

INFORMATION POINT:*Narrative and
narrative analysis*

For both the researcher and reader of narrative research there is a thrill from entering into another's story, and this explains the popularity of work in this tradition. The thrill can come from a glimpse of unfamiliarity or from identifying with the well-known. Nurses know patients through the stories patients tell, and nurses respond with tales of their own. The knowledge the nurse gains about a patient is extended into further narratives when conveyed to others. Stories are told about stories and narratives thus become a form of social interaction. Although narrative can be regarded as both phenomenon and method, the term 'story' is usually used to describe what the actor tells and the 'narrative' is the researcher's account.

The common factor in narrative research, whether it concerns the exotic or the mundane, is that the researched world cannot be reproduced but has to be represented by some form of narrative analysis. The form of that analysis depends largely on the researcher's views on the construction of knowledge (i.e. their epistemology). For example, a phenomenological interpretation of a narrative may relate the lived experience of the narrator. An alternative is the post-modern narrative work, where the underlying principle is that people use narratives to create versions of themselves or their subjectivity. An analysis of narratives cannot reveal what someone 'really' thinks or feels because any truth is simply a construction, and narratives are skilfully woven to bring into being versions of the self that serve specific purposes. Thus in a medical encounter narratives can describe the narrator as consumer, concerned parent or resistor of medical domination.

Much narrative analysis, however, is unclear about its epistemological influences. Mishler (1991), Kleinman (1988), Reissman (1993) and Coles (1989), whilst all sharing a commitment to the value of the method in giving voice to human feelings and experiences, disagree on the purpose and method of narrative analysis and the form of the analysis often appears to be a largely intuitive process. What is common, however, is an emphasis on temporality – time and place, plot, scene and the multiply-placed voice of the researcher.

Further reading

- Coles R. (1989) *The Call of Stories*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA.
 Kleinman A. (1988) *The Illness Narratives*. Basic Books, New York.
 Mishler E. (1991) *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
 Reissman C. (1993) *Narrative Analysis*. Sage, London.

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