

CHAPTER 2

Mapping a Landscape of Narrative Inquiry

Borderland Spaces and Tensions

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Epistemic agents may no longer claim merely to find the world and so thereby shirk responsibility not only for what they find, but also for the nature of what is found. These objects, these substances of the world, are so often not just epistemic constructions but rather ontological artifacts of our own making and doing . . . practices of representation are peculiarly situated in this process, for representation is itself a mode of intervention.

—Kory Sorrell (2004, p. 000) [AU: Pg #?]

The only thing that keeps us from floating off with the wind is our stories. They give us a name and put us in a place, allow us to keep on touching.

—Tom Spanbauer (1992 p. 000) [AU: Pg #?]

Narrative inquiry is an old practice that may feel new to us for a variety of reasons. Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long. These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities. What feels new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in the field of social science research. With this emergence

has come intensified talk about our stories, their function in our lives, and their place in composing our collective affairs. This development has required greater philosophical precision in our use of the terms *narrative* and *narrative inquiry*, classification schemes that respectfully acknowledge the diversity of lived and told stories and story talk, and an examination of the boundaries with other traditions of research.

As seen in Chapter 1, each of the various approaches to the use of narrative inquiry has a history, a history that is itself becoming a topic of scholarly discussion. Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998, p. 1) referred to a “narrative revolution” that was made possible by the decline of an exclusively positivist paradigm for social science research. Also commenting on this revolution some years earlier, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote that although the idea of narrative inquiry as research methodology is new to the social sciences, it has intellectual roots in the humanities and other fields under the broad heading of narratology. Hurwitz, Greenhalgh, and Skultans (2004) trace the emergence of narrative research in the field of medicine as a response to ethical scandals in medical research of the 20th century and the adversarial relationship it precipitated between patients and doctors. Narrative inquiry, they argue, can help heal that relationship. Writing in the field of women’s studies, Vaz (1997) locates the inspiration for the use of oral narrative research in a history of Africana women struggling against patriarchy and colonialism.

What becomes apparent in this brief historical tracing is how interwoven narrative ways of thinking about phenomena are with the ways that narrative methodologies are emerging. For example, we hear Bruner speaking of narrative ways of knowing when he says, “Telling stories is an astonishing thing. We are a species whose main purpose is to tell each other about the expected and the surprises that upset the expected, and we do that through the stories we tell” (Bruner, cited in Charon, 2002, p. 8). While Bruner points us toward narrative as a mode of knowing, Lieblich et al. (1998) point us toward the need for narrative inquiry as a methodological response to the positivist paradigms. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) link the research methodological turn to the alternative ways of thinking about experience. The need for both narrative ways of thinking about experience and new narrative methodologies becomes apparent in the works of Hurwitz et al. (2004) and Vaz (1997). It is this interweaving of narrative views of phenomena and narrative inquiry that marks the emerging field and that draws attention to the need for careful uses and distinctions of terms. The ways that scholars in many fields have taken this narrative turn both in thinking about the phenomenon of experience and in thinking about research methodologies makes the situation even more complex.

Reissman and Speedy (this volume) hint at this complexity when they note,

Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing at a hectic pace, the idea of narrative has penetrated almost every discipline and school. No longer the sole province of literary scholarship, narrative study is now cross-disciplinary, not fitting within the boundaries of any single scholarly field.

Furthermore, they note that while “narrative inquiry in the human sciences is a 20th-century development, the field has ‘realist,’ ‘modernist,’ ‘post-modern,’ and ‘constructionist’ strands, and scholars disagree on origins and precise definition” (Reissman and Speedy, this volume). Sconiers and Rosiek (2000) note similar divergences within the field, citing phenomenological, post-modern, and performative approaches to narrative research. From these different standpoints, we want to draw attention to the narrative turn, a turn that is remarkable in the intensity and enthusiasm with which it has shifted research methodological undertakings.

Any attempt to organize these divergent views into a summary representation inevitably risks shortchanging one view in favor of the priorities of another. There are, however, real differences of opinion on the epistemological, ideological, and ontological commitments of narrative inquirers as well as real differences with those who do not identify as narrative inquirers. These differences, we believe, require careful attention and discussion if the field of narrative inquiry is to realize its potential for making a contribution to the study of human experience and lives. It is the project of this chapter to help clarify these discussions by mapping some of those differences.

Our approach to this conceptual cartography will not be naively objectivist. We do not assume we have access to a stance outside of the history of the field, from which to impartially document all its parts. We are, after all, among those whose work is part of what is being mapped. Leslie Marmon Silko (1997) describes the problem with the metaphor of mapping:

“A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view” does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow outside or separate from the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on. (p. 27)

Following Piles and Thrift (1995), authors of *Mapping the Subject*, we therefore employ the metaphor of mapping with a cognizance that all representations are partial and involve trade-offs between distortions and instrumental ends.¹ We will offer a representation of the field of narrative inquiry that holds one aspect of narrative inquiry constant and uses this as a point of reference from which to examine the internal and external borders of this area of scholarship. The map we construct, with its borders and borderlands, allows researchers to locate themselves on the landscape of narrative inquiry methodologies.

The point of constancy we take as our point of departure is the observation that narrative inquirers study experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2006) observed that arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry are inspired by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a

portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

There are many philosophical treatments of the word *experience*, from Aristotle's dualistic metaphysics in which knowledge of particulars and universals were considered separately, to early empiricist atomistic conceptions of experience, Marxist conceptions of experience distorted by ideology, behaviorist notions of stimulus and response, and post-structuralist assertions that state our experience is the product of discursive practices. The view of experience to which Clandinin and Connelly refer, and which will serve as the cornerstone of our analysis, has its roots in John Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy.

By situating the philosophical foundation of narrative inquiry within a Deweyan theory of experience, we intend to work toward clarifying differences and affinities narrative inquiry has with other areas of scholarship. Our intent in claiming a Deweyan theory of experience as central to the epistemology and ontology of narrative inquiry allows us to sharpen distinctions between both narrative inquiry and other scholarly traditions as well as to sharpen distinctions within the field of narrative inquiry. Through highlighting the tensions at the borders with other areas of scholarship, we bring into sharper relief the differences with other areas of scholarship. However, as we bring into sharper relief the distinctions, we also highlight the affinities among narrative inquiry and other forms of scholarship.

Deweyan Theory of Experience²

For the purposes of our discussion, there are two particularly salient features of Dewey's (1976) conception of experience. The first is that experience is the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry—narrative or otherwise—proceeds:

The importance attached to the word "experience," then . . . is to be understood as an invitation to employ thought and discriminative knowledge as a means of plunging into something which no argument and no term can express; or rather as an invitation to note the fact that no plunge is needed, since one's own thinking and explicit knowledge are already constituted by and within something which does not need to be expressed or made explicit. . . . The word "experience" is, I repeat, a notation of an inexpressible as that which decides the ultimate status of all which is expressed; inexpressible not because it is so remote and transcendent, but because it is so immediately engrossing and matter of course. (p. 325, footnote)[AU: Note #?]

The last line here is important, because it points us to the aspect of pragmatism that makes it unique in the Western philosophical tradition as well as particularly germane to narrative inquiry. Dewey says experience is “a notation of an inexpressible.” Other philosophers have made similar claims. Kant spoke of the *ding an sich* or “thing-in-itself,” an idea necessary for a coherent theory of knowledge but fundamentally unrepresentable. The phenomenologists spoke of an infinite *duree* (Bergson, 1889/1960; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Schutz, 1973), undifferentiated immediate experience that our reflection edits into. For Kant and the phenomenologists, there is something beyond the reach of our writing and reflection toward which our inquiries must nonetheless reach. The inexpressible reality of the *ding an sich* or the infinite *duree* thus serves as a regulative ideal for human inquiry while remaining untouched by the representations.

Dewey’s (1981c) conception of experience differs from this. It does not refer to some precognitive, precultural ground on which our conceptions of the world rest. Instead, it is a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment:

Because every experience is constituted by interaction between “subject” and “object,” between a self and its world, it is not itself either merely physical nor merely mental, no matter how much one factor or the other predominates. . . . [experiences] are the products of discrimination, and hence can be understood only as we take into account the total normal experience in which both inner and outer factors are so incorporated that each has lost its special character. In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it. (p. 251)

In other words, Dewey’s ontology is not transcendental, it is transactional. The epistemological implications of this view are nothing short of revolutionary.³ It implies that the regulative ideal for inquiry is not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower. The regulative ideal for inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world—one that “makes possible a new way of dealing with them, and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced objects, not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive” (Dewey, 1981b, p. 175) In this pragmatic view of knowledge, our representations arise from experience and must return to that experience for their validation.

There are several features of this ontology of experience that make it particularly well suited for framing narrative inquiry as we are discussing it here. First, the temporality of knowledge generation is emphasized. Experience, for the pragmatist, is always more than we can know and represent in a single statement, paragraph, or book. Every representation, therefore, no matter how faithful to that which it tries to depict, involves selective emphasis of our experience. Dewey (1958) warns

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against obscuring the selection process, thus naturalizing the objects of our inquiry and treating them as if they are given:

Honest empirical method will state when and where and why the act of selection took place, and thus enable others to repeat it and test its worth. . . . Under all the captions that are called immediate knowledge, or self-sufficient certitude of belief, whether logical, esthetic, or epistemological, there is something selected for a purpose, and hence not simple, not self-evident, and not intrinsically eulogizable. State the purpose so that it may be re-experienced, and its value and the pertinency of selection undertaken in its behalf may be tested. (p. 271)

Another way of saying this is that an honest empirical method will present inquiry as a series of choices, inspired by purposes that are shaped by past experience, undertaken through time, and will trace the consequences of these choices in the whole of an individual or community's lived experience.

In our view, narratives are the form of representation that describes human experience as it unfolds through time. Therefore, narratives are, arguably, the most appropriate form to use when thinking about inquiry undertaken within a pragmatic framework. Although narrative forms of representation are often used in inquiries framed by other philosophical frameworks, they are, in those cases, almost always regarded as having a degraded epistemic status; if the reality we seek to describe is presumed to be independent of our representations of it, then there is no need to tell the story of how our representation of the world emerged within a stream of experience nor how it returned to that experience.⁴

Second, a pragmatic ontology of experience emphasizes continuity, that is,

the idea that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)

It is important to note that this continuity is not merely perceptual; it is ontological. Experiences do not simply appear to be connected through time; they are continuous.

This conception of continuity is required by the pragmatic promotion of a transactional ontology. Rejecting centuries of speculation about what transcendent reality (God, eternal forms, pure substance) is needed to hold the amazing variety of human experiences together, William James (1909) states the basic principle of ontology of experience:

The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous transempirical

connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure. (p. 195)

In other words, what you see (and hear, feel, think, love, taste, despise, fear, etc.) is what you get. That is all we ultimately have in which to ground our understanding. And that is all we need.

This continuity has important implications for the way we think about inquiry, narrative or otherwise. It reinforces the idea that inquiry is not a search “behind the veil” of appearances that ends in the identification of an unchanging transcendent reality. Instead, inquiry is an act within a stream of experience that generates new relations that then become a part of future experience. It also problematizes the boundaries of inquiry. If experience is continuous, then the initial parameters we set up for our inquiries are themselves a form of relation that can and should be questioned in the course of ongoing research. Dewey (1976) explains it as follows:

It intimates that while the results of reflection, because of the continuity of experience, may be of wider scope than the situation which calls out a particular inquiry and invention, reflection itself is always specific in origin and aim; it always has something special to cope with. For troubles are concretely specific. It intimates also that thinking and reflective knowledge are never an end-all, never their own purpose nor justification, but that they pass naturally into a more direct and vital type of experience, whether technological or appreciative or social. (pp. 332–333)

Referring to inevitable inferential spillover of our inquiries, Dewey describes experience as having something that “stretches.” This stretch is almost “indefinitely elastic” and extends into realms of personal, aesthetic, and social meaning.

This brings us a third feature of a pragmatic ontology of experience that makes it particularly well suited for framing narrative inquiries—its emphasis on the social dimension of our inquiries and understanding. Narrative inquiries explore the stories people live and tell. These stories are the result of a confluence of social influences on a person’s inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history. These stories are often treated as the epiphenomenal to social inquiry—reflections of important social realities but not realities themselves. Dewey (1981a) warns against this prejudice that condescends to impoverishing experience as a source of knowledge:

The most serious indictment to be brought against non-empirical philosophies is that they have cast a cloud over the things of ordinary experience. They have not been content to rectify them. They have discredited them at large. In casting aspersions upon the things of everyday experience, the things of action and affection and social intercourse, they have done something far worse than fail to give these affairs intelligent direction. . . . To waste of time and energy, to disillusionment with life that attends every deviation from concrete experience must be added the tragic failure to realize the value that

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intelligent search could reveal among the things of ordinary experience. I cannot calculate how much of current cynicism, indifference, and pessimism is due to these causes and the deflection of intelligence they have brought about. (pp. 40–41)

It is stunning how well Dewey's warning here seems to describe the contemporary climate in many service professions—teaching, health professions, social work, urban planning, and so on. Narrow standards of effectiveness are imposed on an undertaking whose significance to those involved is both nuanced and manifold. And this imposition of procrustean standards of evidence threatens to drain the meaning of that service from both the service providers and those receiving services. In contrast, narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Beginning with a respect for ordinary lived experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only a valorizing of individuals' experience but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted—but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study an individual's experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others.

Viewed in this way, we can see that not only is a pragmatic ontology of experience a well-suited theoretical framework for narrative inquiries, narrative inquiry is an approach to research that enacts many if not all of the principles of a Deweyan theory of inquiry. In fact, we offer that narrative inquiry as we describe it is a quintessentially pragmatic methodology. What genealogy is to post-structuralist Foucauldian sociology, what critical ethnography is to critical theory, what experiments are to positivism, narrative inquiry is to Deweyan pragmatism.

Holding a Deweyan theory of experience as a constant, as we construct our map of narrative inquiry, allows us to see borders and borderlands between narrative inquiry and other forms of inquiry. It also allows us to see borderlands within the work of those of us engaged in narrative inquiry. A Deweyan view of experience allows for the study of experience that acknowledges the embodiment of the person living in the world (Johnson, 1987). Framed within this view of experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences

are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside another, and writing and interpreting texts.

This constant view of experience understood from a Deweyan perspective and of narrative inquiry as the study of experience understood in this way makes possible an understanding of borders and possible borderlands with other forms of research methodologies.

Border Conditions

It is often helpful in describing phenomena to explain both what it is and what it is not. Having located the conceptual roots of narrative inquiry in a Deweyan ontology of experience, we can now contrast this with the philosophical assumptions that underlie other forms of scholarship. This, in turn, will permit us to make sense of the kinds of questions asked and methods employed in narrative inquiry. In what follows, we explore the conceptual border between narrative inquiry and social science grounded in three other philosophical traditions: post-positivism, Marxism, and post-structuralism.

Post-Positivism

The contrast with post-positivism is perhaps the most frequently discussed in the literature on narrative inquiry. For example, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described this conceptual border as the boundary between narrative inquiry and reductionist thinking. We realize that the literature on positivist and post-positivist epistemology and its implications for the social sciences is vast and beyond the scope of this chapter to summarize. Our modest goal here is to identify the most general features of this approach to social science inquiry and clarify its relation to narrative inquiry.

At the most general level, positivist philosophies begin with epistemological commitments and treat ontological commitments as secondary considerations. In other words, it begins with a theory of knowledge and, from there, ventures into claims about the nature of reality. This approach to philosophy was developed in the 19th century as a reaction to the proliferation of baroque and confusing metaphysical claims about natural and social phenomena. Whether it is notions of corpuscular ether that moves objects, the influence of God on human souls, or evidence that someone was practicing witchcraft, positivism rejected any claims about reality that could not be grounded in empirical observations of the facts of experience.

Over the last century, positivist philosophers moderated their ambitions. Whereas early positivists sought to produce verifiable descriptions of reality, later post-positivists concluded that descriptions cannot be verified in any final way; they can only be falsified. Thus, they are willing to admit into the category of

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knowledge only those statements that can be demonstrably falsified by procedures that can be made public but that—when tried—have not proven false. The conception of reality that underlies this theory of knowledge is called critical realism and is the subject of considerable debate. Adherents minimally maintain (1) that reality is independent of our minds and (2) that something is real if it can bring about observable consequences that permit for public testing of a claim about the world (Bhaskar, 1997; Phillips & Burbules, 2000).

It is important to note, here, that this is not a naive realism, the idea that we have direct knowledge of the world without any mediation by our senses, social influence, or the like.⁵ The critical realist can in fact claim that “there is no conflict between seeing our scientific views as being about objectively given real worlds, and understanding our beliefs about them as subject to all kinds of historical and other determinations” (Norris, 1999, p. 39).

Rather than deny the various social and cultural influences on social science inquiry, the post-positivist seeks to identify methodological procedures that can help communities deal critically with the many mediations of our experience of the world in a way that permits an identification of a reality that we all share. The virtue of this epistemologically conservative stance is that it provides a very stable consensus about a knowledge base for social science inquiry. The drawback is that the price of this stability is that large regions of human experience that influence human affairs—personal meaning, love, hate, aesthetic considerations, religious experience, narrative coherence of individual lives—are often placed outside the bounds of that inquiry.

Narrative inquiry, by way of contrast, begins with an ontology of experience. From this conception of reality as relational, temporal, and continuous, it arrives at a conception of how that reality can be known. This ontology is fundamentally different from that of a critical realist. The critical realist can admit the existence of an infinite variety of private impressions, personal significances, and personal meanings. However, she reserves the term *reality* for something beyond our immediate experience that structures everyone’s experience similarly. Following Dewey, the narrative inquirer takes the sphere of immediate human experience as the first and most fundamental reality we have. Building on Dewey, the narrative inquirer focuses on the way the relational, temporal, and continuous features of a pragmatic ontology of experience can manifest in narrative form, not just in retrospective representations of human experience but also in the lived immediacy of that experience.

Following from this ontology, the narrative inquirer arrives at a very different conception of knowledge than the post-positivist. Whereas post-positivists seek a description of a reality that stands outside human experience, the narrative inquirer seeks a knowledge of human experience that remains within the stream of human lives. In other words, narrative inquiry does not merely describe this or that feature of someone’s experience. It is simultaneously a description of, and intervention into, human experience; it acknowledges that descriptions add meaning to experience, thus changing the content and quality of the experience. Dewey (1981a) describes this irreducible interplay of description and intervention as follows:

Knowledge or science, as a work of art, like any other work of art, confers upon things traits and potentialities which did not previously belong to them. [It] . . . is an act which confers upon non-cognitive material traits which did not belong to it. It marks a change by which physical events exhibiting properties of mechanical energy, connected by relations of push and pull, hitting, rebounding, splitting and consolidating, realize characters, meanings and relations of meaning hitherto not possessed by them. (p. 126)

Such recursive knowledge effects might be regarded as a design flaw in a post-positivist inquiry on human meaning, one that creates feedback loops that distort the data and undermine the researchers' ability to identify falsifiable claims. For the narrative inquirer, the fact that the inquiry is altering the phenomena under study is not regarded as a methodological problem to be overcome. It is the purpose of the research.

These differences in a general conception of inquiry call for different styles and approaches to scholarship on human experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described how a focus on the temporal nature of human experience requires a particular kind of thinking. To think as a narrative inquirer is to think of events as happening over time; each event or thing has a past, present as it appears to us, and implied future. This temporality has semiotic implications. In narrative inquiry, an action is

seen as a narrative sign . . . it is necessary to give a narrative interpretation of that sign before meaning can be attached to it. Without understanding the narrative history of the child [individual], the significance or meaning of the performance [action], the sign, remains unknown. (pp. 30–31)

This view of action can be contrasted to post-positivist research in which

an action is taken as directly evidential. There is an equation connecting action and meaning, connecting performance and cognitive level. In narrative thinking [inquiry], however, there is an interpretive pathway between action and meaning mapped out in terms of narrative histories. (p. 31)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also describe a difference between narrative inquiry and post-positivist research based on the treatment of the context of human meaning. In post-positivist research, while the influence of context is acknowledged, the purpose of research design is to limit attention to that context. The ideal is often considered an experiment in which all contextual influences can be controlled or at least accounted for. In narrative inquiry, multiple contexts beyond the researcher's control—such as spatial contexts, cultural contexts, social contexts, institutional contexts, place contexts, and people contexts—are always present. Narrative inquiry is, following this, a relational form of inquiry. Describing the way people go about making sense of their experience within these contexts, and contributing to that ongoing sense making, is the purpose of narrative inquiry.

There is a trade-off involved in embracing a robust engagement with the temporal and contextual nature of human experience. What narrative inquirers gain in the proximity to ordinary lived experience and the scope of their considerations, they, at times, sacrifice in certainty. Narrative inquirers work with an attitude of knowing that other possibilities, interpretations, and ways of explaining things are possible. This sense of uncertainty or tentativeness is one of the most visible and remarked on the differences between narrative and post-positivist inquirers. It often inspires exchanges in which both forms of research are grossly misrepresented. Post-positivists can accuse narrative inquirers of being confused about the object they are describing, self-indulgent, and substituting opinion for knowledge. Narrative inquirers accuse post-positivists of being naive about the nature of human experience, inhumanly procrustean in their conception of knowledge, and politically complicit with government powers that want to silence whole regions of human experience.

Such hyperbolic exchanges are, in the opinion of these authors, unhelpful. It is better to look more closely at the practice of each type of research and critique specific commitments. For narrative inquirers, a sense of tentativeness in representing their own experiences or the experiences of others is the necessary condition for conceiving of a form of inquiry whose object is the transformation of lived human experience. In other words, narrative inquirers must think of any description of human meaning as tentative, if they are to keep alive the possibility that the description can change the quality of the experience being described.

The challenge for the narrative inquirer, therefore, is less one of achieving the highest possible grade of epistemic clarity and is instead how to integrate ethical and epistemic concerns—how to put knowledge in the service of enhancing human experience. The post-positivist conception of knowledge has a role to play in refining narrative inquiry. False or delusional representations of human experience are unlikely to enhance that experience in any sustainable way. But falsehoods are not the only risk about which narrative inquirers are concerned. They are also concerned with missing heretofore unrealized possibilities in human experience. As William James (1897) exclaimed in “The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy,”

Believe truth! Shun error!—these, we see, are two materially different laws; and by choosing between them we may end by coloring differently our whole intellectual life. . . . We must remember that these feelings of our duty to either truth or error are in any case only expressions of our passionate life. Biologically considered, our minds are as ready to grind out falsehood as veracity, and he who says, “Better go without belief forever than believe a lie!” merely shows his own preponderant private horror of becoming a dupe. He may be critical of many of his desires and fears, but this fear he slavishly obeys. He cannot imagine anyone questioning its binding force. For my own part, I have also a horror of being duped; but I can believe that worse things than being duped may happen to a man in this world. . . . Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things. In a world where we are so certain to incur them

in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than this excessive nervousness on their behalf. At any rate, it seems the fittest thing for the empiricist philosopher. (p. 721)

Marxism and Critical Theory

Post-positivism is not the only philosophical neighbor with which narrative inquirers negotiate border conditions. Less frequently explored, but often more morally and politically charged, is the border between narrative inquiry and approaches to social analysis grounded in some form of Marxism, including but not limited to the work of Marxist sociologists, critical theorists, critical ethnographers, and post-Marxists.

Narrative inquirers and Marxist-influenced scholars working in the applied social sciences often share an interest in analyzing the way large institutions dehumanize, anesthetize, and alienate the people living and working within them. They also share an interest in resisting those effects by producing a scholarship that intervenes in this process by helping people develop a more robust sense of the reality around them and their agency within that reality. What is different between their approaches is their underlying conception of that reality.

As with post-positivism, the literature on Marxist, critical theory, and post-Marxist social theory is vast and beyond the scope of this chapter to summarize. Our modest goal here is to identify the most general features of these conceptions of social science inquiry and clarify its relation to narrative inquiry. If narrative inquiry traces its philosophical roots to Dewey's philosophy, then contemporary critical theory can be said to trace its philosophical roots to Marxist philosophy. Like Dewey and the pragmatists, Marxist philosophies begin with ontological commitments and treat epistemological commitments as important subsequent considerations. The differences between the two lie in the details of their ontological commitments.

For the Marxist, the fundamental motivation for their analysis is the observation that large-scale social arrangements conspire not only to physically disempower individuals and groups but also to epistemically disempower people. In other words, systems of oppression in modern capitalistic societies include the means by which the sources of that oppression are obscured. This process of deflecting attention from the real causes of oppression is no mere momentary distraction. It involves, according to Marxist theorists, sustained deflections of thought perpetrated by the most cherished and respected traditions of our cultures: religion, nationalism, and liberal humanism.

Marx's term for this deflection of attention from the real cause of oppression was *ideology*. Ideology has been such a generative idea in western social inquiry that it has acquired many definitions (Hawkes, 2003). For our purposes we will let ideology refer here to a system of thought and practice that gives rise to false consciousness in individuals and communities. False consciousness is a condition in which a person acquires a habit of thinking and feeling that prevents him or her from noticing and analyzing the real causes of his or her oppression.

It is the Marxist critique of humanism that is germane to our discussion. Humanism, according to this view, is an ideological system. The false consciousness it produces is an exclusive attention to individuals and individual human experience as a source of knowledge. The humanist idea that all knowledge must begin in the observations and content of individual consciousness leaves people trapped in their inherited ideologies. This is the charge that Marxist-influenced scholars most often bring to bear on the work of narrative inquirers. By focusing on individual experience as a source of insight, the larger social conditions that shape the narratives in which people live go unexamined. Marx and Engels warned that humanist ideologies simultaneously shape institutions that distort human experience and then point to that distortion as the fundamental condition of truth. The result is an inversion of reality and falsehood.

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura,⁶ this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process. . . . We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. (Marx, 1846/1972, p. 118)

Over the last century, this early formulation of “false consciousness” has been critiqued, refined, and elaborated by many social theorists (Adorno, 2000; Augoustinos, 1999; Horkheimer, 2005; Lukacs, 1972; Wetherell, 1999). These critiques have focused on the class-identity essentialism that underlies the juxtaposition of false consciousness and a proletariat consciousness that is free from the distortions of ideology (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987). They have also examined the limits of processes of representation to actually describe ideology (Jameson, 1992; Marcuse, 1964; Zizek, 1999). In most cases, however, some version of Marxist anti-humanism—the idea that ordinary individual experience is distorted by ideology and is, therefore, not a trustworthy source of insight about the social challenges we face—has remained a central analytical commitment of critical theory and post-Marxist scholarship.

This rejection of individual experience as a valid source of knowledge stands in clear contrast to the commitments of narrative inquiry as we have presented it. Precisely understanding that difference, however, requires a careful examination of the philosophical assumptions underlying each tradition. A casual read of the idea of “false” consciousness may give the impression that the first commitment of Marxist-influenced theorists is epistemological—an idea of how to discern truth from falsehood. It is, instead, an ontological principle that ultimately anchors their analysis—the assertion that the material conditions of society precipitate ideologies that shape and distort our ability to understand our world. These material conditions precede and influence epistemological fashions in ways that function to protect and

reproduce a grotesquely unequal distribution of human wealth and social power. It is, therefore, in the fundamental reality of these material conditions that Marxist-influenced scholars seek explanation for social and psychological phenomena.

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. (Marx, 1964, p. 51)

Although it may seem extremely abstract, understanding the ontological as opposed to epistemological starting point of Marxist-influenced social theory is necessary for understanding the style and content of this scholarship as well as its relationship with narrative inquiry. A mode of inquiry founded in epistemological commitments—such as positivism—takes accurate description of the world as its primary objective. Epistemic principles, in this case, determine the way the accuracy of research conclusions will be assessed. A mode of inquiry founded in ontological commitments—such as Marxism or critical theory—takes transformation of those ontological conditions as its primary objective.⁷ For the Marxist-influenced scholar, research and analysis is an intervention that seeks to change the material conditions that underlie oppressive social conditions.

As remarked on earlier, narrative inquiry shares with Marxism an explicit grounding in ontological commitments as well as the goal of generating scholarship that transforms the ontological conditions of living. The differences between these two traditions of inquiry are located in the specifics of those commitments and their conception of intervention. Scholarship grounded in Marxism privileges the macrosocial material conditions of life as the primary influence on human life and thinking. The relational texture of everyday life, including the personal, religious, historical, and cultural narratives that provide meaning to that life, are treated as derivative of the macrosocial conditions of life. Furthermore, these narratives are frequently considered obstacles to be overcome on the way to a more realistic understanding of the causes of human experience.

The narrative inquirer, by way of contrast, privileges individual lived experience as a source of insights useful not only to the person himself or herself but also to the wider field of social science scholarship generally.⁸ As described in the comparison to post-positivism, this approach to analyzing human experience is grounded in a pragmatic relational ontology. It takes the immediacy of lived experiences, specifically its narrative qualities, as a fundamental reality to be examined and acted on. According to this view, all representations of experience—including representations of the macrosocial influences on that experience—ultimately arise

from first-person lived experience and need to find their warrant in their influence on that experience. Dewey (1981) is unequivocal on the latter point:

Thus here is supplied, I think, a first rate test of the value of any philosophy which is offered us: Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of in "reality" even the significance they had previously seemed to have? (p. 18)

In privileging lived experience as the ultimate source of, and site of, validation for knowledge, the narrative inquirer does not exclude the possibility of analyzing the oppressive effects of macrosocial conditions. Many social theorists who ground their work in a pragmatic ontology examine the macrosocial conditions of oppression (de Lauretis, 1986; Hook, 1987; Sullivan, 2001, 2006; West, 1989), as do many narrative inquirers (Chang & Rosiek, 2004; Hadden, 2000; Henry & Tator, 2005; Laubscher & Powell, 2003; Maher & Ward, 2002; Sconiers & Rosiek, 2000). However, ultimately, narrative inquirers demur at the Marxist contention that individual lived experience needs to be approached first as the product of ideologies, meaning that the first step in social inquiry is the critique of ideologies. For the narrative inquirer, a person's experience must be listened to on its own terms first, without the presumption of deficit or flaw, and critique needs to be motivated by the problematic elements within that experience. Consequently, the intervention envisioned by the narrative inquirer focuses first on the qualities of lived experience; it is in collaboratively transforming the narratives within which people live that narrative inquiry seeks to lay the foundations for social change. Without such foundations rooted in the storied experiences of ordinary people, it is believed that efforts at social change are condemned to either be ineffective or hollow exercises of externally imposed authority.

Herein lies the most important difference in the practice of inquiry of these two traditions of scholarship. For the Marxist-influenced scholar, the insistence on beginning inquiry in the lived experience of individuals can at best seem overly burdensome. For problems with a clearly macrosocial provenance, this would be like requiring an injured patient to describe their wounds at the cellular level before providing medical care—an unreasonable and dangerous delay of action. At worst, in the Marxist view, the narrative inquirer appears to be the willing dupe of humanist ideologies that function to deflect any attempt to analyze the real causes of oppression. They would say that narrative inquiry stays within the comfortable zone of private experience and provides no leverage for insisting that the mostly middle- and upper-class professionals who conduct and read the research examine their complicity with institutionalized oppression.

Narrative inquirers, on the other hand, often find scholarship grounded in Marxism at best condescending. It approaches people's experience with the presumption of deficits that only the Marxist academic can remedy. At its worst, the narrative inquirer can find scholarship grounded in Marxist theory to be

imperialist and self-defeating. By preemptively dismissing the lived experience of persons as a possible source of insight, it simply replaces one totalizing source of external authority—be it church, state, or post-positivist social science—with another. The result is the continued disempowerment of exactly those persons the Marxist-influenced scholars seeks to emancipate.

This dismissal of lived experience is particularly egregious when applied to communities who have been historically silenced by processes of colonialism, patriarchy, homophobia, and other forms of oppression. Stone-Mediatore (2003) describes this excess as follows:

Worse still, when we treat experience-based narratives as mere ideological artifacts, we reinforce the disempowerment of people who have been excluded from official knowledge production, for we deny epistemic value from a central means by which such people can take control over their own representation. (p. 2)

When reciprocal criticisms between different research paradigms reach the level of mutual recrimination and inspire an unwillingness to listen across disciplinary differences, they are not constructive. This need not be the outcome in this case. There is, in our opinion, much that narrative inquirers can gain from a continued dialogue with Marxist-influenced social theorists. Scholarship grounded in Marxist philosophy serves as a much-needed tonic for Pollyannaish liberal social policy that seeks a solution to all social problems through programs of individual self-improvement. It has also provided some of the most cogent challenges to liberal social science that cravenly ignores the possibility that large-scale socioeconomic conditions can explain both individual behavior and the way researchers choose the unit of analysis for their scholarship. There is nothing that makes such myopias a necessary feature of narrative inquiry. However, by taking the experience of the individual as the starting point and the site of validation for narrative inquiries, the risk of slipping into self-insulating habits of attention and analysis is high.

The question of whether narrative inquiry as a field can avoid this risk is ultimately an empirical question. The development of a narrative inquiry research community that can avoid simply reproducing narratives that support macrosocial systems of oppression, and can instead contribute to the amelioration of oppressive conditions, will depend on (1) educating narrative inquirers for whom the promotion of social justice is a central commitment, (2) the increased inclusion of voices examining experiences of oppression in the narrative inquiry literature, and (3) regular dialogue with scholars in other disciplines who can provide constructive political critique of narrative inquiry practices and texts.

Post-Structuralism

A third scholarly community with which narrative inquirers negotiate border conditions are post-structural social and cultural theorists. Post-structuralism and the more diffuse post-modern cultural developments to which it contributed are

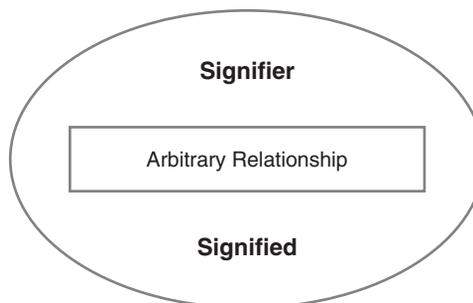
often considered the natural home to narrative inquiry. Post-structuralism focuses attention on the linguistic and narrative structure of knowledge. It raises fundamental and highly technical questions about the ways we represent the world and makes compelling arguments for encouraging epistemic and methodological diversity in the social sciences. Lyotard (1984), in his watershed work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, explained the narrative connection as follows:

In the first place, scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge, which I will call narrative in the interests of simplicity (its characteristics will be described later). I do not mean to say that narrative knowledge can prevail over science, but its model is related to ideas of internal equilibrium and conviviality next to which contemporary scientific knowledge cuts a poor figure. (p. 7)

There can be little question that narrative inquirers have benefited from the widespread influence of post-structuralist critiques of a narrowly and naively conceived scientism. These critiques have made audiences more receptive to the idea that there may be other ways of knowing that merit scholarly attention. However, narrative inquiry as we present it here cannot ultimately be grounded in post-structuralist theories about knowledge. To understand the reasons for this epistemic immiscibility, a brief review of the conceptual history of post-structuralism will be necessary.

Post-structuralism traces its roots to the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959). Saussure challenged Aristotelian notions of an ideal one-to-one correspondence between a word and its object. Using the term *signifier* to denote a linguistic sign and *signified* to denote the object to which the sign referred, Saussure argued that, despite a few notable exceptions, the relation between words and their objects was essentially arbitrary. A signifier maintained a stable relationship to its signified, according to Saussure, through its embedded relationship with a whole system of signs, *la langue*, the language.

The full story of the development of contemporary post-structuralism from Saussurean linguistics is beyond the scope of this chapter. It would suffice to say



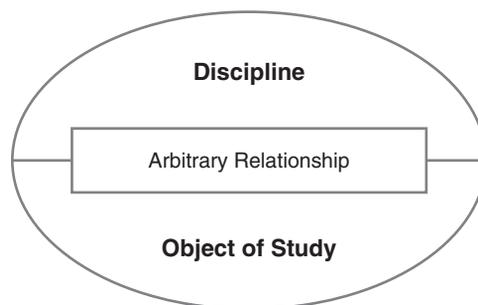
here that 20th-century anthropologists (e.g., Levi-Straus), psychoanalysts (e.g., Lacan), sociologists (e.g., Foucault, Buarillard), literary critics (e.g., Barthes, Spivak), philosophers (e.g., Derrida), and feminists (e.g., Kristeva, Butler) picked up Saussure's theories, elaborated on them, and extended their application to almost every area of study in the humanities and social sciences. For our purposes, the most important of these elaborations was the application of structuralism to the study of the academic disciplines themselves.

Academic disciplines are often thought to be defined by an object of study. The existence of the object and normative views about its ideal state are assumed to precede research on it. A scholar's method of study is chosen because it uniquely suits the object. For example, "mental illness" is assumed to have preexisted and inspired the development of the field of psychiatry. "Intelligence" is often assumed to exist in individuals and this fact is thought to justify the development of methods of measuring the characteristic. "Race" was long presumed to exist and the science of eugenics was presumed to be the study of the differences between human races. In each case, the object of study had clear normative binaries built in before inquiry began: illness/health, intelligent/unintelligent, white/non-white, and so on.

Post-structuralists used Saussure's theories to invert these assumptions. They took Saussure's argument about the arbitrary relationship between signifiers and signified and extended it to the relationship between an academic discipline and its object of study.

They argued that a close examination of the history and rhetoric of the human sciences revealed that objects of scholarly attention within disciplines often shift in ways that are unrelated to the accumulation of empirical evidence. What keeps a disciplinary community stable instead is its relationship to wider social and historical discourses, discourses that are shaped by and express a variety of competing interests that have little to do with the reality of the object of study. Just as words retain a somewhat stable meaning because they are embedded in a larger system of language, disciplinary discourses remain stable because they are embedded in a larger system of social discourses.

The result is an inversion of the traditional conception of an academic discipline. Instead of the object of study defining the process of inquiry, the process of inquiry creates the object that it examines. This social production of the object of



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inquiry serves to legitimate the norms associated with that object. Foucault (1982) explains,

I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. . . . [This presents us with] a task that consists of not—of no longer treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. (p. 176)

If it is not the objects, but instead various human interests expressed through social discourses, that ultimately shape academic disciplines, then the enlightenment project of establishing a knowledge base beyond politics becomes impossible. The norms that guide our inquiry become an effect of, not a refuge from, the operation of power:

Power and knowledge directly imply one another. . . . There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 27–28)

What emerges from this analysis is a powerful argument for encouraging epistemic and methodological diversity in the social sciences. The interdependent relationship between knowledge and power implies that oppression operates, in part, by artificially narrowing the range of what counts as legitimate knowledge. Remarking on the relation between power and narrative forms of knowledge, Lyotard (1984) elaborates,

In the West, narrative knowledge has been subjugated by scientific knowledge. The latter is “governed by the demand for legitimation” and, as a long history of imperialism from the dawn of Western civilization demonstrates, cannot accept anything that fails to conform to the rules (the requirement for proof or argumentation) of its own language game. (p. 27)

What also emerges from this analysis is a deep ambivalence about social science that seeks to intervene in the lives of those it studies. Post-structuralism provides analytic tools that help surface the way allegedly objective social science inquiry has served the function of legitimating arbitrary and hurtful social practices. Post-structuralism does not, however, make the development of alternative normative commitments part of its project. Just because our way of knowing the world is mediated by power and human interests it does not mean that there is an alternative way of knowing that escapes this condition. The gap between our descriptions of the world and the actual world is, for the post-structuralist, ultimately unbreachable.⁹

What we are left with is an infinite series of supplemental descriptions of the world, and descriptions of those descriptions, of which we need to remain suspicious. Post-structuralist social analysis self-consciously locates itself as one more of these redescriptions.¹⁰

Here, then, we can see both the similarities and the differences between post-structuralist social analysis and narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry seeks to examine experience with an eye to identifying new possibilities within that experience. It maintains that knowledge gained from that experience has a linguistic structure; specifically, it maintains, with Lyotard, White, Jameson, and others, that some knowledge is narrative in form.

For the post-structuralist, however, our narrative knowledge has an entirely discursive provenance. Signs can only rely on other signs for their meaning, and thus inquiry does not deal with lived experience itself. Such experience may exist. But as soon as we speak or write about it, we have moved into the process of re-presentation. Representations depend on other representations and discursive systems for their meaning. Consequently, the post-structuralist researcher may listen to stories that individual persons tell her or him. But in so doing she or he will not be interpreting those experiences as immediate sources of knowledge and insight; instead, she or he will be listening through the person's story to hear the operation of broader social discourses shaping that person's story of their experience.

Narrative inquiry, by way of contrast, begins with a pragmatic ontology that treats lived experience as both the beginning and ending points of inquiry. Various social and cultural influences may come into play during the inquiry. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note,

In narrative inquiry, people are looked at as embodiments of lived stories. Even when narrative inquirers study institutional narratives, such as stories of school, people are seen as composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives. (p. 43)

In a narrative inquiry, these social and cultural influences are not treated only as the occasions for critical exposure. They are treated as resources to be used in the pursuit of always tentative and partial ameliorations of experience. This is, of course, a normative project. The norms, for better or worse, must come from within the lived experience being studied. This translates into a collaborative ethic for inquiries, one in which researchers trained in the academy do not presume a transcendent perspective that explains away the stories they and their participants live as mere effects of preexisting social discourses. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) express a narrative inquirer's ambivalence about post-structuralism and post-modernism as follows:

Because nothing is, as it seems, the only things worth noticing are the terms, the formal structures, by which things are perceived. One does not teach, one mindlessly reproduces a social structure; one does not have emotionally credited intentions, one has preset expectations; one does not have experiences

that are one's own, one merely moves forward by contextual design. . . . Persons, they argue, can never see themselves as they are because they are always something else; specifically, they are whatever social structure, ideology, theory or framework is at work in the inquiry. Because narrative inquiry entails a reconstruction of a person's experience in relation to others and to a social milieu, it is under suspicion as not representing the true context and the proper "postera" by formalists. (p. 39)

The use of the term *formalist* here may be confusing to some, because in the field of literary criticism, post-structuralism emerged as a critical alternative to a school of thought known as formalism.¹¹ In the above passage, Clandinin and Connelly use the term more generally. The point they make is that once our representations of experience are assumed to be unmoored from any genuine relation with that experience, then all that is left to analyze is the formal relationship between different discursive systems.

So why not accept the post-structural emphasis on formal symbolic relations, besides the fact that some might find it distasteful? A precise philosophical answer requires returning to the way post-structuralism is grounded in the application of Saussurean ideas about the operation of language to the whole of human experience. Rosiek and Atkinson (2005) explain the limitation of this view as follows:

At a logical level, the presumption that all signifiers have an arbitrary relationship with the things they signify is questionable at best. This view of semiotics, taken as an article of faith by most post-structuralists (Derrida, 1974; Sherriff, 1989), is based on an extrapolation of the characteristics of linguistic signs to all other signifying activity. . . . Without a sound defense of a general arbitrariness in the sign relation, the complete collapse of individual experience into social dynamics is not possible. (p. 12)

There are alternative semiotic theories that pay more attention to individual embodied experience as a source of meaning. For example, Charles Sanders Peirce (1991), arguably the founder of the pragmatic philosophical tradition, argued that meaning required a signifier, a signified, and an embodied interpreter of the sign. Peirce recognized that some meaning existed primarily at a linguistic level in the formal relations between signifiers. Other meaning, however, arises from more immediate less socialized experiences. Physical pain, visual stimulation, viscerally experienced affections, abrupt disconfirmations of one's expectations, and so forth are also sources of meaning. Additionally, according to Peirce, the encounter with any sign—linguistic or not—is mediated by embodied habits of interpretation, habits that have a history in the individual and in their community. Thus, when a person loves, his or her love is not a floating signifier that simply acquires meaning because the object of affection fits the category of loveable. It is also a habit of relating to an individual with a unique history and for whom there is no substitute.

The existence of such alternative semiotic theories does not foreclose debates between post-structuralists and narrative inquirers. The post-structuralist scholar,

like the Marxist-influenced scholar, can still accuse the narrative inquirer of being at best naive about the way social forces shape personal experience and the social construction of knowledge. At worst, they can accuse narrative inquirers of creating a program of research that, through its commitment to an ontology of experience, functions to silence forms of analysis that cannot be readily reconciled with those commitments. The narrative inquirer can respond that the post-structuralist's privileging of macrosocial discursive formations as an exclusive unit of analysis is excessive. Yet such macrosocial influences exist and must be considered. However, the claim that they are all that exists, and that therefore nothing is to be learned from a study of experience as lived, is at best condescending and unjustified. At worst, in its exclusive preoccupation with critique, post-structuralism can be accused of sacrificing real possibilities for amelioration and political engagement.

As we have stated before, divisiveness in interdisciplinary exchanges is not helpful. In our view, the differences between narrative inquiry and post-structuralist analysis are more a matter of emphasis. Each form of emphasis comes with its attendant risks. Narrative inquirers choose to take their risks with people and the stories they live and tell. Sometimes this means working within problematic social discourses longer than the post-structuralist would. In the following, Cornel West (1993) describes the kind of decision that ultimately must be made at this philosophical boundary:

It takes us right to the center of a dialogue between various postmodern theorists, who would put forth a social constructivist thesis, and pragmatists, who themselves claim to endorse a social constructivist thesis, but do not render in their own writings a consciousness of the degree to which they are deploying terms which themselves are constructs.

Now see, I would opt for the latter. . . . I would opt for the pragmatist who does in fact affirm social constructs from culture to culture, civilization to civilization. Why? Because it is so unavoidable, given the kind of socialization and acculturation human beings undergo in a given culture . . . we can accent the constructive character of the individual deed and what have you. Once we have done that, I am not sure we have done as much as the post-modern theorists think we have. (pp. 51–52)

Having identified some of the border conditions of what we are calling the field of narrative inquiry, we now turn to an exploration of the way those borders blur and run together—in other words, to an exploration of the borderlands of narrative inquiry.

Borderlands of Narrative Inquiry

Borders are abstractions. They exist as clear demarcations of territory only on maps but do not show up so clearly in the real world (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). The preceding review of the philosophical territory in which narrative

inquiry takes place highlighted the differences between four traditions of inquiry. In our effort to make these distinctions clear, we spoke in terms of epistemological and ontological differences. In the practice of research, however, such philosophical exactness is often a luxury. The actual business of interpreting human experience is messier. As researchers we find ourselves drifting, often profitably, from one paradigm of inquiry into another. We do not cross borders as much as we traverse borderlands.

Although we believe attention to the philosophical assumptions that distinguish narrative inquiry from other forms of research can be very useful to a narrative inquirer, experience has also taught us that some caution is in order. The temptation to reify borders, to think of them as real and necessary features of experience, is often strong, especially for academics. As some feminist philosophers warn,

This tendency to dichotomize human experiences is persistent, powerful, and pernicious. Dualistic categories are such an organizing force because they provide a simple classification system that allows even the most complex and elusive qualities to be compared and contrasted in bold, clear terms. (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997, p. 119)

To avoid this pitfall, it is important to respectfully examine, rather than conveniently ignore, the cases that don't fit our categorizations and dichotomies.

Fortunately, much work has already been done in this regard. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have described the places where narrative inquiry intersects with other ways of thinking as "bumping places," conceptual spaces where different traditions of inquiry come together and where tensions become apparent. Clandinin and Connelly note that all inquirers come to their inquiries with their own views, attitudes, and ways of thinking. Our personal narratives of inquiry may

coincide with or cross a boundary to varying degrees with the actual inquiries that we undertake. Almost all of us—it is almost unimaginable that we could not—come to narrative inquiries with various versions of formalistic and reductionistic histories of inquiry . . . we are forever struggling with personal tensions as we pursue narrative inquiry . . . narrative inquirers need to reconstruct their own narrative of inquiry histories and to be alert to possible tensions between those narrative histories and the narrative research they undertake. (p. 46)

Huber and Keats Whelan (in press) employ the language of "borders." Citing Gloria Anzaldúa's writing on *Mestisa* consciousness, they write about "a struggle of borders, both interior and exterior." They draw our attention to the close connection between the struggles within each of us and our struggle with external forces as we locate ourselves in the landscape of narrative inquiry. These interior and exterior struggles, according to these authors, do not take the form of clear and distinct borders. Instead, they are better thought of as borderlands in which scholars situate themselves.

In what follows, we play with the idea of borderlands, those spaces that exist around borders where one lives within the possibility of multiple plotlines. This way of understanding the spaces around the philosophical borders we have described fits with a view of a landscape that does not have sharp divides that mark where one leaves one way of making sense for another. Anzaldúa (1987) writes of a borderland as a

vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary . . . a constant state of transition. Los *atravesados* live here . . . those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal.” (p. 3)

Although Anzaldúa is writing of individuals’ experiences as they compose themselves in crossing cultural and national boundaries, the idea of a borderland is helpful for understanding the tensions that exist for those of us who work within the broad plotlines of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers frequently find themselves crossing cultural discourses, ideologies, and institutional boundaries. In this work they often encounter both deep similarities and profound differences between their own experience and those with whom they work, neither of which can be reduced to the other.

The result is less a harmonious single explanation of their world than it is an expanded understanding of the tensions and conflicted possibilities in the stories people live. Maria Lugones (1992) notes that Anzaldúa affirms this dissonance. She writes of a “mestiza consciousness [which] is characterized by the development of a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity, by the transgression of rigid conceptual boundaries, and by the creative breaking of the new unitary aspect of new and old paradigms” (p. 34).

We need to be careful in appropriating Anzaldúa’s words, so as not to engage in an imperialist whitewashing of her work. Narrative inquiry does not take as its primary focus the intersection of processes of colonization, patriarchal oppression, and racist exclusion that Anzaldúa made it her life’s work to engage. All of these systemic injustices and their intersections, however, do find their way into narrative inquiries because they are a part of people’s lives and lived stories. Furthermore, the institutional terrain in which narrative inquirers often struggle to locate themselves are similarly fraught with power struggles over whose voices are worth listening to. Therefore, as narrative inquirers locate themselves within the broad ideas of what it means to engage in narrative inquiry, they too seem to enter into a liminal space, where conceptual boundaries are still in the making and the possibilities for what we might do are diverse. Thus, although Anzaldúa was not originally writing about narrative inquiry, we think her ideas apply here.

What Anzaldúa teaches us is that borders are never clean and clear but are blurred as regions overlap and come together. A view of borderlands understood as Anzaldúa explicated them is a view that fits well with the borderland spaces inhabited by narrative inquiry as it bumps up against post-positivism, Marxism, and post-structuralism but it also fits with the borderland spaces that exist within the broad field of narrative inquiry.

Borderland Spaces With Post-Positivism

As we considered these borderland spaces, we began to see that there is no sharp divide, there are blurred borders and researchers are more or less clear about how they can engage their research questions and practices depending on their place on the landscape in relation to narrative inquiry and post-positivist forms of inquiry. Adopting a view of borderlands between narrative inquiry and post-positivism, we began to see that researchers, working from a post-positivist view and searching for ways to understand phenomena, sometimes design their research in ways that allow them to draw on practices similar to those narrative inquirers might use.

For example, post-positivist research that attempts to understand how contexts, understood temporally, influence, shape, and are shaped by people's actions shift researchers toward examining the context dependent and temporal nature of human thinking generally. As they search for ways to study the shaping influence of context over time they begin to engage in practices that might be seen as having an affinity with the practices of narrative inquirers who are also interested in studying how context shifts individuals' storied experiences over time. Narrative inquirers, in turn, often find this kind of post-positivist research affirming and illuminating of their own inquiry projects.

These affirmations and illuminations can lead narrative inquirers deeper into the borderlands, where the priorities of post-positivist research begin to replace the priorities of narrative inquiry. For example, some narrative inquirers search for ways to speak to a sense of "the universal case" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 32). Some narrative inquirers, unable to live with the tension produced by constantly proliferating counter narratives, search for ways to ameliorate this tension by seeking universal themes in which the narrative tensions can be contained. In that search, they move into the borderlands with post-positivist research, which takes the identification of generalizable patterns in human experience as its primary goal (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This desire to speak to the universal comes, we think, from being immersed in an academic world that encourages us to speak to the universal. Thomas King (2003) describes this impulse as an attraction to

dichotomy, the elemental structure of Western society. And cranky old Jacques Derrida notwithstanding, we do love our dichotomies. Rich/poor, white/black, strong/weak, right/wrong, culture/nature, male/female, written/oral, civilized/barbaric, success/failure, individual/communal. We trust easy oppositions. We are suspicious of complexities, distrustful of contradictions, fearful of enigmas. (p. 25)

As narrative inquirers move further into this borderland, the desire to speak of general trends, of the context free, and to provide a stable knowledge base for social science inquiry stands in tension with a narrative inquiry view that knowledge of human experience begins and must return to the stream of particular human lives. This tension can be a source of new ideas and rich interdisciplinary dialogue. It can also become the cover for forms of academic violence.

Take, for example, the researcher who listens to people's stories, not as a prelude to collaboratively enhancing those persons' continuing experience but instead as a prelude to identifying common themes and universal narrative structures. On the one hand, important insights about narrative aspects of human experience might be revealed in such a study. On the other hand, from our Deweyan view, such a study severs the narratives from the relational, temporal, and continuous features of experience that give it meaning. The story is thus ripped from the personal history of the one living it and is treated as fixed data, much as one might treat numerical data. We use the word *ripped* deliberately, to highlight not only the decontextualization of the story but also the power and status differentials that are often involved when social scientists conduct research on, as opposed to with, people. (See a discussion of this point in Tsai's chapter in this volume.)

Tracking the lines of epistemic and ethical responsibility in this kind of research becomes more difficult in the borderlands, where paradigmatic standards become blurred. As a result, these borderland disputes within the broad field of narrative inquiry are frequently glossed over. We, however, see the importance of naming the struggle of living in the borderlands and acknowledging both the possibilities and the violence that accompany the emergence of subtly different but nonetheless conflicting ontological and epistemological stances.

Borderland Spaces With Marxism

As in the borderlands between narrative inquiry and post-positivism, we see researchers working from a Marxist-influenced view sometimes asking research questions and raising concerns that resemble narrative inquiry in many respects. Most frequently, this movement is inspired by a felt need to bring a Marxist-influenced critique of the macrosocial sources of oppression into practical relation with immediate experience. Critical ethnographer Barry Kanpol (1997) describes the questions he encountered in his travels along this borderland as follows:

I have over the last few years or so begun to ask these problematic questions: To what end do critical educators theorize? Why is theory so devoid of personal narrative? What relationship has critical theory to the everyday life-world of those who work in the trenches, such as teachers, administrators, students and researchers? Why doesn't critical analysis and practice seriously find its way into public schools?

Once the importance of personal narratives to critical theoretic analysis is acknowledged, many political purposes are ascribed to narrative inquiry. Critical race theorist Richard Delgado (1989) made exactly this point in his widely cited article "Legal Storytelling: Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea For Narrative," which highlights three ways that attention to people's stories can be an important way of responding to macrosocial forms of oppression. First, he argues, it serves a healing function:

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So, stories—stories about oppression, about victimization, about one's own brutalization—far from deepening the despair of the oppressed, lead to healing, liberation, mental health. . . . Storytelling emboldens the hearer, who may have had the same thoughts and experiences the storyteller describes, but hesitated to give them voice. Having heard another express them, he or she realizes, I am not alone. (p. 2437)

Second, it can contribute to the transformation of oppressors. Silence is an essential part of processes of macrosocial oppression. Inequality and injustice are sustained, in part, by the ways in which privileged members of society insulate themselves from the suffering of others. Attending to the narratives of marginalized groups can disrupt this insularity.

Yet, stories help oppressed groups in a second way—through their effect on the oppressor. Most oppression, as was mentioned earlier, does not seem like oppression to those perpetrating it. It is rationalized causing few pangs of conscience. The dominant group justifies its privileged position by means of stories, stock explanations that construct reality in ways favorable to it. (Delgado, 1989, p. 2437)

Finally, Delgado (1989) argues that paying attention to people's stories opens up possibilities for generating new stories in which we can all live:

Listening to stories makes the adjustment to further stories easier; one acquires the ability to see the world through others' eyes. It can lead the way to new environments. . . . Listening to the stories of outgroups can avoid intellectual apartheid. Shared words can banish sameness, stiffness, and monochromaticity and reduce the felt terror of otherness when hearing new voices for the first time. . . . If we would deepen and humanize ourselves, we must seek out storytellers different from ourselves and afford them the audience they deserve. The benefit will be reciprocal. (p. 2439)

As we noted above, for the narrative inquirer, a person's experience needs to be listened to on its own terms first, without the presumption of deficit or flaw. Critique of that experience needs to be motivated by the problematic elements within that experience. For the critical scholar drawn into the borderland with narrative inquiry, such commitments do not come easily. It requires that they simultaneously acknowledge that an individual's experience is shaped by macrosocial processes of which she or he is often unaware and that the same individual's experience is more than the living out of a socially determined script. We see some of this struggle in Shari Stone-Mediatore's (2003) book *Reading Across Borders: Storytelling and Postcolonial Struggles*, in which she writes,

Feminist epistemologists, for instance, have warned that we cannot rely on experience to counter ideology because experience itself is formed through

ideological processes. Furthermore, as feminists in the Marxist tradition emphasize, the “reality” that we encounter is a product of human history, but everyday experience tends to confront such historical reality as if it were mere fact. As Sandra Harding puts it, “our experience lies to us.” (p. 99)

As she enters a borderland space between Marxist-influenced views and narrative inquiry, Stone-Mediatore does not want to lose track of the large-scale material conditions that shape human life, but she also wants to credit the force of the experiences of individuals who live in marginal positions in dominant narratives. As she searches for ways to study experience, she begins to engage in practices that might be seen as having an affinity with the practices of narrative inquirers who are also interested in studying individual’s storied experiences as shaped by cultural, institutional, and social narratives. Citing the work of other transnational feminists in this methodological borderland, she observes that

these critics explore concrete ways that the most disempowered people can use resources in their daily lives to challenge the discourses and institutions that keep them in subservient positions . . . they . . . investigate how we might transform lived experiences of discontent into critical knowledge and political consciousness. They recognize narration to be key in the transformation of experience into useful knowledge. (p. 126)

We see this struggle to reconcile respect for the experience of individuals with a concern about the way ideologies distort experience in critical ethnography informed by feminist scholarship, such as that done by Michelle Fine and Lois Weis (Fine, 1987; Fine & Weis, 2003). As early as her landmark work in New York schools in the 1980s, Fine wanted to hear the stories of experience of the high-school students even as she wanted to engage in a macrosocial analysis. Focusing on the silencing of voices that she defines as “the process by which contradictory evidence, ideologies, and experiences find themselves buried, camouflaged, and discredited” (Fine, 1987, p. 157), she attends to the voices of Deidre, Alicia, Monique, and Patrice. An example of the borderland struggle is evident when Fine writes that students’ voices helped her see that, for her, “participation was encouraged, delighted in, and a measure of the ‘good student.’ For these adolescents, given their contexts of schooling, ‘participation’ signified poor discipline and rude classroom behavior” (Fine, 1987, p. 167). It was, it seems, as she listened first to the stories of the students’ experiences that she began to attend differently to what she was hearing. In her later work with Weis, we continue to see her working in the borderland of contradictions between narrative inquiry and Marxist-influenced scholarship. It is in this borderland space between acknowledging the macrosocial dimensions of oppression and attending to the voices of youth, teachers, and others that Fine and Weis see the possibility for “facilitating individual and collective movements toward social change and social justice” (Fine & Weis, 2003, pp. 4–5).

Approaching from the other side of the border, the narrative inquirer drawn to the borderland with Marxist-influenced scholarship also faces struggle. These

narrative inquirers often experience conflict as they recognize their own and others' complicity with institutionalized oppression and find it difficult to continue listening to the storied experience of participants. The more attention a researcher pays to macrosocial structural processes of oppression—be it patriarchy, white supremacist ideologies, institutionalized homophobia, or market economies commodifying every aspect of our lives—the less it may seem that individuals and their experiences make a difference. Focusing on the details of personal experience can feel like escapism.

The need to respond to the structural conditions of oppression is often most acutely felt by narrative inquirers who have previously done service in urban communities or remote rural communities where poverty rates are high and the maldistribution of wealth and resources is most felt. However, scholars who begin their analysis from a position of service to those among us who suffer most, often do so because they feel respect for members of these communities. Frequently, the researchers are members of the communities themselves. Consequently, they want to listen to the stories of the people they seek to serve. They prefer to conduct research with, not on, the people with whom they work.

It is this commitment to listening and collaboration, on the one hand, and an awareness that large-scale social systems set people up to perpetuate their own oppression, on the other hand, that can lead a researcher to the borderlands between narrative inquiry and critical-theoretic scholarship. We offer no easy resolution to this tension. Instead, we offer a caution. Ultimately, the narrative inquirer traveling in this borderland will find it necessary to steer between the Scylla of political naïveté and the Charybdis of collecting stories from participants only to treat them as examples of an oppressive social structure. The former can render narrative inquiries irrelevant to the most pressing social justice concerns. The latter can end up dismissing the lived experience of persons as a possible source of insight and thus simply replace one habit of silencing voices from the margins with another similar habit.

Borderland Spaces With Post-Structuralism

Perhaps the most highly trafficked theoretical and methodological borderland of the three we discuss here is the one between narrative inquiry and post-structuralism. As described in the preceding sections, narrative inquirers share a use of linguistic terms for describing human knowledge and experience with post-structuralists. Consequently, many scholars draw liberally from both traditions when conducting their research. Differences in the underlying ontological assumptions of these two theoretical frameworks, however, occasionally surface in this borderland, producing tensions, confusions, as well as new possibilities for analysis.

The tensions are similar to those found in the previous theoretical borderlands we have described. For example, post-structuralists share with post-positivists a primary focus on description of broad patterns in human activity as distinct from narrative inquirers' focus on individuals' experience. Despite the profound differences between

these two theories, each has its way of minimizing what people learn struggling to live in the interstices of these broad patterns of human activity, be they behavioral or discursive, cognitive or cultural. Stone-Mediatore (2003) speaks to the borderland spaces created between post-positivism, post-structuralism, and narrative inquiry. Referring to post-positivist research paradigms broadly as “empiricist,” she explains,

Neither empiricist nor poststructuralist theories of experience can account for the subversive force of many marginal experience narratives . . . both schools presume that stories of experience are mere unreflective reports of spontaneous awareness. As a result, both obscure the capacity of writers to grapple with muted, contradictory, or even traumatized experience. Moreover, both overlook the capacity of readers to attend to phenomena that are only intimated by metaphors or tension within texts, phenomena that are not directly articulated because they defy our categories for representing experience. (p. 2)

Post-structuralists also share with critical theory scholars a concern that large-scale social processes can condition individual experience so thoroughly that individuals cannot recognize the operation of those processes. This only reinforces their skepticism about truth claims based on personal experience. The difference between post-structuralists and critical theory scholars, as described earlier, is that the post-structuralist sees no escape from discursive processes, no way to finally anchor even scholarly representations in an extradiscursive reality.

Consequently, post-structuralists who find themselves in the borderlands with narrative inquiry often arrive there less because they consider the people’s stories sources of new knowledge about social reality and more because they are attracted to the productive power of stories. They are looking for a way to move beyond description of the formal qualities of social discourses to transformative intervention but need a mode of intervention that is not totalizing:

What is sought is a reflexive process that focuses on our too easy use of taken-for-granted forms and that might lead us towards a science capable of continually demystifying the realities it serves to create. [I envisage] an altogether different approach to doing empirical inquiry which advocates the creation of a more hesitant and partial scholarship capable of helping us to tell a better story in a world marked by the elusiveness with which it greets our efforts to know it. (Lather, 1991, p. 15)

Scholars influenced by post-structuralist theory and attracted to the productive power of stories frequently focus on exploring the use of narrative representations in educational research. They frame the purpose of crafting narrative representations in different ways, sometimes emphasizing political and rhetorical value, at other times their aesthetic value, and at other times their ability to foster emotional and moral responses to a topic. Across these purposes, however, lies a sense that narratives can make things happen in ways that other forms of representation cannot. Sconiers and Rosiek (2000) explain this as follows:

When used in the postmodern sense, narrative research treats all representations of educational events—informant's as well as researcher's—as partially fictionalized (re)presentations whose meaning exists in a contested space between authors and their audiences (Hall, 1992; Kincheloe, 1997; Stake & Kerr, 1995). In this case, the researcher's project is not to escape the textual play of meaning by establishing privileged access to "one true account" of a classroom event, but to participate constructively in an intertextual dialogue about the meaning of these events (Denzin, 1997). When used in the arts-based, performative sense, narrative research can employ fictionalized accounts of events as a way of pointing to as yet unrealized possibilities within that experience (Eisner, 1995; Noddings, 1995; Stake & Kerr, 1995) or as a means of producing the conditions that make certain meanings possible (Butler, 1997; Conquergood, 1991; Lather, 1997). (p. 400)

The promise of this focus on using narrative modes of representation in social science research is that it may "open up an imaginative space for us to recognize alternative identities and ways of life" (Stone-Mediatore, 2000, p. 99) or "lift the veil of conventionality from my eyes as they subtly raise disturbing questions about the necessity and desirability of comfortable, familiar . . . discourses and practices" (Barone, in press). The danger is that the ambition to generate new and better versions of our world will presumptively erase or displace the stories people are already living. The goal of transformation inevitably involves hubris and raises the question "Whose transformation?" Where the motivation is more aesthetic than political, we see narrative inquirers occasionally becoming entranced by a particularly striking metaphor through which they choose to read their participants' stories. They become so caught up in the metaphor that they no longer attend to the stories of experience but, rather, attend to how the stories of experience fit within the entailments of the metaphor. The threat of colonialism and dehumanization looms large.

For those approaching this borderland from the other side, starting closer to narrative inquiry as we have described it, the attraction to post-structuralist theory is often similar to the attraction to critical theory. Concern about the way broad systems of social oppression obscure people's ability to see their own participation in those systems inspires a search for language that can express ambivalence about insights that arise from within stories as lived, without completely discounting first-person experience as a source of important knowledge.

For example, in a study of the experiences of four white teachers who taught in aboriginal schools, Kennedy (2001) struggled to attend to her participants' stories of experience while simultaneously attending to how theoretical constructions of race shaped the teachers' stories. The tension of the borderland was evident as she struggled to listen to the reconstruction of the teachers' experiences in relation to others and to a social milieu without being caught into attending only to the social structure of race. She wrote of trying to snag the race thread in individuals' experiences as it emerged rather than beginning with it preemptively. Within this borderland space, Kennedy frequently finds her work being read for the post-structuralist terms that apply:

A person is a member of a race, a class, a gender, and may be said to have varying degrees of power in any situation. Part of the tension for a narrative inquirer is to acknowledge these truths while holding to a different research agenda. (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 45)

This borderland tension and struggle is also evident in the work of Soreide (in press). In her paper titled “Narrative Construction of Teacher Identity: Positioning and Negotiation,” Soreide explores how the discourse communities of five Norwegian elementary school teachers shape their teacher knowledge landscapes. She shows how the teachers draw from the available discourses to compose and to construct their teacher identities. Her struggle emerges when she wants to treat each individual’s experience as a unique case, deserving respect and attention tailored to their situation and personal history, even as she wants to use their words to illustrate and illuminate how broader social discourses condition their experience. Soreide uses post-structuralist theory to analyze the stories teachers tell of themselves—that is, what Soreide calls their ontological narratives. Instead of presenting these narratives as derivative of the discourses, she attempts to show how the teachers’ subject positions were used as a resource by the teachers in constructing their personal narratives of teacher identity. Soreide writes in the borderland between narrative inquiry and its attention to individual experience and the post-structuralist’s privileging of macrosocial discursive formations as a unit of analysis. She turns uneasily in both directions, that is, to the individual’s narratives of experience as source of identity and the macrosocial discursive formations to show how teacher identity is context dependent, negotiable and negotiated, shifting, multiple, and contradictory.

Another striking example of the struggles inherent in the borderland between narrative inquiry and post-structuralist research is found in Borland’s (1991) description of her feminist oral history research with her grandmother. She described how her grandmother, Beatrice, recounted her life “in a highly structured and thoroughly entertaining narrative . . . to her folklorist-granddaughter, who recorded her words on a tape for later transcription and analysis” (p. 63). Beatrice and her granddaughter, however, did not interpret this narrative in the same way, and this later led to conflicts between the two. The grandmother wanted her stories of experience to be both the starting and ending points of the inquiry. Borland writes that her analysis of those stories was informed by “contemporary feminist conceptions of patriarchal structures, which my grandmother does not share” (p. 69). Borland found herself in the borderland between narrative inquiry and post-structuralism as she wants to attend to her grandmother’s experience but does not want to abandon her feminist theories. Borland speculates that some form of polyphonic representation may be needed to honor both these interpretations:

I am suggesting that we might open up the exchange of ideas so that we do not simply gather data on others to fit into our own paradigms once we are safely ensconced in our university libraries ready to do interpretation. By extending

the conversation we initiate while collecting oral narratives to the later state of interpretation, we might more sensitively negotiate issues of interpretive authority in our research. . . . At the very least, it would allow us to discern more clearly when we speak in unison and when we disagree. Finally, it would restructure the traditionally unidirectional flow of information out from source to scholar to academic audience by identifying our field collaborators as an important first audience for our work. Lest we, as feminist scholars, unreflectively appropriate the words of our mothers for our own uses, we must attend to the multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings generated by our framing or contextualizing of their oral narratives in new ways. (p. 73)

As these examples illustrate, the narrative inquirer who lives in the borderland spaces with post-structuralist researchers lives in spaces that do not allow for easy oppositions. As narrative inquirers live in such spaces, we need to find ways to stay open to complexities, contradictions, and enigmas. As we do this, we acknowledge the richness and complexity as well as the possibility for tension, violence, and strong disagreement that make these borderland spaces.

Looking Back Across the Borderlands

We began this section by acknowledging that borders, philosophical or geographic, become less clear the closer you get to them. We offered, therefore, that it was better to speak of borderlands, regions of shared influence between different research traditions. Before we close, we should also acknowledge that these influences themselves lack clear edges. Even when a researcher's primary philosophical commitments are clear, other scholarly paradigms can shape their work with important findings, by posing pressing questions or by offering critique from outside. In other words, the influence of, say, positivism on narrative inquiry does not abruptly end as much as it tapers off depending on who you are talking to and what you are talking about.

Consequently, the influence of our philosophical neighbors can be seen even far from what we have described as borderlands. We can see what we might call borderlands *within* the community of narrative inquirers. Some narrative inquirers are more interested in the structure of professional identity narratives. Others are more interested in the difficulty some individuals have in addressing the big picture social justice issues in our world. Others are more interested in working with people to aesthetically craft new narrative representations of experience. Some find themselves working to combine these interests and others. Such differences of emphasis and interest, we offer, are not simply idiosyncratic. They can often be traced to the scholarly literature being read by a given narrative inquirer.

These borderlands within, just like the borderlands with other traditions, can create tensions and provoke strong disagreements. Ultimately, however, we see these multiple influences that overlap and shade into one another as contributing to the richness and complexity of narrative inquiry.

Shared Commitments: Commonplaces on the Narrative Inquiry Landscape

In this chapter, we laid out an understanding of narrative inquiry that emerges from Dewey's theory of experience. As we did this, we created a map that positioned narrative inquiry alongside, but distinct from, post-positivist, Marxist, and post-structuralist forms of inquiry. In doing so we suggested there were borderland spaces between these various forms of inquiry, borderlands in which these distinctions become blurred and difficult to identify. We attempted to show how these borderlands were spaces of tension and struggle and how these struggles and tensions become apparent within differing research practices and texts. We ended by saying these borderland struggles are echoed to some extent in the differences we see within and among narrative inquirers.

In this section, we want to affirm that amid the influence of our philosophical neighbors, there is something distinctive about narrative inquiry that marks it as narrative inquiry. There are affinities and commonplaces among those of us who engage in narrative inquiry. These multiple influences and tensions enhance the field of narrative inquiry rather than overwhelm it.

The most defining feature of narrative inquiry, as we have presented it, is the study of experience as it is lived. As noted throughout this chapter, experience is what is studied in narrative inquiry and we argued for a Deweyan view of experience. This shared commitment to the study of experience is central to narrative inquiry. Within this focus, there are additional shared commitments in narrative inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (2006), based on their own work with narrative inquiry and based on a review of others' writing about narrative inquiry (Josselson, 1993; Lieblich, 1995; McAdams, 1996; Mishler, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988), identified three further commonplaces of narrative inquiry—attention to temporality, sociality, and place—which specify dimensions of narrative inquiry spaces and mark out the landscape space of narrative inquiry.

The first commonplace, temporality, attends to Dewey's notion of continuity in experience—that is, that every experience both takes up something from the present moment and carries it into future experiences. Events, people, and objects under study are in temporal transition and narrative inquirers describe them with a past, a present, and a future.

The second commonplace, sociality, points toward the simultaneous concern with both personal and social conditions. This commonplace connects with Dewey's notion of interaction—that is, that people are always in interaction with their situations in any experience. By personal conditions Clandinin and Connelly (2000) mean the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the person, whether inquirer or participant. By social conditions they mean the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form the individual's context.

Another important dimension of the sociality commonplace is the relationship between participant and inquirer. Narrative inquirers are always in an inquiry relationship with participants' lives. They cannot subtract themselves from relationship.

Narrative inquirers, throughout each inquiry, are in relationship, negotiating purposes, next steps, outcomes, texts, and the other concerns that go into an inquiry relationship. Nor can they pretend to be free of contextual influences themselves. As Rosiek (2005) points out, practitioners and their academic collaborators both “face similar conflicts between the discourses of their professional training and the discourses of the non-academic communities in which they live and work” (p. 269). In narrative inquiry, research questions and texts are ones where inquirers give an account of who they are in the inquiry and who they are in relation to participants.

The third commonplace, place or sequences of places, draws attention to the centrality of place, that is, to the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place. This commonplace recognizes that all events occur in some place. It draws attention to borderland tensions because those who work from post-positivist, post-structuralist, or Marxist positions may wish to escape the limitations of place in the interests of generalizability. For narrative inquirers, the specificity of location is important. The qualities of place and the impact of places on lived and told experiences are crucial. As Basso (1996) writes,

As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process—inward toward facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternately both together—cannot be known in advance. When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anybody’s guess. (p. 107)

As an inquiry proceeds temporally, place may also change and narrative inquirers need to stay awake to how place shifts the unfolding stories of lives.

These commonplaces are ideas that hold us together. They are commonplaces or touchstones that allow narrative inquirers to understand their research as occupying a distinct place on the methodological landscape.

Concluding Thoughts

Not everyone who engages in narrative inquiry will be inclined to dwell on its underlying philosophy at length. However, given the explosion of research under the broad heading of narrative inquiry, we feel opening up the debate about the philosophical roots of narrative inquiry as a research methodology brings a helpful clarity to the field. More important, in our view, it helps us not to waste energy on conflicts born of confusion and serves as an important starting point for helping narrative inquirers to be good neighbors in the broader community of scholars. As we continue to develop the ideas of narrative inquiry, we hope it enables us to recognize the good neighbors in others, even if they speak different theoretical languages.

As we reflect on our conceptual cartography of narrative inquiry, we are struck by the energy generated by those interested in studying people's lives. This rush to narrative inquiry and the willingness to move into the borderlands with narrative inquiry suggests an eagerness to understand in more complex and nuanced ways the storied experiences of individuals as they compose storied lives on storied landscapes.

We are also struck by the enthusiasm for narrative ways of thinking, for narrative ways of understanding knowledge and identity that cuts across disciplines and professions. As Rita Charon (2006), a leader in bringing narrative practices to medicine, writes,

We search the horizon—astronomers, oceanographers, artists, musicians, doctors, novelists, geneticists—seeking ways to recognize ourselves and those who surround us, yearning to place ourselves within space and time (and infinity), dramatizing our stubborn beliefs that life means something and that we ourselves matter. (p. 69)

What Charon draws our attention to is that stories matter and that, increasingly, we are interested in knowing the stories that all people live and tell. As we, and other narrative inquirers now know, inquiry, narrative inquiry, into those stories that people live and tell, also matters.

Consulting Editors: Becky Atkinson, Samford University and Janice Huber, St. Francis Xavier University

Notes

1. For example, a Mercator map of the globe preserves relative shapes and permits a viewing of the entire globe but makes objects appear larger the farther they are from the equator. A globe preserves both shape and size, but all areas cannot be viewed simultaneously. However, what area is selected as a center for the map shifts what is seen as marginal. For example, a map with North America in the center makes other areas marginal. A map that moves Asia from the margin to the center shifts how North America and Asia are seen. Something similar happens when the North Pole is in the center of the map. Each projection serves a purpose but also involves limitations in usefulness and accuracy.
2. Quotes from *The Collected Works of John Dewey* are copyright © 1986 by the Board of Trustees, Southern Illinois University, reproduced by permission of the publisher.
3. In the opinion of the authors, while Dewey's views are revolutionary, the revolution in the human sciences that his philosophy points to is yet to occur.
4. More will be said about this comparison in later sections.
5. Many who are attracted to narrative inquiry can be tempted to oversimplify the positivist position as a prelude to rejecting it. This does not advance the cause of narrative inquiry nor does it make for sound foundations of scholarship. For an economical summary of positivist and post-positivist epistemologies, see Phillips and Burbules (2000) and Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, and Norrie (1998).

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6. A *camera obscura* was an instrument used by artists during the Middle Age to cast an image onto paper by means of mirrors. Because the image was inverted, a lens was needed to correct it.

7. Epistemic questions about the accuracy of an analysis will inevitably arise in the course of such inquiry; however, epistemic standards would be adopted as a means to ontological intervention.

8. This utility, it perhaps should be pointed out, would not simply be in the form of a case illustration of ideologically distorted false consciousness—although narrative inquiry could, in fact, provide such illustrations.

9. Derrida (1972/1982) called this gap *différance*, of which he said:

In fact “Older” than Being itself, such a *différance* has no name in our language. But we “already know” that if it is unnamable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this name, or because we would have to seek it in another language, outside the finite system of our own. It is rather because there is no name for it at all, not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of “differance,” which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions (p. 26).

10. This emphasis on description may seem to move post-structuralism closer to positivism. Such proximity, if it exists, would be limited at best. The premise underlying post-structuralism is that our representations of the world (signifiers) cannot, by their very nature, achieve some kind of uniquely faithful relationship to the things that describe (signifieds). Given this assumption, the post-positivist ideal of assembling knowledge only from discrete falsifiable statements is both naive and nonsensical. Post-structuralists interpret post-positivism, like all epistemologies, as a discursive formation that functions primarily as a mode of social control masquerading as an ideal rationality.

11. These latter formalists approached the interpretation of literature with an eye to the formal qualities of the text alone, whereas the post-structuralists insisted on historicizing the meaning of the text and interpreting it in relation to the broader context of the entire social and cultural moment in which it was produced and read.

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