate the Jennie story and figure out what this story means and why it was shared at this particular point in the interaction, we entered the viewpoints and values of the local culture of ten-year-olds as a community of story-sharing practices, a *narrative reality* (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009) that goes far beyond the text, its form and content, and into the world of narrative practice.

Summary and reflection

We started with the assumption that narrative analysis lays open, in the sense of making transparent, how narrators use narrative means in order to give (narrative) form and thereby make sense of events and experiences. In order to be able to do this, this chapter drew on three approaches to work with narratives: (i) a linguistic-based approach that works through the lexical and syntactic configurations of texts and follows their build-up into the topical organization of the text, (ii) a cognitive-based approach that works from the assumption that the story segments are held together by an overarching structure of the plot organization, and (iii) an interactive-based approach that views stories (and their meanings) as local accomplishments among participants. Although all three approaches work with different assumptions of what people do when they engage in story-telling activities, and although each of them starts from different units of analysis as analytic givens and, in addition, is likely to ask different types of research questions, we took these three approaches and applied them to a particular instance of storytelling.

The particular instance of storytelling was deliberately one in which there are different ways of making sense of the story--what the story is about and the purpose it can be argued to serve interactively. We first were using the methods available to identify whether there actually is a story that is being shared, and where this story starts and ends. From there we made

transparent the different layers of topical consistency and thematic coherence in order to move into the question what interactive purposes the telling of this story may have had. Ending up with no definitive answer may be viewed as a shortcoming of the methods employed. However, rather than giving definitive answers to particular research questions, it was the declared purpose of this chapter to raise questions to which narrative approaches may be used in search for answers.

Turning back to the overarching goal of the research project from where this small interactive narrative had originated, which was the investigation of 10-15-year-old boys' positioning strategies (also called *discursive* or *interpretive repertoires*), there nevertheless are some important insights we are able to take away from this kind of analysis performed so far. What can be interpreted as ambivalence between hearing Victor as both complaining *and* boasting may be nothing more than navigating dilemmatic positions that pull into different directions. One pull that we could identify in similar narratives within this age group of boys is taking shape in a plot orientation (also called *master narrative*), within which young boys seek to differentiate a (male) sense of self from the female other, while the other plot orientation pulls for a more integrated approach of (male) self and (female) other. Both are different in terms of relational investments in others, i.e., those who are placed in membership categories different from self and in-group, and at the same time both plot orientations do different discursive work in different situations (cf. Bamberg, 2010b; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Indeed, findings like this led us to realize the potential of story-telling practices as the field par excellence where different narrative plot orientations are tried out and navigated as, what we called, *identity projects* (Bamberg, 2020b; Bamberg, DeFina & Schiffrin, 2010). Having started at the onset of this contribution from a definition according to which narratives 'give narrative form to experience,' we now are able to refine this definition: Apart from exactly doing that,

narratives in the way they are practiced in everyday interactions also are the testing grounds for compliance and resistance to dominant versions, where ambivalence can interactively be displayed and tried out in different communities of practices, and where these narrative practices are the grounds in which identities and sense of self can constantly be innovated and redefined.

The attempt has been made to show that each of the three approaches laid out in this chapter has its own merits and shortcomings. Making transparent what cohesive ties feed the build-up of what the text is topically about forms a first and necessary step in cuing the audience into what activity is going on and what the potential purposes may be for making that particular experience from five years ago relevant to the here-and-now of the telling situation. Analyzing the part whole relationships in terms of their top-down conceptual integration into plot organizations presents a second layer of analytic work that points toward some overarching thematic relevance that the story may have for the narrator--again tied into the local situation of sharing. However, both analytic procedures remain fixated on texts, either in terms of their linguistic or conceptual structuring. They both form starting points to be complemented by scrutiny of a third analytic layer that turns more closely to the functions of the textual means analyzed in the preceding two layers. In addition, this approach also suggests investigating the inter-textual embeddedness of the text (the *before* and *after*) along with the use of o*ther* bodily means that are brought to bear in the telling of the narrative. As documented, this layer of interpretive analysis takes the interpreter into the realm of narrative practices as the place to analyze the purpose and the accomplishment of what is going on.

It should be noted that re-conceptualizing the three narrative methods (texts as words and sentences; texts as plots and themes; and going beyond the text and asking why this story here-and-now) as analytic layers that offer insights into narratives as texts-in-interactions is not

straightforward. On the one hand, it needs to be emphasized that the analytic orientations start from different assumptions about the person, about language, and about narrative. The three orientations also are inspired by different research traditions, asking different (research) questions. Against this backdrop, the use of three approaches as matrices for different analytic layers should not be construed as a ticket to (randomly) mix methods or to triangulate in order to find out *more* about narrative texts and/or practices. Nevertheless, and this is a topic worth following up elsewhere, seeing the three different approaches applied next to one another-- modifying the data continuously so that these three approaches can speak to the data (and the data to the different questions being pursued), helps seeing them as practices that are not necessarily only in competition but also employable together.

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