

Daiute, C. & Lightfoot, C. (Eds.). (2004). **Narrative Analysis. Studying the Development of Individuals in Society**. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.

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While on an explorative journey into the fascinating world of narrative research, the main question often ends up being; where to go next, what analysis to use, what subject area to investigate? The field of narrative research, or rather research incorporating narrative analysis of various materials is growing rapidly, and many new areas of interest for narrative research are continuously being identified.

“Narrative Analysis” can be read in two ways. On the one hand it gathers information from three main forms of narrative analysis, which all contribute to our understanding of the development of individuals (their identity, self, narrative etc.) within a social frame. In that respect it provides an overview of some of the differing types of narrative analysis, that regardless of their differences in method focus on the same subject area, namely individual development. At the same time it provides an overview of the different ways in which narrative analysis is being employed by researchers. Not just in terms of how literary readings, social-relational readings, and readings through the forces of history differ in terms of their method of analysis, their perspective, and subsequently their findings concerning similar subject areas, but also how analytical methods may differ within the same methodological framework.

With regards to the new insights provided by narrative analysis, I was especially struck by the chapter by Lee and colleagues on the role of cultural modelling, in which they use narrative analysis in the form of literary reading to show that the African American 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders, whose academic performances are considered below average, are in fact very skilled in using the creative rhetorical strategies of the African American tradition. However, these skills are neither promoted in the school system nor form the basis for formal testing of the children, thus overlooking a natural source of strength in these children. Although this chapter is situated in the section on literary readings, these insights also seem to have some bearing on both a social-relational and a historical frame of analysis, which could provide new perspectives and further insights into the same problem area. Acknowledging the relevance of using different analytical methods on the same material is another interesting feature that is not so much highlighted intentionally in the book, but is hinted at by bringing together various analytical perspectives on a similar, although not identical, subject area, a constellation which highlights how each of the different narrative analytical strategies bring about their own distinct type of knowledge. In contrast, the book also highlights how different narrative analytical strategies may point to similar conclusions, ie. the impact of culture on the construction of narratives (see the contributions by Lee, Rosenfeld, Mendenhall, Rivers, & Tynes, 2004; Nelson, 2004; Daiute, 2004; Chandler, Lalonde, & Teucher, 2004)

Another chapter that struck a cord, although this time one of disharmony, was Sarah K. Carney’s presentation of transcendent stories and counternarratives in Holocaust survivors life

stories. Carney argues that media, society, and treatment facilities in unison are ignoring or simply dismissing the counternarratives of Holocaust survivors and other trauma survivors by deeming them pathological, since no one is prepared to listen to accounts of traumatic events that do not follow the structure of the heroic narrative. Although I agree with Carney that there is a pervasive unwillingness in society to listen to and accept the harsh and sometimes brutal accounts of traumatic events, I do not agree that treatment personnel in general are just trying to turn each narrative into a heroic account of non-heroic events, and if the survivors does not accept this construction, they are considered to have a pathological response to their experiences. An inherent part of therapeutic intervention with trauma survivors is to listen to the account in every detail without judgment and without trying to change the person's perception of the event, but simply bear witness to what they have experienced (Herman, 1992). That society in general is not prepared to listen to these accounts is precisely why a therapeutic relation in which listening and bearing witness is the central core, so that at least one person, ie. the therapist, will hear and acknowledge these counternarratives. Admittedly, some therapeutic interventions may involve trying to change the person's perception of the events to one of a heroic narrative from a misinterpretation of what is necessary for trauma survivors to overcome their experience. However, when studying the literature on therapy with survivors of trauma in general, the changing of the narrative according to a heroic narrative is not what is central to this type of therapy. Of course, heroic narratives are often what you encounter in the public realm, because actual counternarratives are not necessarily shared with a large group of people outside of therapy, since the survivors' surroundings are not usually receptive to non-heroic accounts of traumatic events. Although Carney's findings and her arguments for why we have to acknowledge the counternarratives are relevant in terms of society's and the media's reaction to trauma survivors, her argument does not hold with referenced to therapy with trauma survivors. Therapy with survivors is conducted in an attempt to help survivors deal with overwhelming events that are continuing to affect their lives negatively and for some this may take the form of changing their story into a heroic narrative form, whereas for others the essence of the therapy may be to come to terms with the reality of their so-called counternarrative. Having said this, Carney's argument is however important because it questions the appropriateness of how society and the media in general deal with traumatic experiences, and more importantly how we all react to the individuals who have been exposed to such events.

Above I have highlighted some of the research areas presented in the book, but I will leave the rest for the interested reader. I will however point to another methodological consideration inherent to narrative analysis, namely the ongoing discussion of what constitutes a narrative that can be subjected to narrative analysis. Two diverging opinions on this subject is presented in the book. In "Data are everywhere" Mark Freeman argues why he sees data as existing in every aspect of human life, and he goes on to describe how all sorts of narrative accounts may be subjected to narrative analysis, in this case literary readings. In "Culture, continuity, and the limits of narrativity" Chandler and colleagues take the opposite standpoint and try to define the true narrative form by identifying what does not constitute a narrative. During this process they also identify how different types of narrative analysis that seem to focus on different aspects of narratives and in doing so they provide an overview of the

various interrelated ways that narrative analysis may be conducted. This chapter therefore seems to transcend the entire book, in that it attempts to provide some sort of structure and categorisation of the various forms of narrative analysis presented in the book.

In general, each of the contributions present interesting new thoughts and findings that may spawn additional insights for both the quantitatively and qualitatively oriented reader, when accepting the premises of the presented methodology. Each main section is introduced by a brief presentation of the specific form of narrative analysis that follows. These introductions provide a guiding structure for reading through the book as a whole, however it is somewhat surprising that the editors have chosen not to round off the book with their own summary. Instead they let the final chapter by Mary Gergen speak for itself as the final note of this book. This actually works because this chapter is not so much a presentation of a specific research project, but instead Mary Gergen gives her personal account of how she became interested in narrative analysis, and how she sees this kind of research as providing a more fulfilling and authentic type of research, that overcomes some of the cultural restraints research may otherwise be subjected to. A different, but also inspirational way of ending this presentation of various forms of narrative analysis, which have been both challenging, inspirational, has given rise to new thoughts and ideas, and last but not least it has been informative in more ways than I have had room to describe here.

Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery*. Basic Books; New York.