

NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

NP is focused upon the **structure**, **content** and **function** of stories that we tell each other and ourselves during social interaction

Our world is storied – through stories we...

- Interpret the actions of others and ourselves
- Shape the world and ourselves
- Are shaped through narrative, along with the world – co-construction

‘Autobiography: popular literary genre

NARRATIVE AS THEORY

- Wundt (1832-1920)
 - Father of experimental psychology
 - Parallel approach: Volkerpsychologie – beliefs, myths etc.

Moving from established narratives

e.g. sacred narratives of religion

to different accounts for guidance, justifications etc.

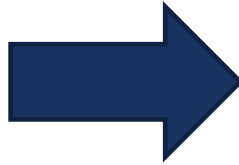
- 20thC: Increase in study of more open, personal accounts to more deeply understand human experience
 - Allport, Bruner and Jandorf (1941): Refugees from Nazi Germany
 - Allport:

“...the struggles of the common man, the picture of his daily life, all his homely values...

... autobiographies that give unaccented accounts of ordinary experience” (1942, p.xi)

NARRATIVE THINKING

Bruner (1986): Two ways of knowing



Paradigmatic

- Process of classifying and categorizing
- E.g. natural sciences
- Formal system of description and explanation

Narrative

- Means of making sense of the world by connecting events over time through stories
- E.g. Adult lives of ex-miners
- Dominant process of thinking within 'folk psychology'

“...the forging of links between the exceptional and the ordinary”

(Bruner, 1990, p.47)

NARRATIVE THINKING

Integrates the strange and unknown into the realm of everyday life

“The function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern”

(Bruner, 1990, pp.49-50)

Challenges cognitive notions – breaking thought and language into its smallest units

“People do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence. They frame events and sentences in larger structures”

(Bruner, 1990, p.64)

NARRATIVE THINKING

- Our world is described as a series of stories – some more coherent than others
- We use our own narratives and also draw upon the accounts of others
- We position ourselves and others within stories/narratives...
- ...and are positioned by others in their narratives

- To understand and communicate about action we organise our observations according to narrative plots

e.g.

- Actions of a person
- Development of a social group
- History of a culture

Depends on ability to construct a narrative

- Different/competing narratives
- Dominant narrative

STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVE: DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

Provides a coherent causal account of an event that has occurred or is expected to occur

Includes both causal and temporal dimensions of narrative
Extent of coherence may vary

- Provides a certain shape, structure and plot to a sequence of events
 - Cultural plots can be drawn upon
 - Number of cultural plots can differ - none, minimal – wide range
 - None, or minimal suggests live mainly in the present
 - Wider ranges allow shaping of the past and predictions for the future

Plot

- Coheres expansive sequence of events
- Brings order to finer details
- Endows meaning

SOCIAL NATURE OF NARRATIVE

“We swim in a sea of stories that seeps into our consciousness and into our very identity”
(Murray, 2003, p.98)

- Stories about lives = social constructions
- Uses everyday language
- Social nature of language shapes/conditions the character of narrative accounts
- People remember things together – personal memories shared through mode of narrative

(Ricoeur, 1997)

- Stories allow us to help others to understand
- Partly organised for us by the other person and also by the culture in which we live
- Stories are not fixed: Factors...
 - Narrator
 - Audience
 - Social and cultural context

SOCIAL NATURE OF NARRATIVE

- A story is co-constructed by two or more parties
- Power/influence: one party can shape the narrative
- Does not mean both parties agree to the narrative
- Dominant narratives become a means of social discipline
- Constant negotiation to connect personal narratives to dominant societal narratives



“Narratives serve as mediations between individual actions and material and social-structural conditions; they reflect the dynamics of ongoing negotiations, interpretations, and construals just as they indicate the constraints operating in these dynamics”

(Morawski, 1997, p.675)

CHALLENGES TO PLOT LINES

- Some events in our lives do not fit into a coherent form
- Difficulty in creating a narrative
- Person or community – adrift, uncertain, anxious

Suggested that people seek therapy when their narrative repertoire does not sufficiently encompass/explain everyday experiences

Narrative therapy: to extend repertoire for new and more satisfactory stories

- Focus on larger narratives that reflect dominant social plot lines

e.g. **Closure of the mines**

Rupture in coherence of person's life story

Larger narrative = 'Battle' between Prime Minister/Government/Police and the Miners

Different from personal experiences

NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

Telling of narratives closely interwoven with the shaping and maintenance of our identities

e.g. maintaining a sense of identity as a miner before, during and after the decline of the coal industry

“An individual’s story has the power to tie together past, present and future in his or her life. It is a story that he is able to provide unity and purpose...individual identities may be classified in the manner of stories. Identity stability is longitudinal consistency in the life story. Identity transformation – identity crisis, identity change – is story revision... Identity is a life story”

(McAdams, 1985, p.19)

NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

- Construction of narrative identity – dialogical: occurs in social context
- The social context may be real or imaginary
- Imaginary dialogues exist alongside actual dialogues with real others
 - They interweave with actual interactions and are an essential part of our narrative constructions of the world

COFFEE BREAK

15 MINUTES



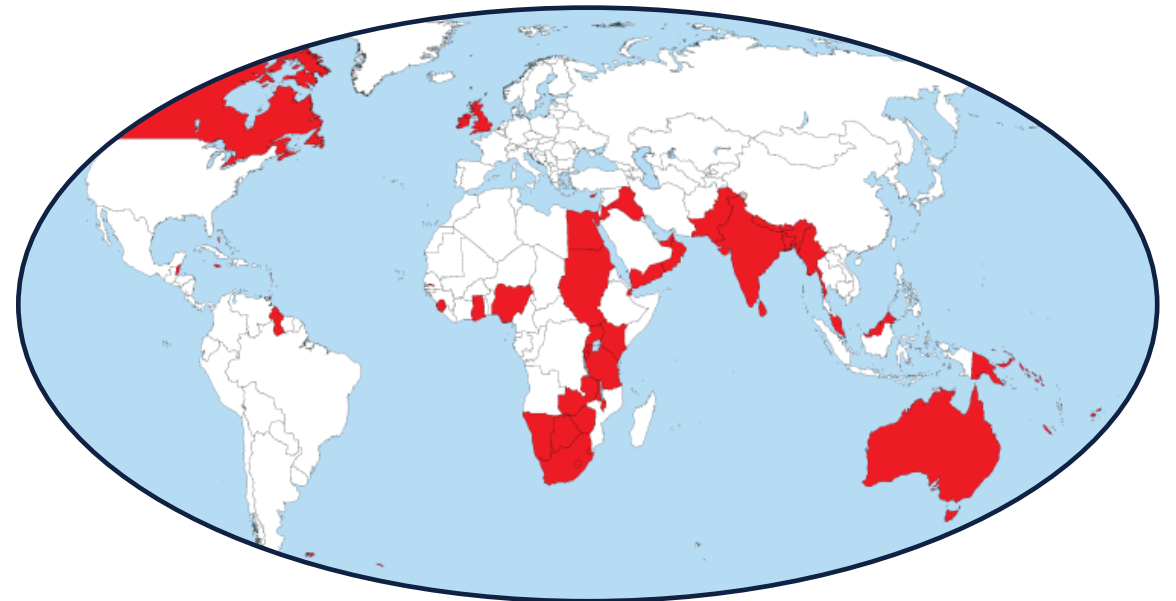
- Constructing our personal narrative closely connected to how we shape our social narratives

- Ricoeur (1991b):

- **Configuration:** primary activity – narrative brings structure to the world through various forms of emplotment

- **Reconfiguration:** how we define ourselves through narrative

- Narrative accounts fluid – not fixed
- Fluidity of narrative – debate about...
 - Identity
 - Character of history e.g. British Empire



NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS

- General interview research: interviewer may discourage sharing of narratives
 - How?
- Interruptions – suggest relevance of narrative elements to the researcher
- Strong adherence to interview schedule – aspects the researcher wants to explore
- Responses to particular elements of the narrative indicate how these are valued by the researcher
- Indications regarding socially desirable answers
- Power relations

NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS

- Narrative researchers: the collection of narrative accounts is at the centre of the interviews
- Gives the participant much more central control in shaping the agenda
- Narrative interviews ask the **participant** to identify the major themes
- E.g.

‘Would you tell me about your experience with chronic back pain?’

‘What was it like growing up with a seriously depressed parent?’

NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS: ROLE OF INTERVIEWER

- Argued that more than one meeting is required to get to know the interviewee
- Trust

- Personal storytelling – acceptance has increased
- Elderly people are particularly receptive to the extended narrative interview method – can look back with some objectivity?
- Memory?

Reflexivity

- Researcher's own role in co-constructing the narrative account
 - Expectations
 - Presence
 - Guiding - responses

NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS: LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEWS

- Aim: obtain a detailed account of a particular broad area of experience
- E.g. 'I'd like to hear about your experiences of education, training and work'
- Main emphasis: how the participant connects events together
 - How do they deal with ruptures in coherence?
- Main goal: a recognisable chronological sequence of events
- Can be difficult if story covers a long time period
 - Episodic interviews instead



NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS: EPISODIC INTERVIEWS

- Increased focus
- Structured series of topics
- Still seeks detailed narrative accounts – participant's personal experiences
- Role of interviewers: to encourage participants to expand on their accounts
- Episodic interview deliberately challenges the attitude scale questionnaire format
 - Does not aim to obtain rated **views** on the topic – Likert scale
 - Aims for personal **experiences** - stories

NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS: CONSTRUCTING COHERENCE

- Western view: linearity of narrative
- Expectations of the form a narrative 'should' take
- Some participants may find difficulty in constructing a linear narrative
- Thus inhibiting the sharing of personal accounts

- Squire (2000) experiences of HIV
- Constraints on participants – a false seamlessness
- Eakin (1999)
- Autobiographies emphasise the central role of the author rather than the roles of others
- Squire (2000) combination of series of autobiographical stories with traditional life-stories can encourage a multi-vocal narrative

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

- Linguistic and Literary Analysis:

- Orientation, complicating action, evaluation, coda
- Genre: comedy, tragedy, romance, satire
- Difficulty, epiphany
- Connecting with broader social narratives e.g. repetitive refrain

- Grounded Narrative Analysis (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967):

- Descriptive
- Does not deliberately connect with the theoretical assumptions guiding the researcher.

- More interactive grounded approach e.g. Hollway & Jefferson (2000)

- Transparency regarding theoretical approach
- How does this provide additional insight into construction of the narrative?

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

- All narratives socially constructed – so interpersonal and social contexts important
- Mishler (1997) – necessity of understanding the interpersonal context within which narrative accounts are constructed
 - Doctor-Patient interviews:
 - **Facilitated story:** Patient speaks, doctor does not interrupt – period of silence
 - **Interrupted story:** Doctor deliberately directs the patient to focus on detailing their symptomatology – encouragement and direction given
- Also need to consider what the researcher is saying – dialogical approach - Words, paralinguistics, silences
- To make connections to broader social narratives

CHALLENGING NARRATIVE COHERENCE

- Scepticism regarding singular coherence
- Awareness of multiple interpretations allows the challenge of dominant narratives
- Narrative research explores the social construction of identity – also offers a framework for promoting personal and social change
- Narrative therapy – challenges inadequate personal narratives – can also challenge repressive social narratives
- Narrative researcher can question restrictive narratives and promote emancipatory narratives – not value neutrality (as with positivist psychology)

PREPARATION

Please undertake reading around the topic of narrative analysis