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NARRATIVE ANALYSIS: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

Small stories and narrative practices

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CHAPTER CONTENTS

Opening with a brief explication of narrative analysis as part of qualitative inquiry, I will lay out how narrative analysis has evolved and changed as an analytic endeavour over the last twenty years, resulting in the emergence of an integrative approach that centres on *narrative practices*. This approach attempts to connect what in the next chapter will unfold as three particular analytic procedures (thematic, structural and interactional), with a fourth procedure (visual) under the header of *positioning analysis*. Positioning here is exemplified as taking place at three different levels: First, storytellers position characters *vis-à-vis* one another in the story they tell. Simultaneously, they position themselves *vis-à-vis* their interlocutors in the process of telling. Third – and this makes storytelling particularly interesting for identity researchers – storytellers position themselves *vis-à-vis* dominant master storylines/discourses and thereby convey a sense of who they are – to their interlocutors and to themselves. In addition to positioning analysis, the narrative practice approach analyses storytelling as a process of navigating and managing identities (constructing a sense of who we are). More specifically, I will lay out three identity dilemmatic spaces as central to the way identities are navigated in storytelling (sameness/difference, agency/passivity and continuity/change). In the last section, I will give a detailed demonstration of how to apply the three levels of positioning and take the reader through the navigation of the three dilemmatic spaces. The visual data are available on the web, including three more clips plus transcripts for class exercises.

Narrative analysis as qualitative inquiry – and the problems with narrative interviewing

Having been tasked by the American Psychological Association to establish guidelines and reporting standards for qualitative research (Levitt et al., 2018), the six of us tried to develop and take five general principles into consideration as general guideposts for qualitative inquiry: (i) allowing for inductive (non-hypothesis-testing) methodologies; (ii) allowing subjectivity and experience into research; (iii) interrogating the outsider perspective and allowing a blurred (though reflective) stance on the researcher–researchee divide; (iv) aiming for insights/findings that have "real-life implications"; and (v) taking language seriously as culturally embodied and intentional practices. While not necessarily every methodological approach or qualitative research project would have to make use of and apply equally to each of these guideposts, I will approach narrative analysis in this chapter as a methodology that does more than pay lip-service, and use these guideposts as points to return to when documenting narrative research in the concluding section.

In retrospect, central to the almost forty-year-old *turn to narrative* across the humanities and social life sciences has been the claim that narrative and storytelling deserve an elevated or "exceptional" place in the range of human sense-making tools. This kind of exceptionality thesis goes back to Bruner (1991), MacIntyre (1981) and Polkinghorne (1988) among others, where the distinction among the stories we *tell*, the stories we are said to *have* and the stories some claim we *live* was systematically blurred. At the core of this blurring seemed to have been the hope that narrative methods were a ticket to an authentic identity – people and organisations are said to *have* and *live*. And while this may originally have made the turn to narrative more attractive, this blurring soon became widely criticised (cf. Bamberg, 2010; Sartwell, 2000; Strawson, 2004) and traced back to psycho-therapeutically rooted interview strategies that hoped to access people's (and organisations') internal and authentic sense of who they *really* were. Attempting to engage participants in confessional self-reflections by taking their accounts as disclosures of *true* identities was criticised as favouring interview strategies that orient participants to withdraw from everyday storytelling practices and ponder over the meaning of lives in a kind of Sunday performance.[1] This, in response, led us[2] to reorient narrative inquiry towards a deeper scrutiny of what became the *narrative practice approach* (Bamberg, 2006, 2011; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: Georgakopoulou, 2007). This reorientation required, first, a disentangling of storytelling from other discourse modes, such as arguing, accounting, but especially also interviewing; second, a revision of the exceptionality thesis; and third, a return to where, how and why people in everyday and mundane situations engage in storytelling – including stories that do not thematise their selves. In addition, the move to analyse narrative as everyday, mundane and also affective relational practices required a reconsideration of the analytic toolkit that thus far had been in use under the header of narrative methods (or narrative methodologies).

Since Chapter 13 of this volume reviews and applies three traditional narrative approaches that first were first laid out by Riessman (1993) and then modified and expanded by Riessman (2008), I will comment here only on how these approaches originally sprang off from different disciplines, and how they became utilised and more integrated in the subsequent turn to the analysis of narrative practices. First, *content analysis*, in the form of *thematic patterns* (as an interpretive/qualitative

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1 In Bamberg (2010) I termed these practices "Sunday performances" because they aren't common and in Christianity carry the connotation of "going-to-church" and "confession".

2 I am using the first-person plural to indicate that I am standing on the shoulders of others – as we all do. I depart from this usage where I take on more of my own agency/responsibility.
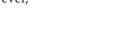
method), had been utilised for all kinds of texts, and soon became extended to include group discussions, conversations, newspaper articles, advertisements and the like. However, when moving inductively to the exploration of personal experience, Riessman (and others) show how this type of textual analysis can illuminate participants' sense-making of themes such as alcohol abuse, illness, relational dimensions, hidden inequalities, power and the like – as strategically relevant for the analysis of interviews. As such, and as a note of clarification, thematic/content analysis in and of itself is not an analysis specific to narratives, though often applied to interviews in a first effort to compare (and contrast) interviews in term of what they are about.

Second, *structural narrative analysi*s originated from segmenting clearly bounded stories into their component parts – such as setting, complication, highpoint, resolution and coda (see Chapter 13). This analytical procedure of segmenting stories into their component parts was developed through analysing large corpora of what were considered to be prototypical stories, and coincided with cognitive research that attempted to show that the human mind processes these segments as independent units.

In addition, this type of analysis also investigates what is called the core story (such as a core sequence of event clauses), and where (and how) narrators move out and away from constructing events into taking an evaluative stance on them. Again, segmenting stories into their sequential and hierarchical building blocks borrowed from cognitive and linguistic research and fused them in ways that were meant to contribute to the exploration of how narrators arguably placed certain aspects of experience or memory into specific orders and made them relevant to the here-and-now of the telling situation. Both thematic/content and structural analysis regard the cognitive/textual unit as the primary focus of analysis, and would consider the third analytic endeavour – the actual *interactional/dyadic* (or multi-party) *context* – as a performance factor, and as such of secondary interest. Riessman (2008: 105–140) makes this third analytic aspect of storytelling more central for narrative analysis, thereby beginning to move the analytic needle from textual form and thematic content to how and why meaning transpires in the storytelling context between interlocutors – where interviews become downgraded to only one among other discourse possibilities to do identity analysis. As such, these three methodological approaches (content, form and interactive function) display a sort of methodological pluralism of the early days of narrative analysis. In her chapter on *visual analysis*, Riessman (2008: 141–182) opens narrative analysis to incorporate photographs, paintings and video diaries to capture the subjectivity of storytellers that increasingly allowed analytic access to bodily performance features such as gestures, facial expressions and gaze – and thereby to the bodily navigation of affective stance-taking. It should be noted, however,

that the unit of analysis for all four approaches (content, form, interaction, visual) differed considerably – ranging from the form of actual story-texts, to whole interviews, to what is arguably taken to be "behind" the interview and the interviewee/author. These four different approaches have been considerably refined over the last decade (as shown in Chapter 13), though in parallel with a voice of concern that language was viewed as a more or less transparent window into people's ways of constructing a sense of who they are. Furthermore, if these four analytic proposals were imagined to be sitting side by side, to be employed for the analysis of Sunday performances in often highly stylised interview situations, the latter two proposals (interactional and visual analysis) were more add-ons, and considered to be secondary to what is primary – namely the "*textualization* of experience" into form and content. Last, but not least, one may wonder how one could still hang on to – or what is left of – the exceptionality thesis that originally seemed to have catapulted narrative and narrative analysis into the centre of qualitative inquiry and the analysis of (narrative) identity.

Analysing "narrative practices"

As our point of departure, Alexandra Georgakopoulou and I proposed working with storytelling as a form of interactive practice under the header of *small story theory* (Bamberg, 2006, 2011; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, Georgakopoulou, 2007) – later renamed the *narrative practice approach*. Taking off from Riessman's interactional/performance approach and making this lens central to narrative analysis came as a critical response to the predominance of analytic frameworks that continued to work with interviews as privileged attempts to unearth authentic identity from people's (and organisations') deep-seated interiority. Our critique of the assumptions that had crept into qualitative interviewing under the hegemony of the therapeutic ethos (Illouz, 2008) worked off from the tenet that meaning emerges as agentive sense-making with and between human bodies interacting with each other in situated activities. Taking this premise seriously and applying it to storytelling practices, the question arises what is particular to storytelling – or better, what is it that is actually being *practised* when engaging in storytelling practices. Sure, narrators engage in attributing intentions (or non-intentions) and emotions to characters in story-worlds; that is, they model sequences of actions in accordance with particular folk psychologies of interiorities and exteriorities. (see Hutto, 2007, for further details; see also the discussion of agency/passivity navigation below). It is accepted knowledge that these models are typically practised in early book-reading and storytelling routines. However, in addition, and perhaps more relevant, with each telling of a story, narrators practise *how to say*

what to say, that is, to place their own emotionality and subjectivity as speakers into the performance of their stories. In an investigation of children's development of affect expression in their narratives, Judy Reilly and I (Bamberg & Reilly, 1996) took issue with investigations that qualified storytelling abilities in the form of signifying story characters' emotional stances and their relevance for plot developments as aspects of *narrative competence*, and the bodily expression of affect in storytelling as mere performance. In contrast, we argued that the role of affective practices (cf. Wetherell, 2013), that is the ability to express one's own bodily felt subjectivity when relating a world of story characters, is equally – if not more – important for the emergent processes of narrative practices and narrative analysis.

Narrative practices and the interactive context

To start with, and returning to the issue of form and content, small story theory originates from the tenet that narrative activities are embedded in previous and subsequent turns in (everyday) interactions; that is, *interactive befores* and *afters*. The implication of contextualising narratives this way is that there is a conversational thematic and topical contiguity that is taken into account when stories surface. Interlocutors monitor each other (and themselves) by asking: "why this story here-and-now?" They try to figure out how and why a shift into storytelling mode – making something from a there-and-then of a (past or imagined) story-time relevant for the here-and-now of the telling time – is pertinent to the local interactive moment in a conversation. It is here that it becomes evident that shifts into storytelling mode are not random or accidental. Rather, interlocutors assume that storytelling is an intentional act – related to and making relevant what communicative and relational business at hand is supposed to be accomplished.

Along these lines, narrating a story requires a great deal of interactive coordination. Shifting into narrating is typically accompanied by a discursive bid to hold the floor for an extended turn, and, towards the end of telling the story, cuing interlocutors to respond. A great deal of breaking into an ongoing conversation with a story is signalled by bodily cues such as facial expression, gaze, shifting body positions, and by way of using intonation units to mark off segments – segments that signal whether the narrator intends to keep the floor or is coming to an ending (cf. Bamberg, 2012); and bodily cues that signal the ending of a telling typically transpire well before. Approaching narrative/story from this kind of narrative practice angle prioritises the interactive relational, affective and bodily business that storytelling accomplishes. It is relevant here that participants in communities of practice share cultural practices of storytelling, not necessarily in the form of technical or theoretical concepts, but due to continuous bodily and

verbal practices in their social interactions. Thus, while the discursive functions of storytelling may be manifold (e.g. to entertain, show regret or to embellish an argument), narrators are fundamentally doing relational affective identity work. It is my proposal that this kind of identity work may best be understood in terms of the following three kinds of navigation practices.

Identity navigation – three navigation spaces for character construal

To start with, in our daily practices, we – as personas or organisations – mark ourselves off as different, similar or the same with respect to others. Integrating and differentiating a sense of who we are *vis-à-vis* others takes place in moment-by-moment navigations; and stories about self and others are good candidates to practise the construction of story characters as navigating this space, from childhood on. However, to position ourselves as narrators *vis-à-vis* our interlocutors is different from how we position the characters *vis-à-vis* one another inside the story-world. For instance, taking off from a well-known fairy tale, construing Hansel and Gretel in a girl–boy sibling relationship as the same (i.e. loyal to each other), but the girl as more resourceful and smarter than the boy, marks them off as different from the other story characters. In this fairy tale, they are starkly positioned *vis-à-vis* witches (outsider, weird and evil) and stepmothers (dominant, selfish and evil), and less strongly positioned *vis-à-vis* fathers (generous but weak), so that themes (what the story is about) can emerge – either as about a broken family in which children are abandoned, or about children having to claim agency to overcome obstacles in growing up, or *simply* as one of the first feminist fairy tales. To be clear, in narrative analysis, we analyse these third-person characters as constructed and positioned this way so that a particular story text (plot) and thematic aboutness can emerge. We are not analysing them as *born* Hansels, Gretels, witches, and so on; that is, as *having* these identities and *living* them. And it should go without saying that storytelling situations in which narrators construct themselves as first-person characters require the same analytic procedures: story characters (including the self of the narrator) are positioned for interactive purposes. To interpret them transparently as *having* and *living* identities would do injustice to narrative interactions within the parameters of the narrative practice approach and treat language as a transparent window into reality.

A second identity space for the practice of identity navigation is often termed "agency/passivity". Here again, we are confronted with a traditional psychological folk theory assuming that people and organisations *have* agency – and maybe even that they *live* their agency – in the sense that agency is part of people's interiority,

responsible for how and why they do what they do. In contrast, the concept of identity navigation theorises agency/passivity as a discursive space that is constructed in the form of a navigation process between two opposing directions of fit: one coming from world to person, the other from person to world. While it is possible to construct a sense of story characters as passive recipients of forces (typically biological/natural or social), it is equally possible to construct the world as a product of story characters' agency. In this latter case, characters are said to be agentively producing and changing world. The navigation between agency and passivity becomes particularly relevant for constructions of characters as accountable – either in terms of mastery and success or as responsible and blameworthy for mishaps or wrongdoing. Again, stories about (past) actions are good candidates to practise navigations of this sort.

Third, when relating past to present, narrators can highlight the constancy of personas or institutions, or contrastively construct them as having undergone gradual or radical change, resulting in a different, new persona or entity. While identity navigations of characters between sameness/difference and between the two directions of fit (from person to world and from world to person) do not require temporality as essential prerequisite, it seems that navigations between constancy and change necessitate a correlation of two events in time – which some narrative inquirers take to be the minimal definition of "story" (cf. Labov and Waletzky, 1997). Thus, it appears that navigations of constancy and change make a good argument for storytelling as an opportune and, as such, privileged space for identity practices. Another argument for why and how storytelling may provide a privileged space for identity analysis is the recognition of narratives and storytelling as intrinsically bound up with questions of value and moral order, as well as providing a particularly gripping location for bodily affective audience engagement. Due to space limitations, this argument cannot be followed up here in the detail it deserves. However, I will try to illuminate these aspects in the analysis of a small story below.

Summing up thus far, I hope to have cleared the ground for what is to follow: while rejecting an *a priori* exceptionality of narratives that equates life and narrative, and avoiding essentialising entities (individuals as well as organisations or institutions or *society*) as *having* a self-contained narrative (that is taken to be the identity they *live*), I am proposing to work from the premise that identities and narratives are processual; that is, part and parcel of our mundane interactive, affective and continuous business of negotiating and navigating who we are in relation to one another. This is the realm where storytelling activities have their place in accomplishing identity work – and, at an analytic level, it is the empirical location where these interactions unfold as storytelling practices and can be interrogated via narrative analysis.

Positioning and positioning analysis

Recent debates on the concept of positioning (Bamberg, 1997; Deppermann, 2013) reflect and pick up on the kind of identity navigation processes in storytelling activities touched on in the previous section. Designed to strategically explore plots and storylines, positioning theory originally paid little attention to the analysis of narrating as interactional, conversational activity. In conversations, due to the intrinsic interactional forces of conversing, people position themselves in relation to one another in ways that traditionally had been defined as roles. More importantly, in doing so, people "produce" one another (and themselves) situationally as "social beings". This approach explicitly addresses the analysis of language in terms of how people locally and relationally/affectively attend to one another. Although traditional narrative analysis along the lines suggested by Labov and Waletzky (1997) addresses what stories referentially and thematically are "about", namely sequentially ordered events and their evaluations, narrative practice analysis pushes to go further. It suggests positioning for a finer-grained analysis of *in situ* and *in vivo* storytelling activities. For this purpose, the process of positioning is to be investigated at three different levels that are outlined below.

In a first analytic step, the question is addressed how story characters are constructed in position to one another within the specific sequence of narrated events. More concretely, positioning level I analysis aims at the linguistic and paralinguistic means (i.e. expressive, non-verbal behaviour) that do the job of navigating the characters through the three identity spaces discussed in the previous section: sameness/difference, agency/passivity and continuity/change. At a second level, the analysis turns to how narrators position themselves *vis-à-vis* their interlocutors. At this level, linguistic, paralinguistic and bodily means (facial, gesture, proximity) are interrogated for their contributions to the discourse mode that may be "under construction". Does the narrator, for instance, attempt to instruct listeners in terms of what to do in the face of adverse conditions, or engage in making apologies for their actions and attribute blame to others (or both)? This level of analysis typically aims to develop an understanding of why the particular story was told at this point in the conversation. This is where the reading of linguistic and non-linguistic markers at positioning level I is reinterpreted in terms of what John Gumperz (1982) termed "contextualization cues" – how linguistic and non-linguistic, affective signals become interpretive cues for where co-conversationalists are in conducting their relational affective business, and where they are headed. On one hand, it appears as if at this level (positioning level II) we as analysts/interpreters *are leaving* the seemingly safe grounds of what actually has been said (and arguably can be captured

in transcriptions) and entering the layer of multimodal performance features of storytelling (with all its slopes and bumps that on the surface invite a multitude of interpretations). However, what we gain is that a narrative practice approach takes this level of the interactive co-construction of narratives serious as foundational and constitutive for what is *textualised* at level I, and also what becomes the constitution of a sense of self at level III (below). To clarify, the local and situated relational business at hand between co-conversationalists is the foundation from where themes and content are making it to the surface for level I analysis. And, in the same vein, this also holds for the construction of a sense of self positioned at level III – to which we will turn next.

Having opened for empirical investigation the questions how narrators position story characters *vis-à-vis* one another (level I) and how narrators position themselves *vis-à-vis* their audience (level II), the final step attempts to address an arguably trickier problem, namely whether and how narrators actually may position a sense of who they are *to themselves*. More succinctly, this question attempts to explore whether there is anything in narrative practices that we as analysts can interrogate in the form of claims or stances of narrators that goes above and beyond the local conversational situation. In other words, at level III, positioning analysis interrogates whether and how the linguistic devices and bodily manoeuvres employed in narrative practices actually point to more than the content of what the narrative is "about" (level I), and directives *vis-à-vis* the interlocutor in their interactional business (level II). For the business of level III positioning, it is posited that in constructing content *and* audience, narrators observably appeal to dominant discourses (master narratives), and construct local answers to the question: "Who am I?" (Bamberg, 2011; De Fina, 2013). To be clear, however, attempted answers to this question do not necessarily hold across contexts; rather, they are *projects of limited range*. Nevertheless, we as analysts assume that these repeated and continuously refined navigation practices rub off and produce and transmit a sense of how to engage effectively and productively in sense-making procedures that endure and may turn into habits – and this also to the extent of a sense of self that is perpetual (and analysable) at positioning level III.

Summary and outlook

So far, I have attempted to clarify the role of narratives – specified as narrative practices – for requesting a special (or privileged) space in the business of organising and sense-making in the world of interpersonal affective relationship construction, including how individuals or organisations arguably *relate to themselves*. Positioning as an analytic framework combines traditional textual analysis (see

Chapter 13) focusing purely on what seemingly was captured in transcripts (positioning level I), and the analytic attempts to capture and describe what is happening in the local and relational context of the interaction (positioning level II) – while both in concert are taken to orient towards analytic endeavours at positioning level III, the constitution of a sense of self. It should be noted and underscored again that this kind of analysis does not rely on any recourse to meaning-making processes as springing off from a psychological interiority (a *soul* or *mind* or *brain*). While we, as positioning analysts, in alignment with certain ethnomethodological approaches, strongly oppose traditional psychological theorising that starts from internal constructs and considers them to be engines for action and behaviour, we nevertheless posit that the (narrative/affective) practices in which people engage each other find effect in repetitive and routinised communal and cultural practices that have repercussions.

Overall, I hope to have contributed to a clarification of what constitutes units for the analysis of stories told as narrative practices, and laid out a strategic position for the analytic procedures for dealing with them. Insisting on the context in which narrative form and content emerge (i.e. where and how narrators *break into narrative*), I departed from starting with internal constructs, which are construed as causes for surfacing stories (in interaction). Thus, a narrative practice approach shifts the unit of analysis from textualised products as (arguable) reflections of experiences of actual events or memories thereof. Instead of claiming to investigate *reality*, or the experience or memory thereof, such as with approaches that restrict themselves to biographies or biographical memories elicited in therapy-like biographic interviews, the narrative practice approach analyses storytelling situations. And although there is nothing wrong with confining one's investigations to narrative textualisations in which narrators reflectively thematise themselves, especially for institutionalized interview purposes, these kinds of Sunday performances, however, are less telling than narrative practices *in vivo* and *in situ* of everyday interactions. Claims that equate interviewees' narratives with their memories or experiences – assumptions by which narrative researchers claim language to be transparent to gain privileged access to people's interiority – become especially problematic. A word of caution, though: this does not imply a denial that we (as people – and relational beings in the world) *have* a sense (a modern folk psychology) of an interiority, or even that there probably may *be* an interiority. The argument here simply is that starting from an assumed interiority as pressing itself onto an outside world is a (typically Western and late Modern) supposition that gets in between a fruitful analytic approach to sense-making processes (with and without narratives) that should have their genesis in interaction, where self and other mutually constitute each other as continuous *processes*.

Narrative analysis – an illustration

In this section I will work micro-analytically through a short segment of an inter-action that is publicly available on YouTube.[3] Edison Chen, a high-profile actor and entrepreneur in the Asian entertainment industry, was interviewed by Anjali Rao in June 2009 for *Talk Asia* on CNN. The interview followed up on a sex scandal that had broken in February 2008, when photographs Chen had taken of himself engaging in sex acts had surfaced on the internet. These pictures compromised others and destroyed their careers. According to Rao, this scandal had "forced him out of Asia and the entertainment industry", and when he returned, more than a year later, he requested this interview with Rao to be aired on *Talk Asia*. The brief segment chosen here is the fifth in the sequence of adjacency pairs (question–answer units) between Rao and Chen, and it is in this segment that Chen launches what we originally had termed a "small story". The reason for selecting this particular interactional unit is to document the navigation between the three identity dilemmas, and how positioning analysis can contribute to a deeper and more detailed analysis of narrative identity practices. After identifying the core story and how it is embedded in other discursive segments, I will first work through positioning level I, identifying the characters and how they are positioned *vis-à-vis* one another. Then I will work through the three identity spaces, add a brief analysis of visual cues and conclude by showing how this analysis contributes productively to the analysis of identity; that is, becomes part of a more general approach to analytically investigating "who-am-I questions" at positioning level III. At the very end, I will present three links to subsequent segments of the same interview that can be used as further exercises into "small story" analysis.

Edison Chen, Transcript 1

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 1  IQ: you were a highly visible presence in this part of world
 2  until the scandal really blew up
 3  what have you been doing with your days
 4  since it happened?
 5  EC: heh (exhaling)
 6  've been doing a lot of things
 7  he-he (laughing)
 8  ehm eh (.) it took me a little while
 9  but you know with eh with eh with the constant support of everyone around me
10  and you know my family (.) especially and my girlfriend and (.)
11  I I kind of got through that shell again
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3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ox945LO3z8M (or, for readers who are blocked from access to YouTube, https://wordpress.clarku.edu/mbamberg/classes/).

12 I kind of got through this
13 I'm nothing and (.) I'm done and I might as well give up (.) stage
14 and you know 've started to see what I could do
15 what I was valuable (.) in the area that I was in
16 and I was in America
17 I was in LA and New York mostly
18 and I'm in I always wanted to either direct or produce movies (.)
19 so I you know decided to take some sm crash courses
20 following some producers
21 and try to learn the game of produ production
22 not only did I have time to do some of the things I enjoyed
23 uhm some of the things that (.) I dreaded at first
24 like . doing my laundry (.)
25 or throwing out garbage
26 or (.) going to the grocery store (.)
27 ehm actually become something that really grounded me
28 and really . really gave me a different perspective of life
29 because I've been working in the entertainment industry since I was nineteen
30 was very young
31 ehm I didn't really have a great outlook on life to be honest with you
32 I was just out of school .
33 stis was like a party you know
34 every ding was like a party
35 ehm I kind of got accustomed to that life
36 where (.) everything was taken care of
37 where I thought I was eh a a pretty good person (.)
38 where and then I went back
39 and I kind of had to do all these things by myself
40 and I kind of reflected on the way I treated people
41 and (.) the way I saw things
42 and I got a a lot more grounded (.)
43 and I am thankful for that you know (.)
44 I mean everything I believe that everything happens for a reason

Short pauses are marked by (.)

What have you been doing with your days since it happened?

In this segment, Anjali Rao gives Chen the floor with a request to account for what she had qualified in her opening trailer as "hiding and silence" between February 2008 and the here and now at the time of this interview. In line 6 he gives a short and offhand answer: "a lot of things", followed by laughter, potentially marking it as an opener to be followed up with more detail. And indeed, details follow in lines 16/17: he went to America (Los Angeles and New York), where he took courses and followed producers (lines 18/19), and where he did laundry, took garbage out and

went to grocery stores (lines 24–26). If this forms his core story, the sequence of events that may be report-worthy, the rest of his turn can be segmented into three additional units: (i) how he came to consider leaving Hong Kong (lines 1–14); (ii) the effects of his move to Los Angeles and New York (lines 27–28 and 38–44); and (iii) reflecting back on the time-period during which he had engaged in taking the pictures (embedded between lines 28 and 38).

This, strictly speaking, is exactly what the "small story" concept attempts to capture: Chen's layout of a skeleton spatiotemporal sequence of action clauses in which he figures as the main character – moving to the USA, trying to learn more of his trade, and engaging in normal, everyday, mundane and boring activities like anyone else. This by no means qualifies as a tellable narrative with a problem, a highpoint and a resolution (cf. our structural part of narrative analysis above). However, in concert with the surrounding segments, it is carefully assembled as a peg for how to navigate his agency/responsibility, his sameness/difference and his change. However, before working through these three dilemmatic identity spaces, let me briefly start with position level I to give a feel for how he himself and other characters are positioned *vis-à-vis* each other. Lines 8–15 serve to mark the decision to leave for Los Angeles and New York; however, not instantaneously. Instead, his move is made possible by and due to support from family and girlfriend – both not insignificant, especially in the cultural context of Asia/Hong Kong. Being able to rely on the continuous trust ("constant support", line 9) of those who (apparently) know him best, and in addition being in a seemingly stable heterosexual relationship, both serve as promising licence for being trustworthy and honest. No other specific characters are made relevant for the period under consideration, assigning the agency initially to others (family and girlfriend) – for a time in which he presents himself as low in agency and dejected – and enabling him so that he can regain some of his (previous) agency ("started to see what I could do", line 14) and to make decisions (to go to the USA, lines 16–17) that ultimately result in change.

Change seems to be the central dilemma that is woven into and around Chen's response to Rao's question regarding his whereabouts. It serves as the centre for the navigation of agency/responsibility and sameness/difference woven into and around it. The first dimension of change was already mentioned in the analysis of character positioning: Chen claims a change from a low point in his life, the time when he was at the recipient end of the world-to-person direction of fit, with the help of family and girlfriend, towards regaining agency (and responsibility). The second, and more relevant, dimension of change is attributed to the list of activities as leading to a sense of "groundedness" (lines 27 and 42) that is set in stark contrast to an "ungroundedness" during the time before (lines 24–26). Interesting in the characterisation of these times before becoming "more grounded" is that

Chen de-emphasises his own agency: "everything was like a party" – a life to which he "got accustomed", and "where everything was taken care of". Note that these phrasings are subjectless and agentless – as if there was no choice for anyone *not* to participate. In this context, two potential master narratives are mobilised: youth as a mitigating factor and the habits coming with celebrity status. We will return to them with our discussion of positioning level III. Chen's apparent digression before elevating his agency with doing laundry and taking out the garbage, namely that he at first dreaded these activities, but ended up enjoying them (*sic*! – lines 22/23), should not go unnoticed: although viewers of the interview may chuckle at this point, providing specific details of behavioural changes that exemplify some major change in character may serve as a subtle and humble way to (re-)establish trustworthiness.

Agency (as coupled with responsibility) and Chen's navigation of the two directions of fit has been touched on in the previous paragraphs. To summarise and highlight, his agency, apart from starting to see what he could do (line 14) and deciding to take courses (line 19), (literally) peaked with referring to himself as doing laundry, throwing the garbage out and going to the grocery store (lines 24–26) – and having to do all these things by himself (line 44). If this had been the whole story surfacing in his account of where he had been and what he had done, this small story would have been ineffective. However, his claims to agency become relevant in contrast to the lack of agency during his years before he was caught – effectively accounting for when he took pictures of women which compromised them and destroyed their careers. Thus, constructing his actions – and thereby himself – within the frame of a direction of fit from world to him may come across as an attempt to remove the accountability for his actions from himself and transfer it to the kind of agencies that are "responsible" for what celebrities, especially when young, engage in. Whether or not one believes that Chen actually now enjoys taking out his garbage, his construction of himself as highly agentive when in Los Angeles and New York nevertheless (only) makes sense when heard and viewed in contrast to his construction in retrospect of having no say (no agency) in his actions and activities before he came to the USA. As such, the navigation of the two directions of fit from world to person and person to world in this excerpt is only understandable in the service of intending to bring off an exculpatory identity and re-establish a trustworthy self – one that seemingly had had some kind of currency previously. His final and turn-concluding statement in line 44 ("I mean everything I believe that everything happens for a reason") seems somewhat uncalled for and surprising: hasn't he just claimed to have acquired a new agency that is more responsible and morally superior – at least superior to his characterisation of his previous identity – and this arguably with a lot of effort? While this statement may be interpreted as handing back a good deal of his

newly claimed agency to some higher moral "ground", such as fate or a spiritual determination, his way of navigating the two directions of fit here also may be interpretable as attempting to show a kind of humility, one that his followers and the viewers of this interview would appreciate from someone who is very different from them and whom they look up to, but at the same time someone they adore and identify with – as being just like them.

However, how is this possible? For celebrities (as well as for politicians; cf. Bamberg, 2010), to argue that the person you relied on and trusted – whether by buying their products or voting for them – is no longer the same may run the risk of total fallout. This, however, is where the navigation of sameness versus difference may have to kick in more forcefully and do a trans-fixing job. Being a high-profile celebrity (or politician) makes them different – though in an interesting and dilemmatic way: on the one hand, a high profile is exciting and desirable; and therefore, if navigated well, may lead ordinary folk to align and affiliate themselves; on the other hand, high-profile individuals stand out and are construed as dissimilar, and may be met by ordinary folk with envy, disaffiliation and a certain disalignment. Chen navigates this sort of double dilemma by first aligning his new identity with family values and commitment to his girlfriend, and as such reasserting his not irrelevant heterosexual male identity. His claims to be like everyone else who takes their garbage out (even for those of us who do not), as we discussed above, assert his new identity as settled, mature and humble – in contrast to his former "spoiled celebrity" identity, which is more likely to act irresponsibly and immature. The link between his old and new identity is provided by a folk developmental (and culturally shared) master narrative that constructs adolescents as immature and confused, and not yet fully accountable or responsible for their actions and activities. In addition, although more subtly, he orients towards the master narrative of self-development when he claims to take agency by leaving the location of his wrongdoing, distancing himself in order to engage in learning (lines 19/20) and self-reflection (line 40), which takes him to a new and more humble identity, one that treats people better (line 40). This master narrative calls up a Western model of identity development – where the alternative would have been to submit one's personal advancement to religious fate or a therapeutic master narrative. In sum, Chen seems to navigate an identity with which ordinary folk, and here probably especially an Asian generation that spans teenagers and emerging adults, can affiliate as different but the same. This required a balancing act that built on traditional values such as family and romantic commitment, as well as being subjected to everyday and mundane shared chores, and finally, the character type of becoming a normal and responsible person – just like (presumably) everyone else – while still remaining distant as a rich (and crazy) Asian celebrity.

Analysis of Chen's bodily performance cues

My analysis of visual cues, a way to document how bodily cues are woven into what originally had been placed under narrative performance features, will have to be localised and limited. Of the range of bodily cues that typically go along with the performance of storytelling in dyadic interactions, I will focus on three – and on these three only for the first five seconds of Chen's response to Rao's question, covering lines 5/6 of the transcript. The three are gaze, head movement and one intake of breath, plus the coordination between them. The purpose of singling out these three is twofold: first, to give a sense of the complexity of when and how to make bodily performance cues relevant to narrative analysis; and second, to prepare the reader for one of the three exercises offered below in working independently with the same kind of data.

From what we as viewers of the video material online can see in terms of Chen's facial expression, during the time Anjali Rao formulated her question, his gaze was directed towards her face. This is a standard or normal listening position in dyadic interactions – institutional or otherwise. When it comes to his response, Chen averts his gaze, and engages in two full rotations of his head, ending with a smile – and at this point locking back into a mutual gaze with his interviewer. In other words, during the four seconds of rotating his head, his gaze is directed away from his interlocutor. Again, starting a new turn by averting one's gaze is standard/normal, and this has been theorised as doing cognitive, expressive and interactive work – such as engaging in collecting one's thoughts, lessening the tightened emotional attentiveness *vis-à-vis* the interlocutor, and just simply signalling that the turn-taking signals have been read correctly: *it is now my turn*. In addition, it should be noted that it would be hard, if not impossible, to engage in head rotation while keeping one's gaze fixed on the co-conversationalist. Thus, Chen's aversion of gaze in these seconds requires to be interpreted as part of a bodily move that comes across as not only shifting posture into a new turn, but also simultaneously shifting the bodily resonance between speaker and audience/viewer. While labelling this type of move as a "squirming" gesture may spring to mind, it definitely signals a certain uneasiness or discomfort, and this before an answer has been formulated. Marking off his exhaling in line 5 – before his answer in line 6 – is due to the fact that Chen makes it visibly hearable – unlike any other time when he inhales or exhales. Upon closer inspection of how and where he exhales, however, it should be noted that it occurs at the end of his first head rotation, followed by turning his gaze downwards, a communicative gesture one would not necessarily expect. Rather, a speaker, when given the floor for an extended turn, is more likely to start by inhaling – potentially with an upward gaze as a thinking gesture. Here, however, the packaging of gaze, head movement and exhaling

comes across as signalling a decrease in force or power, and as such an unassertive and deferential turn initiation.

Chen's laughter following the second rotation of his head fits the typical case of an evaluative response to line 6 (!'ve been doing a lot of things"), performing it as a "fake" laughter (Haakama, 2012) and marking it thereby as an incomplete or failed answer – as something that may be in need of further repair, which we explicated above. However, in this particular case, and in line with his bodily performance of what could be called *doing being uneasy*, coupled with a deferential manner, his laughter orients his audience/viewer to the delicacy of the overall particular interactional context – as loaded with the ambiguity of, on the one hand, intending to be forthcoming and, on the other, being uncomfortable and not knowing how to. In our summary of working through both verbal and bodily displays to which we will turn next, we will return to the navigation of the three dilemmatic spaces and how this may contribute (or not) to what we called above the display of authenticity (doing being authentic).

Analytic considerations

Opening with a brief analysis of the textual segments of the excerpt under examination and of how Chen constructed the characters in his narrative in positions *vis-à-vis* one another (positioning level I), we deepened the analysis by moving into the construction of how he (as speaker/interlocutor in the interview situation) navigated himself as character in the story through three dilemmatic positional spaces. We identified his navigation of constancy and change as his major communicative goal (becoming *the new Edison*), being sustained by gaining a new agency (reorganising the direction of fit) and a new "sameness character" (in the sense of becoming a more ordinary, everyday, and as such more relatable person). While in the excerpt analysed here he did not explicitly address any wrongdoing, it nevertheless received coverage covertly: he can be heard arguing that the act of wrongdoing was committed when his agency – and as such responsibility – had been diminished. He claims to have changed and realigned his new identity with those who in the past already had been fans, followers, consumers of his products, and thereby may be viewed as successfully navigating a continuity between past, present and future. In our analysis thus far, we occasionally incorporated aspects of positioning levels II and III, to which we will briefly return as analytic dimensions for the purpose of narrative identity analysis.

As laid out above, narrators navigate the interactional territory (positioning level II), and in doing so draw on different kinds of background assumptions (master narratives – level III) – bringing off a sense of how they intend to come across (communicative intent), and in turn practising their answer to the who-am-I question

(engaging in identity practices). Here, in the segment under consideration, Chen navigates the interactional territory between him and Anjali Rao – and simultaneously the viewership of *Talk Asia* – as a space between empathy and admiration: empathy for someone who had fallen from a pedestal; and admiration for someone who is able to pull himself up again (with a little initial help from family and partner). He makes good use of the interview giving him space to explore the confessional (Sunday) territory to interrogate the redemptive self as a master narrative for the purpose of giving a lesson in how to navigate self-management and renewal. The redemptive self, originally claimed to be a master narrative for American identity renewal (cf. McAdams, 2006), built here on the underlying assumption that "everything happens for a reason" (line 44), which ultimately makes us a better person, is a close to perfect narrative to navigate this fine line between interlocutor/audience sympathy and admiration. In his attempts to bring off the redemptive self, it is noteworthy that Chen relies on other background (master) narratives already mentioned in our analysis above. One is the widely shared cultural assumption that adolescents are unruly and immature, and that their developmental trajectory ultimately may take them to more mature actions and activities. Another master narrative Chen employs is that distance and (self-)reflection lead to a better and higher moral ground – in his case being physically away from Hong Kong, and reflecting on what it means to take your garbage out, resulting in a more positive self-evaluation and catharsis. Finally, claiming celebrity status by "working in the entertainment industry" (line 29), he calls upon the master narrative of a larger range of moral freedom for those *in the limelight*.

Conclusion/outlook

The above demonstration of how to apply the resources that were made available for analysing storytelling practices in the first parts of this chapter has zoomed in on one small story, and attempted to work this story "to the bone". In essence, I demonstrated how to identify Chen's core story – going to the USA and taking his garbage out – and, working up from there, the positioning work that he performed visually and ostensibly, as well as by way of navigating his three identity dilemmas, and how this formed the core of narrative analysis. The following link provides access to three more segments from the same interview (including the transcripts) to implement or practise, for instance in the form of a class exercise, the kind of narrative analysis demonstrated in this chapter: https://wordpress.clarku.edu/mbamberg/classes/

In sum, the resources made available in the first parts of this chapter build on traditional narrative analytic procedures that will be laid out in more detail in the

next chapter, namely thematic, structural and dyadic-performative approaches to narrative analysis. Adding a fourth approach, namely the analysis of visual-performative narrative analysis, and attempting to integrate all four into an overall integrative approach to narrative analysis, earmarks the essential quality and strength of the narrative practice approach. As such, the narrative practice approach aims to overcome the methodological pluralism of earlier days of narrative analysis as an arena of methodological approaches that all share a commitment to qualitative inquiry. To clarify, my attempt to bring together and integrate should not be misunderstood as imperative or (even worse) complete and exclusive. Rather, readers may be able to isolate certain analytic procedures and apply them to their work with narrative (practices). Still, it may be easier to realise the limitations of different analytic approaches when we have ways to see them in relation to each other – in their overall attempt to assist our qualitative endeavours. However, I would like to add by way of a warning that narrative analysis requires a clear delineation of the unit of analysis – in the sense of what is the analytic focus, and why narrative. Whether we as qualitative researchers claim to be studying experience or memories, or whether we claim to be studying accounts or justifications, if our work centres on – or attempts to make use of – narratives, a clarification of our analytic focus on narrative, and a justification for why narrative, both have to accompany our interpretive undertaking.

---------- Key concepts ----------

Identity dilemma navigation   Identities are constructions of characters in three dilemmatic spaces that require careful navigating: being different, similar or the same in relation to other characters; characters as in control versus being the product of forces that control their actions; and constancy (i.e. staying the same over time), as against having changed. These spaces are dilemmatic, because narrators have choices; and these choices are analysable in their storytelling interactions.

Identity/identity analysis   Identity is a second-order theoretical construct, implying that identities (plural – as first-order concepts) are constructed and continuously reconstructed in everyday interactive processes. The term *identities* is used to enable the empirical investigation of how people and organisations are able to gain a sense of self, and give answers to the who-am-I question – engaging interactively in identity work.

Narrative/story   Narratives/stories are interactional discourse units; texts, interviews, conversations, arguments, route descriptions and recipes are not. What distinguishes stories/narratives from other discourse units is their temporal contour in which characters are constructed as navigating identity dilemmas.

Positioning/positioning analysis   Positioning in discourse/interaction presupposes agentive speakers (narrators) who position a sense of who they are at three analytic (empirical) levels in their storytelling interactions: how they position story characters *vis-à-vis* one another; how they position themselves *vis-à-vis* their audience; and how they attend to dominant discourses (master narratives) and thereby convey a sense of self.

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