

Doing Narrative Research



edited by Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire & Maria Tamboukou

second edition



Doing Narrative Research

Second Edition

Edited by

Molly Andrews

Corinne Squire

Maria Tamboukou



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC

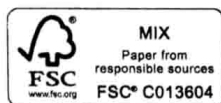
SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/1 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Editor: Katie Metzler
Assistant editor: Anna Horvai
Production editor: Ian Antcliff
Copyeditor: Sarah Bury
Proofreader: Jennifer Hinchliffe
Marketing manager: Ben Griffin-Sherwood
Cover design: Francis Kenney
Typeset by: C&M Digital (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound by: CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CR0 4YY



Editorial arrangement and Introduction © Molly Andrews,
Corinne Squire and Maria Tamboukou 2013

Chapter 1 © Wendy Patterson
Chapter 2 © Corinne Squire
Chapter 3 © Ann Phoenix
Chapter 4 © Maria Tamboukou
Chapter 5 © Gerrit Loots, Kathleen Coppens & Jasmina
Sermijn
Chapter 6 © Lars-Christer Hydén
Chapter 7 © Susan E. Bell
Chapter 8 © Mark Davis
Chapter 9 © David Herman
Chapter 10 © Phillida Salmon and Catherine Kohler
Riessman
Chapter 11 © Molly Andrews
Chapter 12 © Margareta Hydén
Chapter 13 © Paul Gready
Concluding comments © Catherine Kohler Riessman
Afterword © Jens Brockmeier
First edition published 2008. Reprinted in 2009, 2011 and
2012.

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or
private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication
may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or
by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of
the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction,
in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the
Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning
reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the
publishers.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012954394

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British
Library

ISBN 978-1-4462-5265-9
ISBN 978-1-4462-5266-6 (pbk)

Doing Narrative Research

List of contributors

Molly Andrews is Professor of Political Psychology, Co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research (www.uel.ac.uk/cnr/index.htm) at the University of East London, and co-investigator on NOVELLA (Narratives of Varied Everyday Lives and Linked Approaches), an ESRC funded, National Centre for Research Methods Phase III node project (<http://www.novella.ac.uk/>). Her research interests include the psychological basis of political commitment, psychological challenges posed by societies in transition to democracy, patriotism, conversations between generations, gender and aging, and counter-narratives. Her current research is on biographical and political change in former East Germany. She is the author of *Lifetimes of Commitment: Aging, Politics, Psychology* and *Shaping History: Narratives of Political Change*, both published by Cambridge University Press. *Narratives of Everyday Life* will be published by Oxford University Press in 2013.

Susan E. Bell is A. Myrick Freeman Professor of Social Sciences and Professor of Sociology at Bowdoin College. Her specialty is the sociology of health and illness, in which she investigates the experience of illness, women's health, and visual and performative representations of the politics of cancer, medicine, and women's bodies. Currently she is exploring the global flow of biomedical knowledge and spatial permeability by listening to and analysing stories constructed in interactions between immigrant patient populations and staff in two outpatient clinics in one US hospital. Previous publications include *DES Daughters: Embodied Knowledge and the Transformation of Women's Health Politics* (Temple, 2009), guest editor with Alan Radley of a special issue of *Health*, 'Another way of knowing: art, disease, and illness experience,' 2011, and co-author with Anne E. Figert of 'Medicalization and pharmaceuticalization at the intersections: looking backward, sideways and forward', in *Social Science & Medicine*, 2012.

Jens Brockmeier, a Senior Scientist at the Free University Berlin and a Visiting Professor at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, has a background in philosophy, psychology, and language studies. He also is an Honorary Professor at the University of Innsbruck and Visiting Senior Fellow at the Centre for Narrative Research of the University of East London. His research is concerned with the

cultural fabric of mind and narrative and has been published in English, German, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic.

Kathleen Coppens works as a doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the Free University of Brussels (VUB, Belgium). She is attached to the research group on Interpersonal, Discursive and Narrative Studies in Psychology and Educational Sciences (IDNS – PE) at the Centre for Children in Vulnerable Situations. She has been involved in research on the psychosocial support offered to former abducted youth and other war-affected youth in Northern Uganda, the cultural validation and adaptation of questionnaires on symptom behaviour, the development of questionnaires on coping and traumatic experiences of youth, and mapping and analysing traumatic experiences and symptom behaviour of former abducted youth. Currently, she is conducting longitudinal research on the resettlement processes of war-affected communities in Northern Uganda, in which she specifically focuses on the reintegration process of formerly abducted youth in these communities.

Mark Davis is Senior Lecturer, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, Australia. His research has addressed risk narrative and infectious diseases and the narrative aspects of online life. His previous publications include *Sex, Technology and Public Health* (2009) and *HIV Treatment and Prevention Technologies in International Perspective*, edited with Corinne Squire (2010). In 2012, Mark received the Dean's Award for Excellence in Research by an Early Career Researcher, Faculty of Arts, Monash University.

Paul Gready is the Director of the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York. He has worked for Amnesty International (on East and Southern Africa, and India) and a number of other international and national human rights organisations, and has wide-ranging experience as a human rights consultant. Most of Gready's practitioner and consultancy experience has been in Africa, with a particular focus on South Africa. He has served as a member of various advisory groups, for example on human rights and development (Amnesty International Dutch Section, Special Programme on Africa; Novib, Oxfam). Gready has published on a number of human rights-related topics, notably transitional justice and human rights and development. His most recent book is *The Era of Transitional Justice: The Aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and Beyond* (Routledge, 2010).

David Herman is Professor of the Engaged Humanities in the Department of English Studies at Durham University. His current research focuses on the intersections among narrative studies, cognitive science, and critical animal studies. His book *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* was published by MIT Press in 2013.

Lars-Christer Hydén received his PhD in Psychology from Stockholm University. His current position is as full Professor of Social Psychology at Linköping

University, Sweden, and as director of the Center for Dementia Research (CEDER). His research primarily concerns how people with Alzheimer's disease and their significant others interact and use language – especially narrative – as a way to sustain and negotiate identity and a sense of self. He has published articles in international journals and edited books about narrative research, for instance *Health, Culture and Illness: Broken Narratives* (together with Jens Brockmeier, 2008, Routledge) and *Beyond Narrative Coherence* (together with Mattia Hyvärinen, Maret Saarenheimo, and Maria Tamboukou, 2010, John Benjamins).

Margareta Hydén is a Professor of Social Work at Linköping University, Sweden. Her areas of interest include domestic violence, narrative and gender studies. Her work has appeared in *Discourse & Society*, *Narrative Inquiry*, *Feminism & Psychology* and *Child and Family Social Work*. Her recent work focuses on children's narratives of witnessing violence in the family and on social networks' responses to interpersonal violence.

Gerrit Loots is Professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Visiting Professor at the Instituto de Investigaciones en Ciencias del Compartamiento (IICC), Departamento de Psicología of the Universidad Católica Boliviana 'San Pablo' at La Paz. He is running a research group on Interpersonal, Discursive and Narrative Studies in Psychology and Educational Sciences (IDNS – PE), and member of the directors' board of the inter-university Centre for Children in Vulnerable Situations. His fields of interests and research are infant psychology, more specific early parent-child interaction, psychosocial wellbeing of children affected by war, migration, poverty and social exclusion, and postmodern collaborative and narrative therapy.

Wendy Patterson is a freelance researcher and writer with a particular interest in narrative and sociolinguistics. She is also an editor of academic texts. Her publications include *Strategic Narrative: New Perspectives on the Power of Personal and Cultural Stories* (Lexington Books, 2002).

Ann Phoenix is Professor and Co-Director at Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London and Joint Head Department of Childhood, Families and Health. She co-directs the Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre funded by the Department for Education. Her research focuses on psychosocial identities. She is the Principal Investigator on NOVELLA (Narratives of Varied Everyday Lives and Linked Approaches), an ESRC National Centre for Research Methods node. Her books include: *Black, White or Mixed Race?* (1993/2002 with Barbara Tizard, Routledge),; *Young Masculinities* (2002, with Stephen Frosh and Rob Pattman, Palgrave), and *Parenting and Ethnicity* (2007 with Fatima Husain, JRF [online]).

Catherine Kohler Riessman is a medical sociologist and Emerita Professor at Boston University. She has also served as Research Professor in the Sociology Department

at Boston College. Her most recent book is *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Sage, 2008). Throughout a long career she has studied and compared the narratives women and men develop to account for biographical disruptions, including divorce, infertility, and chronic illness in mid life. The author of many journal articles and book chapters in recent years, her early books include *Divorce Talk* (1990) and *Narrative Analysis* (1993). She has been awarded Leverhulme, British Academy, and Fulbright fellowships and has served as a visiting professor at University of London, Victoria University in Melbourne, the University of Western Sydney in Australia.

Phillida Salmon was an early advocate of the narrative approach in psychology and the social sciences – a commitment that developed from her central involvement in Personal Construct Theory. Many of her publications illuminate how and why the life story method provides insights and understandings of what it means to be human. She worked for 11 years in the NHS, but taught in universities for most of her career – at Brunel, Surrey and the Institute of Education. After her retirement she worked as a tutor for the Open University, gave courses on narrative and identity at Birkbeck College Centre for Continuing Education and worked as a psychotherapist at the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture. One of her major contributions to academic life was her distinctive approach to supervising her numerous PhD students. Her most renowned books are *Living in Time* (Dent, 1985); *Achieving a PhD: Ten Students' Experiences* (Trentham, 1992); *Psychology in the Classroom* (Cassell, 1995); and *Life at School: Education and Psychology* (Constable, 1998). She died of cancer in 2005.

Jasmina Sermijn is a part-time lector at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and is attached to the research group on Interpersonal, Discursive and Narrative Studies in Psychology and Educational Sciences (IDNS – PE). In her PhD research she studied the interaction between psychiatric diagnoses and the narrative construction of selfhood. Her fields of interests are postmodern, narrative theory and practices and systemic therapy. Jasmina works also part-time as a family and relational therapist in Hestia (Centre for Family and Relational Therapy) and is a board member of the BVRGS (Belgian Federation of Relational, Family and Systemic therapy). She wrote two books and some articles on the construction of narrative selfhood, the impact of psychiatric diagnoses, and rhizomatic thinking in narrative therapy.

Corinne Squire is Professor of Social Sciences and Co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research, University of East London (<http://www.uel.ac.uk/cnr/>) and a CNR partner in the ESRC-funded NCRM research methods node, NOVELLA (Narratives of Varied Everyday Lives and Linked Approaches, <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/58431.html>). Her research interests are in HIV and citizenship, popular culture and subjectivities, and narrative theories and methods. Publications include *What is Narrative Research?* (Centre for Narrative Research, Bloomsbury,

2013), *HIV Technologies in International Perspective* (with Davis, Palgrave, 2010); *HIV in South Africa* (Routledge, 2007) and *Public Emotions* (with 6, Radstone and Treacher, Palgrave, 2006).

Maria Tamboukou (BA, MA, PhD) is Professor of Feminist Studies, Co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research at the University of East London and co-editor of the journal *Gender & Education*. Her research activity develops in the areas of critical feminisms, auto/biographical narratives and Foucauldian and Deleuzian analytics. Writing feminist genealogies is the central focus of her work. Recent publications include the monographs *In the Fold between Power and Desire: Women Artists' Narratives*; *Nomadic Narratives: Gwen John's Letters and Paintings*; *Visual Lives: Carrington's Letters, Drawings and Paintings* and the co-edited collections: *Doing Narrative Research* and *Beyond Narrative Coherence*. Maria is currently working with epistolary narratives on love and agonistic politics and on a genealogy of the seamstress, a British Academy funded project looking into auto/biographical narratives of home-based dressmakers and women working in the garment industry.

In memory of Phil Salmon

Contents

List of contributors	vi
Introduction: What is narrative research?	
Corinne Squire, Molly Andrews and Maria Tamboukou	1
1 Narratives of events: Labovian narrative analysis and its limitations Wendy Patterson	27
2 From experience-centred to socioculturally-oriented approaches to narrative Corinne Squire	47
3 Analysing narrative contexts Ann Phoenix	72
4 A Foucauldian approach to narratives Maria Tamboukou	88
5 Practising a rhizomatic perspective in narrative research Gerrit Loots, Kathleen Coppens and Jasmina Sermijn	108
6 Bodies, embodiment and stories Lars-Christer Hydén	126
7 Seeing narratives Susan E. Bell	142
8 Doing research 'on and through' new media narrative Mark Davis	159
9 Approaches to narrative worldmaking David Herman	176
10 Looking back on narrative research: An exchange Phillida Salmon and Catherine Kohler Riessman	197
11 Never the last word: Revisiting data Molly Andrews	205
12 Narrating sensitive topics Margareta Hydén	223
13 The public life of narratives: Ethics, politics, methods Paul Gready	240
Concluding comments Catherine Kohler Riessman	255
Afterword: The monkey wrenches of narrative Jens Brockmeier	261
Index	271

Introduction

What is narrative research?

Corinne Squire, Molly Andrews and Maria Tamboukou

I live in terror of not being misunderstood (Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist')

In the last three decades, narrative has acquired an increasingly high profile in social research, following a series of 'narrative turns' in other disciplinary fields, like history and literary studies (Hyvärinen, 2010). It often seems as if all social researchers are doing narrative research in some way. Yet narrative research, although it is popular and engaging, is difficult; how to go about it is much discussed. People working in this field are frequently approached by students and colleagues, in and outside academia, asking questions like, 'Should I request respondents to tell stories or not?'; 'What happens if my respondents don't produce any narratives?'; 'What is a narrative, anyway?' and, most regularly, 'What do I do with the stories now I've got them?' Narrative data can easily seem overwhelming: susceptible to endless interpretation, by turns inconsequential and deeply meaningful.

Unlike many qualitative frameworks, narrative research offers no automatic starting or finishing points. Since the definition of 'narrative' itself is in dispute, as indeed is the need for having one in the first place (Tamboukou, 2008), there are no self-evident categories on which to focus as there are with content-based thematic approaches, or with analyses of specific elements of language. Clear accounts of how to analyse the data, as found for instance in grounded theory and in Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, are rare. There are few well-defined debates on conflicting approaches within the field and how to balance them, as there are, for example, in the highly-contested field of discourse analysis. In addition, unlike other qualitative research perspectives, narrative research offers no overall rules about suitable materials or modes of investigation, or the best level at which to study stories. It does not tell us whether to look for stories in recorded everyday speech, interviews, diaries, photographs, TV programmes, newspaper articles or the patterned activities of people's everyday lives; whether to aim for objectivity or researcher and participant involvement; whether to analyse stories' particularity or generality; or what epistemological or ontological significance to attach to narratives.

Despite these difficulties, many of us who work with narratives want to continue and develop this work. Most often, perhaps, we frame our research in terms of narrative because we believe that by doing so we are able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change. By focusing on narrative, we are able to investigate not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed; how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted and what, if any, effects they have. For many of us, problematic as they are, narratives carry traces of human lives that we want to understand. All these areas of enquiry can help us describe, understand and even explain important aspects of the world. It is our hope that this book will contribute to this multilevel, dialogic potential of narrative research. In the rest of this Introduction, we explore further the popularity of narrative research, its diverse histories and its theoretical contradictions, in an effort to describe both its complexity and the possibilities for working productively within that complexity.

Narrative research: popularity and diversity

Narrative is a popular portmanteau term in contemporary western social research. The crowd of much-used summary and outline texts about narrative research (Bold, 2012; Clandinin and Connelly, 2004; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2011; Elliot, 2005; Freeman, 2009; Herman, 2009; Holstein and Gubrium, 1999; Langellier and Peterson, 2004; Mishler, 1986; Ochs and Capps, 2001; Plummer, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Roberts, 2001; Sarbin, 1986; Wengraf, 2001) exemplifies its popularity. So does the recent burst of empirically-based texts focused on specific studies (Andrews, 2007; Emerson and Frosh, 2004; McAdams, 2006; Mishler, 1999; Squire, 2007; Tamboukou, 2010), the rich crop of narratively-themed collections of essays (Andrews et al., 2004; Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Bamberg et al., 2008; Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001; Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Clandinin, 2006; Hyvärinen et al., 2010; Patterson, 2002) and the increasing number of books addressing narrative in specific domains, such as human development, education, health, sexualities, psychotherapy and social work (for instance, Charon, 2006; Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004; Greenhalgh and Hurwitz, 1998; Hall, 1997; Hydén and Brockmeier, 2011; Lieblich et al., 2004; Mattingley, 1998; Plummer, 1995; Trahar, 2009; Wells, 2011).

Aside from this current ubiquity within social research, 'narrative' is also a term frequently heard in popular discourse. Often, these popular uses of the term work to connote a particularly acute understanding. Politicians or policy-makers suggest they are doing their jobs well because they pay close attention to people's everyday 'narratives', or because they themselves have a joined-up 'narrative' of what they are doing. Journalists claim a good understanding of

events by spelling out for their audiences the underlying ‘narrative’. Citizens are urged to achieve better comprehension of difficult circumstances by reading or hearing the ‘stories’ of those affected – for example, the World Health Organization pictures the diversity of disability through ‘first-hand accounts’ from across the world (www.who.int/features/2011/disability/en/index.html). Sometimes, though, public ‘narratives’ are treated with suspicion, as obfuscators of the ‘realities’ they gloss and hide. In addition, the term ‘narrative’ is used descriptively in popular discourse, as it is in academic humanities disciplines, to indicate the line of thematic and causal progression in cultural form, such as in a film or a novel. Here again, ‘narrative’ may be a good thing, exciting, compelling, insightful. But it may also be criticized as over-complex, over-simple, too long, too conventional. Both in popular culture and in social research, then, ‘narrative’ is strikingly diverse in the way it is understood. In popular culture, it may suggest insight into – or concealment of – important biographical patterns or social structures, or, simply, good or less good forms of symbol sequence. In social research, ‘narrative’ also refers to a diversity of topics of study, methods of investigation and analysis, and theoretical orientations. It displays different definitions within different fields, and the topics of hot debate around these definitions shift from year to year.

On account of this prolixity, many accounts of narrative research begin by exploring the field’s different contemporary forms. This Introduction is no exception, but it approaches the task a little differently. It sets out two overlapping fields within which narrative research’s diversity appears: those of narrative research’s history, and its theory. For, we shall argue, narrative research’s incoherence derives partly from its divergent beginnings, and partly from the theoretical fault-lines that traverse it.

Where does narrative research come from? —

Historical contradictions

The antecedents of contemporary narrative social research are commonly located in two parallel academic moves (Andrews et al., 2004; Rustin, 2000).¹ The first is the post-war rise of humanist approaches within western sociology and psychology. These approaches posed holistic, person-centred approaches, often including attention to individual case studies, biographies and life histories, against positivist empiricism (Bertaux, 1981; Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). The second academic antecedent to contemporary narrative social research is Russian structuralist and, later, French poststructuralist (Barthes, 1977; Culler, 2002; Genette, 1979; Todorov, 1990), postmodern (Foucault, 1972; Lyotard, 1984), psychoanalytic (Lacan, 1977) and deconstructionist (Derrida, 1977) approaches to narrative within the humanities. These approaches had effects on social research in the English-speaking world from the late 1970s, initially through the work of Althusser, Lacan and Foucault, film and literary critics and feminist and socialist theorists, as it

appeared in translations; and in journals such as *Ideology and Consciousness* and *mf*, and in books like *Changing the Subject* (Henriques et al., 1984) and later, in the USA, Gergen's (1991) and Sampson's (1993) work.² Such work was often interested in story structure and content. But unlike the humanist narrative move within social research, it was concerned with narrative fluidity and contradiction, with unconscious as well as conscious meanings, and with the power relations within which narratives become possible (Parker, 2003; Tamboukou, this volume). It assumed that multiple, disunified subjectivities were involved in the production and understanding of narratives, rather than singular, agentic storytellers and hearers, and it was preoccupied with the social formations shaping language and subjectivity. In this tradition, the storyteller does not tell the story, so much as she/he is told by it.

Despite the theoretical differences, there are many convergences between these humanist and poststructuralist traditions within current narrative research. Most researchers are affected by both conceptual histories. For example, Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson use what they have called 'free association narrative interviewing' (2000) to map individuals' biographical accounts of crime in the community. They also apply psychoanalytic understandings of fractured subjects to these individual biographies, and draw on poststructural formulations of the uncertainties of language.³ Similarly, Mark Freeman (2004) traces the life histories of individual artists, but at the same time he positions these life histories within the modern western narratives of art that 'write' these lives, and he also pays attention to the unconscious structures of meaning that traverse life stories. Recent studies influenced by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze (Loots and colleagues, this volume; Tamboukou, 2010) work with corpuses of data produced by individual, frequently marginalized subjects, while treating those data as networks of narrative meaning distributed across the material world, not fixed to a single biographical subject.

More generally, humanist and the poststructuralist traditions of narrative research are often brought together by their shared tendency to treat narratives as modes of resistance to existing structures of power. This tendency may involve, for instance, collecting the oral histories of working-class communities. It may mean investigating the (auto)biographical expression of women's subject positions: how women write within the contexts of their lives; and how other women read their texts within the conditions of their own lived, subjective place within power relations (Hydén, this volume; Stanley, 1992; Tamboukou, 2010). It may stimulate a linguistic study of the storytelling sophistication of African-American adolescents (Labov, 1972). Some narrative researchers use extensive life histories in order to understand how personal lives traverse social change (Andrews, 2007; Chamberlayne et al., 2002). Others deploy narratives to try to change people's relations to their social circumstances. This is the terrain of narrative therapy and other therapies that use storied material, as well as of some community research that enables collective storytelling (Sliep et al., 2004). Still other researchers analyse the conditions and effectiveness of community and 'public' narratives (Gready, this volume; Plummer, 1995, 2001).

Politics thus seems at times to bring the two historical trends in narrative research together (Squire, 2005). Nevertheless, their theoretical assumptions about subjectivity, language, the social and narrative itself remain in contradiction. Current syntheses of the two often involve, for instance, maintenance of a humanist conception of a singular, unified subject, at the same time as the promotion of an idea of narrative as always multiple, socially constructed and constructing, reinterpreted and reinterpretable. These contradictions do not go unnoticed. But many researchers think it more important to do useful and innovative work across the contradictions, rather than trying to resolve conflicting positions that are historically and disciplinarily distinct, as well as logically incommensurable.

Theoretical divisions in narrative research —

The historically-produced theoretical bricolage in narrative research is largely responsible for the current wide variability in how researchers conceptualize what is narrative, how to study it and why it is important, as material, method, or route to understanding psychological or social phenomena, or all of these. The following section of the Introduction sketches some obvious and some less obvious theoretical division in contemporary narrative research.

One of the most well-rehearsed differences is between research focused on the spoken recounting of particular past *events* that happened to the narrator, the person telling the story, classically described in Labov's work on event narratives (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; see also Patterson, this volume), and *experience-centred* work (see Squire, this volume), exploring stories that range in length from segments of interviews, to many hours of life histories, and that may be about general or imagined phenomena, things that happened to the narrator or distant matters they've only heard about. It is worth noting here that the *event-centred* and *experience-centred* division is for many narrative researchers a heuristic one and the boundaries between them are porous and overlapping, as becomes apparent in Chapters 1 and 2. However, this second kind of narrative research encompasses varying media, too: not just speech, but also writing, such as scraps of letters, laundry lists, extensive multi-volume diaries; visual materials like photo albums and video diaries; and narratives inhering in objects and actions such as the arrangement of objects on mantelpieces and the everyday activities of shopping, cooking and eating (Seale, 2004). Such expansion of narrative data seems to some to give the term 'narrative' a meaning so broad as to rob it of descriptive, let alone explanatory power (Craib, 2004). Yet throughout this second field of work, the life experiences that infuse the data constitute the primary topic, the true 'narrative' (Bruner, 1990).

What is shared across both event- and experience-centred narrative research is that there are assumed to be individual, internal representations of phenomena – events, thoughts and feelings – to which narrative gives external *expression*. Event-centred work assumes that these internal and individual representations are

more or less constant. Experience-centred research stresses that such representations vary drastically over time, and across the circumstances within which one lives, so that a single phenomenon may produce very different stories, even from the same person.

A third form of narrative research, which addresses the co-constructed narratives that develop, for instance in conversations between people or email exchanges, does not fit into either of these two initial fields of event- and experience-oriented narrative research. This third field *may* operate with the assumption that its more 'social', co-constructed, stories are expressions of internal cognitive or affective states. However, most often, it views narratives as forms of social code, addressing stories as dialogically constructed (Bakhtin, 1981) and not as expressions of internal states. Researchers in this field are interested, rather, in the social patterns and/or functioning of stories, whether the 'stories' are short, disjointed sequences of conversation or much more extensive, exemplifying broad cultural narratives (Abell et al., 2004; Bamberg, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Plummer, 2001; Squire, 2007).

Narrative research's divergences over whether stories are symbolizing internal individual states or external social circumstances – in itself, a questionable division – relate to a further dichotomy. Are narratives shaped by the *audiences* to whom they are delivered, and if so, to what extent? For some narrative researchers, the most interesting features of personal narratives lie in what they tell us about individual thinking or feeling, whether the narratives themselves are about events or experiences (Chamberlayne et al., 2002; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Labov, 1997). Other researchers are more concerned with the social production of narratives by their audiences: in how personal stories get built up through the conversational sequences in people's talk (Bamberg, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2007); or how they are tied up with the performance and negotiation of social identities in a common space of meaning (Phoenix, this volume; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Salmon and Riessman, this volume).⁴ Some narrative researchers are occupied more widely with how narratives follow, are constrained by, or resist, larger social patterns of social and cultural storytelling (Gready, this volume; Malson, 2004; Plummer, 2001). Researchers may even view narratives much more generally, as fields of communication traversed by storylines that do not need to be broken down between narrators and audiences, narratives and contexts, or narrative language and the other materialities involved with narrative (Loots et al., this volume). Narrative researchers may also be interested in how researchers' own 'stories' vary, depending on the social and historical places from which they 'listen' to their data (Andrews, this volume; Riessman, 2002). These primarily social research interests are seen in some narrative researchers who think of stories themselves as expressions of personal states, as well as in those who treat stories as manifestations of social or cultural patterns, though they are commonest among the latter.

Of course, researchers who are mainly interested in what seems like the simplest kind of stories, event narratives told by individuals, also acknowledge that stories are shaped by their listeners. But for them, these social factors are not