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The Zone of Narrative Distance: Between Agency and Authenticity

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The Zone of Narrative Distance: Between Agency and Authenticity

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my advisor Larry Browning whose unwavering support and continued guidance have been a constant blessing in my life. I would also like to dedicate this to my father, Wagdi Zeid, who has always inspired me to pursue my dreams and continues to do so now but from a better place. My husband and three girls have been a continuous source of motivation and I am grateful for their patience, encouragement, and unconditional love. I am also indebted to my mother for teaching me how to be strong and to stand up again no matter how many times I fall.

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The Zone of Narrative Distance: Between Agency and Authenticity

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This is a qualitative study of more than 600 personal narratives of explanation, imagination, celebration, transportation, elevation, and circumspection. Participants (n=130) recreated narratives of their lived experiences in response to prompts and corresponding six angles of appreciation adapted from an “Open Architecture of Narratology ” (Browning & Morris, 2012). Through a constant comparative analysis, recurrent concepts and categories emerged to support the theoretical development of a communicatively constructed “Zone of Narrative Distance”. Grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2008) also supports “narrative authenticity” as a perceived possible seventh angle for narrative appreciation. In enacting variations of narrative agency, narrators communicatively construed an epistemic distance afforded by remoteness in retrospective reflection and sense making of past experiences. Ontological and epistemological characteristics of the “Zone of Narrative Distance” are discussed in light of potential contribution to the greater discipline of narrative impact across multiple disciplines.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting...., stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without a narrative... it is simply there like life itself.

(Barthes, 1975, p.237)

As early and grand as the story of creation in holy scriptures and as simple and repetitive as an unexpected event that makes up a “small story” in our daily lives (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), stories are the substance of our conversations, lives, memories, and identities. Universality, ubiquity, and pervasiveness of narrative has prompted many social scientists to investigate structures, genres, and functions of narratives in an attempt to grasp a multidimensional understanding of narrative impact. Several scholars have envisioned narrative as life itself or as a powerful instrument in constructing and transforming dimensions of reality in our personal and work lives (Browning & Morris, 2012; Bruner, 1991; Fisher, 1987; McAdams, 2001, Polkinghorne, 1991, 1995; Somers, 1994). Our appreciation for narrative and its profound influence shows in the volume of narrative studies comprising a significant “narrative turn” in units

of analysis and research methodology in social sciences, humanities, and technology across numerous contexts.

Reissman (2008) traces the beginnings of the narrative turn back to the 1960's and attributes its current status to four movements: the criticism against positivist social science modes of inquiry, the "memoir boom" or autobiographical surge in popular literature, identity movements, and the "burgeoning therapeutic culture" that utilizes personal narratives to capture complex social constructs such as identity, agency, and cultural values and norms (p.14). The narrative turn does not only indicate a rapidly evolving interest in the descriptive and "telling" nature of stories but also the ability of stories to transform meanings of experiences, individuals, and general publics (Boje, 2012; Green, Brock, & Strange, 2002; Polletta, 2006). Personal narratives, in particular, have occupied center stage in recent years. Indeed, the ability of stories to accurately and vividly depict, describe, and explain numerous human conditions is unsurpassed and many studies have utilized personal narratives in various social contexts such as self and identity concepts (McAdams, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1991), formation of social classes (Somers, 1992), cross-cultural constructs (Mutua & Swatanner, 2004), developmental psychology (McCabe & Peterson, 1991), and criminal reform (Maruna, 2001) to name a few.

The common element in all the aforementioned contexts is a personal narrative: the story that we consciously share about ourselves with others. While the majority of recent studies are concerned about the stories we tell, it is important to note that the influence of narrative or narrative impact is a mutually binding and reflexive process

between the story or storyteller and audiences. Narrative truth, as well, is up to the judgment of audiences. Thus, in order to understand how narratives affect us, we must also acknowledge our agency in selectively interpreting and retaining bits and pieces from thousands of narratives that cross our paths every day.

Self-stories, predominantly falling under small stories, connect us with others in multiple ways. In general, there seems to be a broad distinction between “big” and “small” stories. Freeman (2006) depicts “big stories” as “life on a holiday” (p.132); where small stories pause and we look at life from a bird’s eye view. While there are differences between big and small narratives in both structure, impact and temporal span, Bamberg (2006) argues that small stories are more important than big stories for modes of narrative inquiry and knowing. Small stories are also the building blocks of our sense of self and identity concepts (McAdams, 2001, 2006). Personal narratives help us understand how to cope with grief and loss (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Caplan, Haslett, & Burlison, 2005; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004) and illness (Bury, 2001), embrace and adopt new normalcies in remarkable demonstrations of resilience (Buzzanell 2010), and offer us a chance to recurrently use such mechanisms when needed in the future. In addition to the previous, narratives are also central to the development and assessment of leadership capacities in every individual (Sparrowe, 2005). The construction of a narrative self requires individuals to reflect upon who they are at a retrospective distance from the events they choose to narrate.

As we construct stories from past experiences, we learn more about the meaning of embedded events and bring deeper structures of our identity to the surface. McAdams

and McClean (2013) develop this further into a concept and theory of narrative identity where we internalize an evolving life story to “integrate the reconstructed past and an imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose “(p. 233). Narrative identities are sequential collections of personal stories that project a self-perceived character as communicated by the narrator. In every individual’s collection of personal stories, some events stand out as spotlights or markers of personal transformation, sudden realizations, and remarkable strength. Other events stand out as instances of contamination or stagnation interrupting the flow of a coherent or consistent self-perception of a narrative identity. Cumulatively, self-narratives depict more than just personal traits or dimensions of character. They tell of the narrator’s worldview, position in proposed worldview, and of a preferred reality (Freedman & Combs, 1996). The more we engage with such narratives, the more likely it is for us to successfully position or locate ourselves as active agents, actors, and protagonists in future narratives. Browning and Morris (2012) argue that people who know how to position themselves within the narrative and know how to reframe the story “are at an advantage” (p. x). This advantage comes naturally for some and with practice for others. Some may even, as Karl Scheibe (1986) posits, undertake dangerous adventures in order to construct and maintain satisfactory life stories laden with meaningful moments worthy of narrating. Whether we take Scheib’s route in pursuit of grand event narratives or depend on the small stories of every day life, we all need stories in our lives but for different reasons.

Our lives are saturated with narrative exchanges, but individual patterns of selection, retention, recall, and narrative configuration differ and are indicative of more

than just events and characters narrated. When we share stories with others, we retrospectively make sense of our lives and invite others to see the world from our perspective. We also expect something in return: a simple acknowledgment, acceptance, and to some extent validation of a subjective truth present in the stories. There is no doubt that personal stories are a rich and dynamic source of narrative knowing. However, “for narratives to flourish there must be a community to hear; ...for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics” (Plummer, 1995, p. 87).

The role of audiences is not limited to passive reception. Audiences, whether communities or a sole reader, are active agents in determining how much of an impact, if any, stories may have. Furthermore, they also implicitly impose certain requirements in the development of both narrative structure and meaning upon the narrator. Narratives attuned to such implicit requirements are likely to influence audiences causing them to suspend disbelief and fully engage with the narrator’s worldview (Holland, 2003). While many have tried to unravel the mysteries of narrative powers and why some people are more likely to “suspend disbelief” and readily fall under narrative spells more than others, our knowledge about narrative is still scattered into bits and pieces from every discipline with varying ontological and epistemological grounds. In their review of narrative impact, Green, Strange, and Brock (2008) find that it is never enough to look at narrative impact from a single disciplinary perspective. They also acknowledge the presence of significant interdisciplinary divides and advocate a multidisciplinary lens to study the act of storytelling and to adequately describe the influence stories may have on

the meaning of our lives, beliefs, identities, and ultimately societies. Similarly, Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) call for constructive reflection upon the perpetual nature of humans as gatherers and interpreters of stories through a constructivist approach of narrative analysis. They also find that narrative analysis alone is often single-sided and cannot look at narratives as an organic whole inseparable from their narrators.

Traditionally, narrative analysis dissects narratives into plots, themes, and structural elements at the surface discourse/language level and is mostly and predominantly descriptive. Reissman (2008) delineates four major analytic approaches within narrative analysis: thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and visual analysis. Briefly, thematic analysis focuses on identifying dominant and recurrent themes within narratives. Structural analysis looks at how events are organized into a plot and how organizational structures are framed within a narrative (Barthes, 1975). This is also where discourse analysis can be easily integrated into multiple modes of narrative inquiry. Dialogic/performance analysis places some emphasis on the storyteller and lastly visual analysis looks at the presence of narrative in multiple contexts such as art, video, and digital media. All the aforementioned methods of research have enriched and enhanced our knowledge about narratives.

Yet, narrative analysis looks at the final product: the story and its building blocks. Often overlooking the relationship between story and storyteller, narrative analysis speaks for narratives but not for storytellers and their capacity to retrospectively make sense of an event prior to constructing a story. Dynamics of the relationship between stories and their storytellers are not easy to control or navigate for multiple reasons. First,

motivations behind telling a story are often difficult to account for or predict. While we are readily attracted to narratives of others and are likely to share our own when asked to, researchers cannot go beyond the surface level of narratives in uncontrolled natural settings. Second, across most traditional pursuits of narrative knowing in humanities and social science, narratives remain at the surface and center of investigation often overlooking an integral phase in narrative development: a narrative preconstruction phase (Labov, 2007). Lastly, the polyvocality and multiplicity embedded in every narrative (Browning & Morris, 2012) develops into a semi-opaque lens veiling complexities of narrators' vicissitudes, needs, desires, and goals.

Consequently, narratology, first coined by Todorov in 1969, has been formerly dominated by a structuralist viewpoint and an emphasis on the mechanics, discourse, and surface level coding of narrative; often neglecting deep narrative structures and meaning. The narrative turn has softened the lines between varying forms of structural analyses (Barthes, 1975; Propp, 1968; Lévi-Strauss, 1955; Todorov, 1973) and invited scholars and narratologists to look at the value embedded in every story beyond structural and mechanical components. Recent narrative theories acknowledge the lacking nature of single disciplinary lenses in the analysis of personal stories. They also acknowledge the need to adopt an "open" architectural framework to narratology that can easily and readily accommodate novel and contingent findings about our developing abilities as storytellers and the influence of stories as they come about (Browning & Morris, 2012). In the oral tradition of storytelling, Bauman also contends that the "fullness of the work (narrative) in all its wholeness and indivisibility" demands and is better served by an

integrative vision of analysis (1986, p.190). Hence, narrative impact is better perceived as natural process that must be looked upon in its totality. Within qualitative analysis methods, grounded theory seems to be well suited for such an endeavor where emergent theory develops to describe latent social conditions within their natural habitat.

Narrative knowing, as Polkinghorne (1988) describes, is diverse and rich. Despite the significant volumes of works on theories behind the practice of personal storytelling, few have looked at a vast pool of semi-structured narratives from a grounded theory perspective. The purpose of this study is to explore, identify, and define common grounds in the practice of personal storytelling as they emerge in a controlled setting of an upper-level communication course at a large higher educational institution in the United States of America. Through the tools of analysis suggested by classical grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 2008), emergent categories may offer communication scholars, narratologists, social scientists, and practitioners alike some insight into how and why we tell stories to serve particular functions. Collectively, emergent categories from this analysis may be further developed into theory that outlines homo narrans' (Fisher, 1987) efforts to make sense of their experiences in order to relate to and invite others to acknowledge and share their worldview despite the inherently lacking nature of their narratives. While "narrative is the best way to understand the human experience because it is the way humans understand their own lives" (Richardson, 1990, p. 133), it is also offers scholars an opportunity to capture what narrators unintentionally communicate about their identities, sensemaking patterns, and what is truly meaningful in their lives. Thus, a semi-controlled setting where all narrators share a common motivation to tell

stories for a particular purpose may overcome some of the difficulties mentioned earlier about exploring the relationship between stories and their storytellers.

The setting for data collection in this study is guided by the larger theoretical framework set by Browning and Morris (2012) in an “*Open Architecture of Narratology*”. The authors identify six potential communicative applications for narrative: explanation, circumspection, celebration, elevation, transportation, and imagination. Applications are not exhaustive and the authors invite others to contribute to the aforementioned six applications as deemed necessary. In lieu of the burgeoning affection and appreciation for the dynamic value of narratives in multiple contexts (Gergen & Gergen, 2006), this study also seeks to unveil potential inherent value of studying small stories as wholesome entities that reflect vicissitudes, motivations, and goals of their narrators that develop into layers constituting their narrative identities.

This study utilizes investigative tools adopted from a classical grounded theory such as constant comparative analysis and coding to analyze more than 600 personal small stories collected over approximately two years in a semi-controlled virtual classroom environment. The richness of human experiences and knowledge as portrayed through intricate layers of creativity and individuality in every narrative-generating process of this data set promises uncharted territories where new theory about our abilities to make sense and apply narratives to specific purposeful functions may emerge. Likewise, codes emerging from this analysis may offer an alternate perspective on what we value and find meaningful about the our narratives and narratives of others. Before proceeding with the analysis, it is necessary to provide essential definitions and primary

ontological and epistemological assumptions on the nature of narrative as held by this study.

Chapter Two: On the Nature of Narrative

“Narrative existed long before people gave it a name and tried to figure out how it works”, yet we are still contemplating what it actually means and what is required to narrate or narrativize our experiences (Sternberg, 2001). And for good reasons. Aside from the inherent complexity in every narrative, there are varying ontological and epistemological viewpoints on the structure, composition, and function of every narrative form. With each perspective comes a contingent definition of narrative; one that reflects a unique configuration deemed fit for its function and well suited to its context.

Whether we embrace broad or more structured definitions, “narrativity” as the larger conceptual domain first coined in the 1960s , is an umbrella term that includes any and all abilities to “narrativize” human experiences in pursuit of meaning. Sternberg defines “narrativity as “what makes a text a narrative, what in it constitutes a minimal narrative, what distinguishes it from other genres or text types” (2010, p. 507). In a review of other definitions, he cautions against the use of limiting definitions that propose “narrativity” as a necessary imposition on event representation (Rudrum, 2005, p. 198) or through the story-discourse distinction (Davis, 2012).

Thus, narrativity, for the purposes of this analysis, is an ability to construct narratives; a human condition that perpetually makes sense of experiences to share with others, real or imagined. Similar to Bruner (2006), this study views narrative potential in almost everything.

For in White's (1980) words:

narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent...far from being a problem then, narrative might well be considered, a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely the problem of how to translate *knowing (sic)* into *telling (sic)*... the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than cultural-specific. (p. 5)

There are multiple modes of narrativity but “the necessary and sufficient condition of narrativity is the presence of a narrator telling a story” (Ryan, 1992, p. 368). In the mode of narrativity investigated by this study, the narrators' primary concern is to translate the knowledge acquired through previous experiences into “telling” narrative applications fit to every communicative application.

As broad as “simply there like life itself” where universality and ubiquity may even render it insignificant (Barthes, 1975, p. 79), the definition of narrative remains contingent on purposes and goals of narrative inquiry in pursuit of meaning. The bare minimum definition of narrative, as Abbott (2008a) claims, is “ the representation of an event or a series of events” (p.13). The keyword in this definition is “representation” and from representation stems multiple viewpoints of what counts as narrative in terms of structure and meaning. Representation of events is “a type of communication that is composed of discourse, appears in a sequence, and is interpreted retrospectively” (Browning & Boudes, 2005, p.32).

On the other hand, Bal (2009) distinguishes between narrative text, story, and fabula where narrative text is the larger all encompassing system that includes a story or the content embedded in that text and fabula represents a traditional plot. Specifically, “if one regards the text primarily as the product of the use of a medium, and the fabula primarily as the product of imagination, the story could be regarded as the result of an ordering” (Bal, 2009, p. 76). Gabriel (2004) also maintains a clear distinction between narrative and story, where narrative is the larger all-encompassing communicative system and story is the more fragile emotionally laden symbolic web of characters and plots. Holding the same distinction, Boje (2001) adds a temporal dimension to distinguish between narrative as a retrospective sensemaking process (Weick & Browning, 1986) and communicative interpretation of story. Such distinctions suggest that “story” may not be an instrument of knowledge outside its narrative context; relegating story to a lesser capacity of sensemaking and sharing experiences.

Such limits, according to Bruner, may be “inherent in the minds of” narrators and audiences and thus “we would do well with as loose fitting a constraint as we can manage concerning what a story must ‘be’ to be a story” (1986, pp.16-17). Indeed, only loose fitting constraints can accommodate the multiplicity, plurivocality and continual emergence of meaning embedded in every narrative. The distinction between story and narrative for most narrative scholars exists at the surface level. It is distinguishable at the structural level of narrative analysis and is easily diffused as we look into deeper narrative structures where narrators’ vicissitudes, motivations, and goals reside. Extending this viewpoint, Browning and Morris (2012) advocate an “*Open architecture*

of narratology” where all narratives are valuable meaning making instruments and deserve to be appreciated.

The following section discusses the main dimensions and assumptions of an “*Open architecture of narratology*” metaphor as it influences the data collection process and the narrators’ perceptions of narrative requirements.

An Open Architecture of Narratology

An “*Open Architecture of Narratology*” does not only accommodate the richness and complexity of narrative knowing (Polkinghorne, 1988) but also the dynamic nature of narratology as a body of narrative knowledge that is constantly evolving as “an ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events, cultural artifacts that tell a story” (Bal, 2009, p.3). The metaphor, although not an explicit theoretical framework, suggests a “mode of narrative appreciation” that enables narrative researchers to pursue meaning in every narrative opportunity as well as recognize the narrativity embedded in personal communication; even when incomplete. Perhaps, this approach also overcomes the distinction between complete and incomplete narratives held by Boje or what he references as “antenarratives.” He defines antenarrative as “a “bet” on the future pattern (of narratives and associated sensemaking) in more or less authentic scenario of event-space” (2011, p. 1). He further describes antenarratives, unlike narratives, as incomplete, incoherent, “improper” and of lesser semantic power. In appreciating all narratives, Browning and Morris (2012) insist that “stories of all kinds deserve to be listened to” because “sometimes the best stories are incomplete and because the incompleteness is the hook that draws the listener (reader) in” (p. xi). Even chaotic

fragments of narrative in our daily lives are worthy of appreciation (Crossley, 2000). Hence, narrative appreciation as a mode of understanding and evaluating narratives allows us to exhibit greater tolerance towards varying individual capacities of storytelling.

Although our awareness of narrative and its structure begins at an early age, arguably as early as the age of six months and possibly “virtually inborn” (Bruner, 2006, p. 58), the capacity to tell stories is enabled by a complex state of consciousness and is influenced by the worlds we live in and the stories that we are individually and collectively exposed to. Hence, an additional advantage to adopting an open architecture of narratology and its accompanying mode of narrative appreciation is a clear and persistent awareness of a collective and mutual reflexivity in determining the value and meaning of every narrative. An awareness of such reflexivity and agency that we possess as storytellers and interpreters helps us realize that proposed angles of appreciation are not “intrinsic features of the narratives” (Browning & Morris, 2012, p. 11) but rather a reflection of our own sensemaking efforts. For in Ricoeur’s words, “stories are models for the redescription of the world”, however “the story is not by itself the model” but rather “an instantiation of models we carry in our minds” (as cited in Bruner, 1986, p.7). The models we carry in our minds and the stories we share are numberless but they carry a common grammar; a identifiable sequence that gives rise to meaning. The following section discusses core features of narrative as they are of relevance to the following grounded theory analysis of personal narratives.

Narrative Structure

Narrative can take on many forms and perform innumerable functions but a core essential structure remains present in the fabric of every story, an event. To begin a story, Bruner (2006) argues that first we presume “existence of some initial canonical state of things in the world, some stable ordinariness to which, as it were, our habits of mind are tuned” (p. 56). An event is also referred to as action (Abott, 2012). Storytellers consciously and intentionally select an event or action from their repertoire of experiences and carefully construct a plot or sequence of events that follows a typical skeletal framework. The skeleton as built around this event “includes an expression of an initial canonical state, peripeteia, action, resolution, and coda” (Bruner, 2006, p.58).

Many scholars have divided narrative construction into sequential steps where a state of ordinariness is interrupted by an event; peripeteia (Schrier, 1980). “Peripeteia” – or the breach in steady state as it first appears in Aristotle’s poetics- is at the core of every story and propels the reader to anticipate a plot or series of interconnected relationships between events or within an event in a story. The development of plot is strategic and planned by the storyteller in a pre-narrative construction phase. Ricoeur defines plot as an “intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in any story” (1980, p. 171). As storytellers select an event, they develop a plot to situate the event in time and space in preparation for representation to others. Most stories have a beginning, middle, and end. Antenarratives or incomplete narratives, on the other hand, may invite others to participate in the construction or focalization of narrative substance in the future. Antenarratives are “bets on future narratives” (Boje, 2001); an attempt at a complete

narrative that we add to our repertoire. Every story, complete or incomplete, deserves to be heard, understood and appreciated. For behind every story is more than a series of events, a captivating plot, or an unexpected ending. Our selection of events to develop into a narratives is not random and is an extension of our identities and characters in the eyes of others. Thus, we can safely argue that behind every story are dimensions and reflections of the identity of the storyteller or the narrator. The following section presents the narrator as a focalizer (Bal, 2009), interpreter (Bruner 1990, 1991; Browning & Morris 2012; Polkinghorne, 1988) and an active constructor of narrative identity (McAdams 2001).

The Narrator

This study holds the conviction that humans are essentially storytellers; homo narrans who see and invite others to see their world through narratives (Fisher, 1987). As homo narrans, we can safely argue that every form of communication is a story and that every story has a communicative function. Indeed, “the narrative form seems to be our uniquely human way of making sense of the world with a minimum of experience, even in the absence of experience” (Bruner, 2006, p. 58).

In the absence of our own experiences, we actively seek knowledge through the wealth of narratives readily available to us. The knowledge we acquire settles into our modes of representation and the worlds that we carry within. Our “minds are structured so that we cannot help but construct stories out of our own experiences and we listen to stories with an innate ability to pull apart details and fill out our memory structures where lacking” (Green, Strange, & Brock, 2003, p. 311). Similarly, Fisher argues that “all

forms of human communication need to be seen fundamentally as stories- symbolic interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture, and character... with value-laden warrants ” constituting narrative logic (1987, p. xiii). We are “ homo narrans” presenting and representing the world in our stories. As we do so, we learn about others and engage them in forms of narrative knowing. People use self-stories to interpret and account for their lives through time practicing and reconstituting their narrative logic. This is an ongoing process; a process that helps us become better storytellers. We are compelled as Ochs insists by “the drive to impose a *narrative* logic on life experience”; one that “is ubiquitous, cutting across languages and social groups large and small, and across the life span, emergent at the earliest stages of language development” (2004, p. 269).

While we may not be always consciously cognizant of our ability to understand others and ourselves through narrative, we remain passionate about stories. This analysis is not a quest for narrative truth, nor is it out to seek which narratives enjoy the greatest degree of conformity to our traditionally agreed upon narrative logic. Yet, this analysis celebrates the presence of a subjective and contingent truth in every narrative (Browning & Boudes, 2005; Browning & Morris, 2012); a truth of representation, one that “*authentically*” constructs reality through narratives. As Bruner contends, narrative deals with the vicissitudes of intention (1986, p. 17) and begins in the memory of the narrator. Yet, as Ochs and Capps (1998) contend, memory is subjective. Governed by the limitations of natural memory, Polkinghorne (2005) affirms that “memory is not a container of taped replays of life events...recollection is a partial reconstruction of the

past that attends to and connects memory traces according to the press of present needs and interpretations” (P.4). Recollection and distribution of “tales from life is governed by the natural abilities of memory, a necessity for turning points, and dynamics of the relationship between self and other” (Bruner, 2006, p. 34). Our ability to subjectively recall events from our memory and others’ ability to selectively retain bits and pieces from our narratives falls under the greater umbrella of narrative impact. Narrative impact is vast, diverse, multidisciplinary, and constantly evolving as it occurs at individual and collective levels of consciousness. The following section discusses narrative impact as it relates to the construction and provision of this data set.

Narrative Impact

There is a growing interdisciplinary interest in mechanisms of narrative impact. Scholars and practitioners alike wish to understand how and why narratives affect audiences. In their multidisciplinary review of narrative impact, Green et al. (2008) find that narrative impact’s importance “lies in its social consequences” (p. 346) where “to tell a story to oneself or hear a story from another is to be changed” (p. 351). Indeed, they posit that our minds are “repositories of stories and learning consists largely in assimilating new stories and revising and expanding indices for our repertoires of previously received stories” (p.351). However, much of their questions about the mechanism of narrative impact, the ideal methods of assimilating new stories, or the ability of readers or listeners to assimilate their newly added indices into their own stories remain unanswered. We know that narratives affect us but we are still not sure how some are able to affect us more than others.

There are certain assumptions about the qualities of narratives that are more likely to affect us than others yet the collective impact of narrative is difficult to capture or measure. Narrative impact is a three-dimensional relationship between narrator, narrative, and audiences where complexity is multiplied and is both structural and dynamical (emerging from the interaction between the three) (Browning & Morris, 2012). Some also attribute an equally important effect on the medium or context of interaction. Thus, our best attempt at discovery of the mystery of narrative impact lies at the individual level where we can holistically assess the relationship between the three players. Although narrative impact, as a larger metaphor, is primarily concerned with narrative influence on recipients (listeners, readers, or viewers) of narratives, to understand narrative impact is to first grasp the dynamics of narrative construction at the individual level from a holistic and multidisciplinary integrative viewpoint. We must also look at narrative construction as a natural process with evolving degrees of complexity and often unexpected dynamics.

Summary

Although the previous narrative review, serving purposes of this analysis, is limited in scope and depth, it brings about more questions than answers about the nature of narratives, narrators, and their audiences. Indeed, there is still much more to know about narratives and their abilities to transform both narrators and audiences. Narrativity is a persistently ubiquitous human condition utilizing complex communicative sensemaking vehicles in a universally recognized and appreciated narrative currency. To start, the bare minimum definition of narrative is a representation of an event. Our ability to “narrativize” our experiences of such events is subjective, variant, responsive,

reflexive, contingent, and liminal. Epistemologically and ontologically, this study holds no distinction between narratives and stories nor does it judge some stories as incomplete. Alternatively, it holds the assumption that all narratives are, by default, incomplete and lacking. There is a subjective truth in every narrative effort and every narrative is an “authentic” retrospective sensemaking attempt. Adopting an open architecture metaphor, all narratives deserve to be appreciated and they all possess inherent meaning and reflect agency of the narrator as well as dimensions of their identity. Narrative impact is ideally captured at individual levels where we can better grasp dynamics of interaction and control between narratives, narrators, and audiences.

While there is an abundance of classical and modern works on the nature and definition of narrative, theories of narrative, and functional/structural models of narrative analysis across multiple disciplines, there is still a need for an integrative and holistic assessment of how and why we tell stories and what makes some of the stories we tell better than others promising greater narrative impact even within a guided setting of personal narrative construction. Calls for a deeper understanding of “narrative impact” (Green, Strange, & Brock, 2003, p. xiii) as it extends beyond the personal realm of the narrator remain necessary and are needed to account for the multiplicity and polyvocality embedded in our daily experiences. In order to better define what constitutes a narrative and how we may utilize such a powerful communicative tool, we must not only understand how narrative works but also how and why stories are constructed and what makes some better than others in the eyes of many. It is important to note that the nature of narrative, its influence, and reception are dependent on a mutually reflexive

relationship between the story itself and its recipients. In other words, the nature of narrative and its influence is cumulative, context-bound, multidimensional, and serendipitous.

To accommodate evolving complexity and multiplicity embedded in every narrative, loosely fitting structures are best for understanding narrative as it appears and evolves in every context under investigation. Many of the inherent obstacles in relatively rigid qualitative or quantitative structural analysis of narrative are overcome by the flexibility and dynamism afforded by Classical Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2008) as an inductive qualitative research methodology.

In pursuit of situated and integrative narrative knowing, the following is a secondary analysis of 600 stories that have been collected and transcribed over the course of two years. Falling under “a special class of storytelling consisting of self-narratives or autobiographical accounts whose chief protagonist is the narrator’ (Neimeyer & Levitt, 2001, p. 48), these stories implicitly and unintentionally tell us about the narrators’ through their reconstructions of personal experiences. More than 130 participants were given specific prompts for every story corresponding to six communicative applications of narrative set forth by Browning and Morris (2012). Each participant/narrator developed, performed, and transcribed six personal stories ranging from three to five minutes long. The “*Open Architecture of Narratology*” and accompanying mode of narrative appreciation developed by Browning and Morris (2012) have guided the collection of data as well as the scope of narrativity within this study. Narrative appreciation suggests six angles to holistically assess the relationship between narrator,

narratives, and audiences. The following six angles create a skeletal framework that loosely fits the complex nature of narratives and captures the multitude of possible worlds inherent in every narrative: *action, motivation, and moral outcome; sequence and locale; interest and memory; character and identity; aesthetics; and complexity and control*. Although this study does not utilize the six angles of appreciation directly in the analysis, it is important to mention their influence on the narrators' perceptions and expectations as reflected in their narratives. Correspondingly, the communicative applications are: explanation, circumspection, elevation, imagination, celebration, and transportation. Each set of narratives collected corresponds to one of the aforementioned applications and incorporates angles of narrative appreciation.

Complexity, diversity, richness, and plurivocality inherent in this data set benefits from an inductive ontological and epistemological approach; one that acknowledges that narrative knowing is bound to its context and validates and reflects the role of researcher in interpreting and selectively focusing on specific narrative dimensions as they concurrently emerge in the data set. The following chapter discusses the selection of tools from Classical Grounded Theory (CGT) as both method and approach to analyzing the data and its ideal fit to the inherent qualities of personal narratives.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In general, theories in the field of social science have several broad functional requirements. An efficient and well-rounded theory should enable prediction and explanation of behavior, aid in the advancement of sociology, remain applicable to practical contexts, provide a perspective towards behavior that is derived from the data, and lastly guide and provide researchers with relevant methodology experience on specific particular areas of behavior (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). Good theory must also be relevant to academics, practitioners, and laymen simultaneously. The aforementioned is not easily accomplished with traditional deductive research methods that are set out to test existing theories and hypotheses. Relying on a priori assumptions, deductive methods test applicability and validity of existing hypotheses and assumptions but are not ideally set for generating new theory nor explicating new concepts as they emerge from data.

Deductive methods also lack the ability to sensitively respond to unexpected findings in the data and are typically in pursuit of something to support a priori assumptions. Expectedly, deductive methods tend to mold data into specific categories and concepts that may not ideally fit with the data. This does not mean that deductive research methods are not of value to the field of social science and narrative but rather suggests that deductive methods may not be well suited to some types of data sets; specifically the data set under investigation.

Within social research methodologies, there are myriad inductive research methods. Generally, qualitative research methods fall along a continuum that ranges between positivism and social constructionism. Between the positivism of a singular view

of life's social phenomena and the collaborative evolving sensemaking efforts embedded in the social constructionist perspective, qualitative researchers are actively interpreting social contexts and players. The main goal of qualitative research methods, regardless of where their specific approach falls along the continuum, is to generate valid and pertinent theory where "understanding is a central topic and methodological challenge: the meaningful experience of others is a mystery that requires careful discernment" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 35).

Although data can be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, grounded theory appears to be the most careful and context-bound inductive methodology. Maintaining an interdisciplinary ethos concerned with understanding the human world "within a specific situation", grounded theory generates middle-range theories that adopt "the perspective that individuals are able to play an active role in influencing social settings, although the nature of their action, or inaction, is not predetermined and cannot be understood absent a detailed examination of social experiences" (Treem & Browning, in press). Similarly, Lindlof and Taylor argue that "individuals linguistically construct numerous, overlapping life worlds and it is through them that we gain access to each other's subjectivity" (2011, p. 39). In this context, in response to situated and shared prompts, narrators are constantly using their narratives to convey meaning and realize their identity in a semi-controlled setting. There are numerous grand theories about our ability to narrativize our experiences and the sensemaking capacities involved. Yet, many grand theories such as Fisher's Narrative Paradigm (1987), or Barthes' Structural analysis of narrative (1975) explain abstract and absolute concepts and phenomena of narrative

that may not be easily applicable to every social context. The positivistic undertone of some grand narrative theories puts non-conforming narratives at a disadvantage or at least relegates them to a lesser degree of value as communicative vehicles worthy of investigation and appreciation. For the purposes of this analysis and to accommodate the size of the data set and potential untapped wealth of narrative knowing, tools within grounded theory analysis represent an ideal fit. The following section summarizes main assumptions and characteristics of grounded theory as applied to the data set under investigation.

Grounded Theory

The complexity, diversity, and magnitude of the aforementioned data set demands an inductive approach; one that validates the researcher's entry with an insufficient knowledge and supports flexible use of data to produce valid and credible theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). The discovery of pertinent narrative theory from this data set requires a systemic analysis of keywords and themes as they naturally emerge in narratives in their corresponding sets of explanation, imagination, circumspection, elevation, celebration and transportation. While the data can be qualitatively tested under several narrative modes of analysis such as thematic or structural analysis, each mode of narrative analysis often emphasizes one dimension of the context under the investigation at the expense of possibly more important emergent concepts that remain context-bound. For example, to apply Labov's (1967) structural analysis model is to narrowly concentrate on what is being said, "ignoring how (narrative) content is organized by a narrator" (Reissman, 2008, p. 100-101). Similarly, to apply requirements of narrative

fidelity and probability to every narrative would greatly restrict the valuable content in personal stories that may not fit within the rational requirements of the narrative paradigm. Grounded theory, on the other hand, with roots in pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5).

Thus, grounded theory creates an ideal environment for the natural emergence of concepts and themes that are inherently valuable in their context. The following section presents a historical and epistemological overview of Classical Grounded Theory Analysis (Glaserian) followed by a procedural outline of steps in the analysis.

The earliest attempts at developing grounded theory as a scientific research methodology date back to 1949 where Merton mentioned “serendipity: an unanticipated, anomalous, and strategic finding gives rise to a new hypothesis” to explain common themes as they unexpectedly emerge in data sets (as cited in Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p.2). “Serendipity” has been developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss throughout the years into a systemic comparative analysis method that aims at generating theory contingent to the specific context for data sets. There are several approaches to Grounded Theory analysis, with epistemological and ontological differences, as noted by Treem and Browning (in press): the classic or Glaserian theory, consistent with early work and subsequent developments by Glaser (1998) and Glaser and Strauss (2008). The second form is Straussian Grounded theory as developed in the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990), unlike Classical Grounded theory, researchers develop the categories and

elements needed for analysis from extant and previous literature. Lastly, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) assumes a greater role and input for the reflexivity of the researcher and places a greater emphasis on the perspective of the researcher. In all three approaches, grounded theory emphasizes the development of theory from categories, relationships, and main themes that emerge from the data through a constant comparative analysis method yet with varying ontological viewpoints and a correspondingly different role for extant literature.

This study follows essential guidelines of CGT (Classical Grounded Theory) where internal constant comparative analysis within the data set is used to generate theory about the practice of storytelling and corresponding evaluation of personal narratives. Glaser (2014) argues that CGT stands alone as a separate method whose “attraction is great and spreading worldwide” (p. 3). In a way, CGT frees researchers from the burden of verifying “grand” theories or positivism granting them the freedom to recognize novel or unexpected phenomena when looking at social actors and how they may perform under any given circumstance. When choosing CGT, there are no preconceived notions or theories to test nor is extant literature a required source of concepts. Instead, it develops concepts from the data to describe what is actually going on. Knowledge derived from CGT is primarily emic, where the information and the conceptualization come from within the data set. Through a constant comparative analysis of data, emergent patterns continually self-test for their grounding in the data until a satisfactory saturation for each pattern develops.

Emergent patterns relate to each other as a conceptual framework and they are consequentially presented in emergent theoretical codes. Glaser notes that doing CGT requires a significant degree of creativity where “confusion, ambiguity, even fear of failure, at the beginning soon change to clear conceptualization as the researcher constantly compares and theoretically samples toward saturation” (2014, p. 11). The researcher is also responsible for unveiling the interplay between social actors/narrators, their context, and the unit of analysis (narratives).

It is at this stage that the researcher develops “theoretical sensitivity” through an awareness to the subtleties of meaning in data (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 46). Theoretical sensitivity is a personal quality of the researcher and whether intentionally or not, the researchers’ insights and the ability to give meaning to data is a reflection of the models carried in their minds. Thus, by default, this analysis includes my voice as interpreter of stories and my own subjective biases in recognizing recurrent patterns and themes throughout the data set. Despite the flexibility of grounded theory, it is a rigorous procedural research methodology that demonstrates a great degree of transparency and sensitive adaptation to the nature of data and its natural context.

Steps and Canons. In reviewing grounded theory as presented by Corbin & Strauss (1990) and Strauss & Corbin (1967, 2008), four key processes central to grounded theory are identified: *constant comparative analysis*, *coding*, *analytic memos*, and *theoretical sampling*. As an iterative methodology, data collection and the four processes occur simultaneously and interchangeably. The following sections highlight the

main elements in every process and how they relate to one another to produce grounded theory.

Coding. As soon as the first round of data is collected, an initial coding is necessary to determine how further data should be collected to support the researcher's initial impressions about the context under investigation. Typically, there are three phases of coding; an initial *open coding*, *axial coding* where themes and keywords are collapsed into larger umbrella concepts, and lastly *selective coding* where a core concept emerges. Open coding is generative and comparative and events/actions/interactions are recorded as the researcher prepares to include conceptually similar concept through in *axial coding*. Lastly, after all variations and relationships are identified through axial coding, *selective coding* unifies all axial coding around a central "core" code. The last phase of coding usually takes place towards the last phases of a study. The core code may be one of the axial codes that have repeatedly emerged or another more abstract term with a broader scope in needed to accommodate the depth and variance in axial codes. Grounded theory emerges as the core code is developed into a theory that remains "grounded" in the data. Sometimes, multiple core codes emerge leaving the theory with multiple interconnected concepts. In this case, the grounded theory is a depiction of the relationships and variations between core concepts.

Constant Comparative Analysis. Although constant comparative analysis is not exclusive to grounded theory, constant comparative analysis is the main technique for collecting and discovering common themes as they emerge in the data. Strauss and Corbin (2008) identify four stages: *comparing incidents applicable to each category*,

integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and lastly, writing the theory. Data collection and processes are interrelated and are bound to the context.

Ideally, the first round of data analysis should guide further collection of data. As the researcher collects data, certain keywords and themes appear repeatedly thereby develop into concepts. Through a continuous state of constant comparisons between data sets, recurrent keywords and themes develop into abstract concepts. Such concepts, as basic units of analysis, increase in number and develop greater abstractness as they are grouped into categories. In later phases of the analysis, relationships and variations within the categories act as “cornerstones” of a developing theory.

Theoretical Sampling and Theoretical Saturation. Simultaneously occurring, constant comparative analysis and coding run parallel to theoretical sampling of “data slices” to identify different views within the data. Sampling in grounded theory proceeds on theoretical grounds as guided by properties, dimensions, and variations of concepts. Through representativeness and consistency, a concept earns its way into grounded theory by demonstrating its relationship to other pertinent social phenomena. As the process continues, a degree of theoretical saturation is sought and eventually achieved. Patterns and variations within concepts increase their complexity and substantiate the validity of their presence in the later phases of analysis. There are criteria and limits for theoretical saturation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) identify empirical limits of data, integration and density of the theory, and the analysts’ theoretical sensitivity as essential criteria for achieving theoretical saturation. Analysts realize that theoretical saturation has been reached when information repetitively appears to confirm existing conceptual

categories (Suddaby, 2006). Theoretical saturation is achieved when additional data does not add to the variations of axial codes or develop the categories further. It is important to note that conceptual categories are inherently pragmatic and dependent upon the context and researcher. Thus, as Corely (2015) confirms categories “*engage a phenomenon from those living it*” (*emphasis in original*)(p.600).

The path towards saturation, envisioned as a learning curve full of “eureka” moments, is not obstacle free. Yet, it is also what gives the researcher “momentum, purpose, and confidence” (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 76). To guard against one’s own biases, the process of reaching theoretical saturation must be included in the theory itself. Analytic memos keep the analyst focused and guarded against biases as well as records substantive theoretical grounds as they emerge.

Analytic Memos. Writing theoretical memos is an integral part of doing grounded theory- this process keeps track of concepts, categories, the relationships that may emerge and patterns and variations of the aforementioned to ensure consistency and theoretical sampling/sensitivity are sustained. They also facilitate the development of concepts into more abstract categories.

Review

Clearly, grounded theory methodology is scientific and rigorous. It also provides analysts with a significant degree of autonomy in identifying meaning. However, as with any methodology, there are some critiques. Surprisingly, some of the strongest critiques stem from what is considered by many advantages of grounded theory analysis. Treem

and Browning (in press) summarize critiques of grounded theory in three areas: biases of the researcher, lack of generalizability, and a tendency to fall into the trap of description.

In his review of “*What Grounded Theory is Not*”, Suddaby (2006) identifies six common misconceptions about grounded theory as the source of most criticism received thus far. Among which is concern about the biases of the researcher. In response to the concern about researchers’ biases, it is unrealistic to assume that any researcher will walk in without any inherent biases or previous knowledge that will affect his or her interpretation and coding attempts. Indeed, it is the reflexivity and agency of the researchers that facilitates their quest for meaning. There is no research methodology that actively acknowledges the role of the researcher in constructing “meaning” through generative theory as much as GT. Additionally, it is the interplay between researcher and data that enables the researchers to demonstrate creativity in their analytic ability, theoretical sensitivity, and theoretical development (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Accordingly, Suddaby advises “those new to grounded theory research must become both patient and tolerant of ambiguity, because it is the ongoing interaction between researcher and data that generates the fundament of successful grounded research. (2006, p. 638)

Generalizability of Grounded Theory

It is important to note that weaknesses and strengths of any methodology will either diminish or become more pronounced if not properly chosen for its fit with the question or data pursued. Evidently, grounded theory “is most suited to efforts to understand the process by which actors construct meaning out of intersubjective experience” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634).

In CGT, the natural relationship between data sets and emergent theory developed is holistic and idiosyncratic. Since the categories and concepts emerge from recurrent themes, the contingency of theory built from CGT represents a complex conceptual framework that is directly derived from and dependent on the data itself. Theory generated by CGT usually cannot be easily refuted by adding more data or applying relevant grand theory. The integrative and holistic viewpoint adopted by CGT ensures a greater degree of internal validity; one that is often challenged in logico-deductive methods. The quest for verification that typically dominates most deductive theories is also not a primary concern of CGT. Some may argue against external validity; the ability to apply theory that emerges from CGT to other contexts. However, Glaser would argue differently because CGT does not aim at generating grand theories that are easily applied to any social contexts. Although theory that develops through CGT contingently “works” and “fits” its corresponding data set, it is not designed to be easily applicable to other contexts.

It is important to note that CGT is not an excuse to disregard or ignore extant literature as Suddaby (2006) warns. Instead, the novelty of grounded theory rests in its ability to integrate emergent findings with extant theory and relevant literature” thereby supporting a natural evolution of formal theories as deemed necessary and not in a forced fashion (Treem & Browning, in press). This approach to data analysis also ensures that researchers are not merely describing the underlying social dimensions of the phenomena under investigation. The main purpose of a grounded theory analysis is to generate “theory”; whether formal or substantive.

Summary

Even though grounded theory is not a step-by-step procedure but rather all at once, it is “rigorous and tightly procedural from start to finish” (Strauss & Glaser, 2008, p. 12). The key variables are subjective and intrinsic where repetitive patterns, key terms, and themes develop into concepts that are later developed into abstract categories. Theory that emerges from further development is “grounded” in the data and supported by theoretical sampling to reach a state of theoretical saturation. The researcher’s creativity and reflexivity in explicating the social phenomena at hand is key to the emergence of substantive grounded theory. The purpose of grounded theory is “not to make truth statements about reality, but, rather to elicit novel and complementary conceptualizations about underlying causal and consequential relationships between social actors in an attempt to construct reality (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

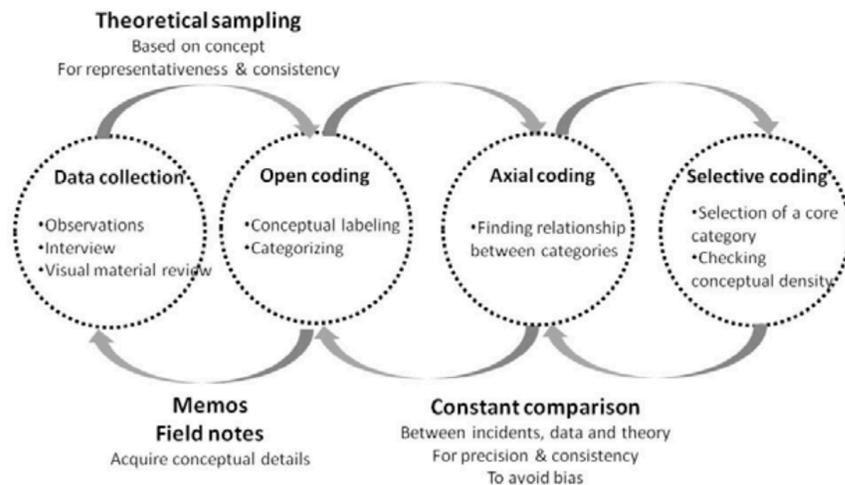


Figure 1. Data analysis procedure of grounded theory method.

Cho & Lee, 2014, p. 15

Although CGT does not readily fit every social phenomenon, there are some irreplaceable advantages to using GT in large data sets of social behavior such as the data set in the study. Unlike other qualitative research methods such as narrative analysis, GT does not analyze a single dimension of data set such as narrative structures, plot, time, space, theme, or prototype but instead adopts an integrative approach where the relationships between actors, structures, their contexts, and other factors that may emerge are simultaneously considered.

Although any research methodology has its inherent weaknesses and strengths, grounded theory, to a large extent, models the way we learn in natural settings. “Not knowing beforehand until the data is conceptualized easily becomes a personal way of life” (Glaser & Strauss, 2008, p. 14) much like the narratives under investigation. GT is not perfect or easy but theory that emerges from incorporated interrelated concepts represent the best fit because both theory and data represent an organic whole; a multi-layered entity. The following chapter presents GT as applied to the data set under investigation and the procedures followed within each data set.

Grounded Theory Analysis of Personal Narratives

We are constantly scanning our surroundings for patterns or behaviors that resonate with repositories of our experiences. As we come across common grounds, we collect similar structures and assimilate novel ones that fit with our backgrounds and identity configurations. Similarly, and perhaps serendipitously, our abilities to construct narratives also follow the same path. We subjectively select an event from our repertoire

of events to construct a story that we deem fitting to audiences and contexts. Ochs (2004) contends such “narratives are central to weaving the fabric of social life in that they forge and sustain social relationships and build shared lifeworlds” (p. 289)

Our mode of representation is constantly adapting to assume a state of sensitivity and responsiveness to our surroundings. Fortunately, the resemblance between grounded theory analysis and our natural ways of learning and telling stories ensures an ideal fit between data and purpose of analysis.

In this study, 600 narratives of 130 individuals create a rich canvas of human behavior and narrative capacities. Amounting to approximately 7500 words, narratives produce a diverse portray of life’s memorable moments for all the characters, heroes, and villains they create and present in their stories. In *Every person’s life is worth a novel*, Polster (1987) describes stories as “spotlights” in a cubist portray of every individual’s life. This data set presents thousands of spotlights from a cubist portray of all the participants’ lives.

Epistemologically, it is difficult to make specific assumptions about the storytellers and their capacities to make sense of events in their lives to construct narratives. The data set requires a qualitatively driven inductive methodology that possesses a unique capacity to adapt to unexpected twists and turns in the data and dynamically respond to human anomalies. Additionally, humans as homo narrans (Fisher, 1987), are complex storytelling machines (Salmon, 2010) thereby multiplying layers of complexity already present in narrative structures comprising the data set. The size of the data set along with the complexity of narrative construction and narrative itself are best

suiting to Classical Grounded Theory (CGT) where no prior assumptions about narrators and their narratives are made. The main purpose of this analysis is to explicate and identify ways in which narrators make sense of their experience and interpret reality as it appears in their narratives. In this context, theory that emerges seeks to make statements about the abilities of narrators to make sense of past experiences in response to guiding prompts and their roles as narrators in the context under investigation.

Data Collection

The data collection started in 2011 and continued for two years. Narrators, participants in an upper-level communication course, received consent forms and participation details electronically as guided and governed by their affiliation with a large educational institution in the United States of America. Narrators were not financially compensated for participation. Narrators performed, recorded, and transcribed narratives in response to six prompts. Upon completion of each narrative, narrators uploaded recorded videos of their performance and electronically mailed transcripts of their narratives. This analysis utilized transcripts only. Any and all identifying information was removed from narrative transcripts.

In 2011, the first group of participants (n=63), aged between 18-22, generated corresponding narratives for each communicative application in response to provided prompts. In the following year, the second group of participants (n= 62) of the same age group generated a second set of narratives. In total, each communicative application of narrative was applied through two sets of narratives. Names and identities of storytellers have been changed to maintain their privacy. Numerical values from 1-130 were given to

each narrative in every communicative application of narrative. Identifying information was removed from the story and replaced with alternative words posing minimal effects on content or meaning of the story.

The participants, referred to throughout the study as narrators, were initially guided by specific written prompts communicated electronically. In response, narrators delivered transcripts of their stories electronically in plain text format. Electronic feedback was provided by teaching assistants at the start of every new set suggesting ways that narratives may be developed or performances may be enhanced. For example, after delivery of an explanation narrative, the narrator received detailed feedback about the performance and structure of his or her narrative and where some areas may benefit from further development or where some details may have been better left out. Feedback provided expressed the teaching assistants' views on what constitutes a better narrative and how some narratives are better capable of capturing an audience's attention to elicit greater responses. Participants often responded to feedback with immediate and substantive changes to following sets of narratives' structure and plot. The feedback and comments of teaching assistants are not part of the analysis and do not guide or affect the grounded theory analysis in any way. All communication with narrators was conducted via their electronic mail as affiliated with the educational institution and presented by the narrator as preferred method of communication.

Structure and Procedure

To account for the influence of narrative applications and the six angles of appreciation, the data analysis and presentation followed the organizational scheme of

both narrative applications and their corresponding angles for narrative appreciation as set forth by Browning and Morris (2012). Personal narratives collected by this study have been influenced by the narrators' understanding of an open architecture of narratology and ongoing discussions of six angles of appreciation.

The Communicative Applications of Narrative (Browning & Morris, 2012). The data was collected in sets corresponding to each narrative application defined by Browning and Morris (2012) in specific contexts. The authors caution that the applications are not exhaustive and they hope that setting these forth will inspire others to come up with additional applications. This study regards the applications and their corresponding contexts as functional units of narrative influence. The following sections correspond to the six applications: *explanation, imagination, celebration, transportation, circumspection, and elevation.*

Data was collected in response to an external stimulus provided in “prompts” via electronic mail to each participant a week before delivering their narratives. The prompts are adaptations from corresponding applications in “*An open architecture of narratology*” (Browning & Morris, 2012). At the beginning of every prompt, parallel angles of narrative appreciation were provided to guide the narrative development process. The six angles of narrative appreciation: “action, motivation, and moral outcome”, “sequence and locale”, “character and identity”, “interest and, memory”, “aesthetics”, and “complexity and control” are dynamically corresponded to each set. The following chapters present a secondary analysis of all the collected narratives from both courses. Under the larger premises of grounded theory, the first set of narratives is

constantly comparatively assessed against the consecutive set of narratives. Codes, concepts, and categories are set forth in preparation for the later phases of grounded theory development. Each chapter elaborates on the definition of narrative application and corresponding prompt/appreciation angle as situated and perceived through the narrators' representations. It is important to note that this analysis is not set to test the relationship between the structure of narrative applications and angles of narrative appreciation. However, it is imperative to include this information in the analysis to ensure the "grounding" of theory in the corpus of data and the integrity of findings reported later on.

Chapter Four: Explanation Narratives

So while we have learned a great deal indeed about how we come eventually to construct and "explain" a world of nature in terms of causes, probabilities, space time manifolds, and so on, we know altogether too little about how we go about constructing and representing the rich and messy domain of human interaction

(Bruner, 1991, p. 4)

As narrators organize and represent the “rich and messy domain of human interaction” in everyday stories about their experiences, they are also attributing a certain degree of agency, a perpetual ability to chose a specific explanation out of all the possible explanations for specific events or actions. Despite the ubiquity and pervasiveness of narratives explicating our actions, the configuration and underlying structure of narrative’s explanatory powers are not universally agreed upon. Relatedly, explanation, as a communicative application of narrative, has been the source of considerable philosophical debate.

Posing both an ontological and epistemological duality, the explanatory function of narratives oscillates between two views: “explanation as sui generis” and explanation as a reducible “logico-deductive causal pattern of reasoning” (Polkinghorne, 1988). Proponents of the first view argue that the sui generis explanatory powers rise from a “unique and non-reducible cognitive instrument for comprehending the world that is very different” from the scientific logical deductive reasoning mode (Steuber, 2008, p. 33). In support of the sui generis powers of narrative, Carr (2008) finds that “narratives explain because their structure is isomorphic to the structure of the action itself”, thus explaining

“by linking the explanandum to a realm with which everybody is intimately familiar with” (p. 22).

Further explicating an inherently autonomous explanatory power of narrative, Uebel (2012b), similar to Carr (2008, 1986), assigns narratives a form of “rational agency” whereby “our action explanations have an underlying narrative structure and it is from this narrative structure and its content that we can derive justification for the claim that reasons we have identified are causes” (p. 82). From this perspective, rational agency is a byproduct of narrative structure and a privilege that all narrators enjoy as they represent subjective interpretations of their lived experiences. In sum, we can attribute the sui generis explanatory capacity of narratives to three key concepts: familiarity of narrative, isomorphic structure of action, and rational agency.

Perhaps the familiarity of narrative need not be further situated or elaborated in this context of analysis, but the relationship between isomorphic structure of action and the accompanying mode of rational agency as they apply to this study requires some contextualization. An essential premise underlying our quick and unassuming acceptance of narratives of explanation is that is “perfectly in line” with “everyday discourse and common sense” (Carr, 2008, p. 21). What narrators deem as perfectly in line with expectations and knowledge of human nature falls under the essential premises of “folk Psychology”: a kind of tacit knowledge or practical wisdom that lay people use to guide their prediction and explanation of actions (Hutto, 2012; Knobe, 2006). Of relevance to the likelihood or believability of experience, is the premise of narrative fidelity (Fisher, 1987).

While “Practical wisdom” bequeaths collective recognition of a certain structure of action and its resemblance to narrative forms of explanation, “it is the narratives of others that relate to us directly, that explicate and explain why an action was performed (Hutto, 2008, p.180). Narrators’ accounts of reasons for specific actions enjoy rational agency and are deemed as plausible and sufficing by others as long as they are likely to fit with other’s expectations of similar actions. Thus, it is “not the possession of an implied (collectively recognized) narrative structure alone that legitimates accepting an action explanation as causal but the comparative fit of its implied content to what we take to be the facts surrounding the event to be explained” (Uebel, 2012a, p. 63).

Rational agency is also dependent upon how well narrators “embed their individual action in a larger story or situate it in a larger context because seeing an individual action as part of a larger whole does indeed further our understanding of this very action” (Stueber, 2008, p. 41). Essential to the enactment of all the previous dimensions of explanatory powers of narratives is the choice of a particular “action” worthy of explanation. And while it is true that all actions are worthy of an explanation, some actions are easier to account for. Aristotelian peripeteia or the breach in steady state exemplified in actions that violate expectations of the narrators are easier to account for because they “exercise the mind’s innate capacity to react to and deal with inputs of such a kind” (Chafe, 1990, p. 83). Such actions are also well suited to the typical narrative structure where a redress of the breach in steady state is pursued.

Following from the discussion of narrative’s explanatory powers, the first set of narratives collected in this study responds to a prompt that encourages narrators to reflect

upon their innate inclination to make sense of and account for their actions through narrativity. It is important to note, that explanation as a basic and essential function of narrative, is developed with each subsequent communicative application of narratives in the following chapters.

The prompt for this set of narratives includes a threefold emphasis: action, motivation, and moral outcome. Unveiling the narrators' vicissitudes and motivations facilitates enactment of rational agency and develops causal narrative structures that explicate and further support narrators' actions. Similar to vicissitudes and motivations, moral outcomes are based on "innate intuitions and virtues and only when such moral motives are acknowledged" (Haidt & Joseph, 2004, p.66) can narrators confidently construe narratives of autonomous sui generis explanatory powers. Thus, actions with their underlying motivations and probable moral outcomes acted as sites of initiation where narrators controlled and developed their rational agency to narratively represent their lived experiences. The following prompt guided participants through their first story-telling attempts.

Prompt A

Appreciation angles: Action, motivation, and moral outcome

Explanations can be stories that tell not only what happened, but also delve into the actors' goals, intentions, hopes, and outcomes. Explanations often include exacting descriptions of the circumstances of action, the complications faced, and deliberate efforts to accept or deflect responsibility. The purpose of an explanation is to take a moment, event, situation, or epoch and account for "Why

did it happen?” Explanations are cagey because they appear to be innocent in simply describing what happened, but such explanations often offer blistering critiques of the individuals in the circumstances. In effect, explanation stories are saying, “Can you believe THAT HAPPENED?” The goal is to take a remarkable outcome and trace backward to causes that show how it came about.

The first set of stories reflects upon how narrators make sense of an event and find reason within their actions to explain the consequences that follow as they develop causal relationships between their actions and consequences. The prompt also asks narrators to “include exacting descriptions of the circumstances of action.” Circumstances are integral to the development of a setting, a backdrop against which the narrators’ goals, motivation, and intentions are contrasted. Indeed, the setting “plays a most significant role in the interpretation of action: it makes the intentions involved “intelligible both to the agents themselves and to others” (Uebel, 2012a, p. 48).

Through a constant comparative analysis of the first set of explanation narratives, recurrent themes and keywords emerge giving rise to several axial codes. *Narrative Depth*, *Narrative Juxtaposition*, and *self-reflection* fall under the larger all encompassing core code of *choice*. The results of the first set of explanation narratives were constantly compared against the second set of explanation narratives. Recurrent keywords and themes appeared through both sets with minimal variations across.

Choice

It was once said that a narrator’s worst fear is to have their audience ask “so what?” (Labov, 1972, p.366). While there may be an infinite number of ways to avoid

this question, one way Chafe (1990) argues is to choose an action or event that stands in stark comparison against their setting; one that bluntly violates expectations such as illness or near-death accident. The earlier prompt asks narrators to recall a “remarkable event” one that sufficiently brings about inherent explanatory value to aid narrators in their first narrativizing attempts. Parallel to the sui generis explanatory nature of narrative, this study holds the view that “remarkable events” hold subjective explanatory powers; self-confluent and culture-bound meaning evoking structures.

In this analysis, almost twenty five percent of the narrators (n=130) recounted illness, life-threatening accidents, and unexpected natural disasters as prototypical settings for actions and events that call upon the aid of practical wisdom and possess inherent explanatory power. The majority of narrators chose to narrativize their choice of simple everyday actions in elaborately developed settings and intricate sequences of causal narrative structures. In all cases, narrators recognized their rational agency in narrativizing explanations of their experiences at two distinct levels: choice of action and choice of representation.

The choice of a particular action to narrate comes with an unsigned obligation; an obligation to narratively represent the action and probable causal relationships in a familiar narrative form that remains in line with common sense and everyday discourse (Carr, 2008). In acknowledging their agency to choose a particular event, narrators concurrently recall motivation and intention behind their choice or action. In examples where narrators were not explaining their own actions, they were still primarily concerned with explaining their choices to narrate such an event or explicating choices of

their main characters. Across almost all narratives, the main event predominantly focalized manifestations of “choice”; both explicit and implicit.

And, so he told my mom he said, ‘I realize that everyday I have a choice. I can choose to be happy or I can choose to be sad. I can choose to be angry, or I can choose to make today the best it can be. And after seeing that I need to be the role model, I'm choosing to be better.’ So that's why my uncle is happy and loveable.(Narrative 1)

Following choice and recall of an action, narrators realize their capacity to enact rational agency in constructing tight webs of causality and rational narrative reasoning. In this analysis, it is important to distinguish between both levels of rational agency as they apply to choice and narrative representation of such a choice. All narrators make a choice; a genuine and univocal choice of selective recall from their memory (Black & Bern, 1989). Representation of choice is an enactment of rational agency governed by the narrators’ control of memory and facilitated by the familiarity of narrative and action structures or possible action emplotments (Roth, 1989). Generally, agency, as summarized by Duranti (2004),

is understood as the property of those entities (i) that have some degree of control over their own behavior, (ii) whose actions in the world affect other entities’ (and sometimes their own), and (iii) whose actions are the object of evaluation (e.g. in terms of their responsibility for a given outcome (p. 473)

Narrative reasoning is a self-proclaimed account of rational agency or “causing things to happen” (Abott, 2008, p.131) through narrativity. Rational agency uniquely addresses

the sui generis nature of narrative's explanatory powers and the equivalent levels of agency that narrators enjoy as they explicate their actions in narrative form.

In examples of illness narratives, narrators explicated their actions or character's actions against terminal or unexpected illness as a willful and conscious choice to bring back "their lives to normal", "fight back", and "conquer the illness." Illness, falling under the category of remarkable events, provided a setting that lessened the narrators' burden of accountability to the "so what" question. Because the choice to narrate experiences of illness "is part of the very human need to be understood by others" and to connect "from a liminal place within the human condition that calls for sensemaking and this often takes the narrative form" (Mattingly, 1998, p. 1).

Building upon the isomorphic resemblance between illness and the traditional narrative requirement of a breach in the steady state (Bruner, 1991), narratives of illness employ greater use of practical wisdom or tacit knowledge about the collectively shared nature of illness. In constructing their narrative representations of illness as a "choice" to fight back, narrators enacted rational agency in comparing their behaviors and actions before and after their illness or illness of a loved one. Narratives of illness and other profoundly life-transforming experiences offer "paradigmatic solutions" where "there is no analysis to explanation, only accepted solutions, including perhaps how this "explanation" became paradigmatic" (Roth, 1989, p. 469).

In a story about the narrator's mother suffering from an exotic illness, the narrator focalizes the beginning, middle, and end of her narrative around her mother's illness and unexpected actions she took to save her life. She offers a paradigmatic solution to a

problem and eliminates other probable explanations to her actions in a tight sequence of events, obstacles, and characters in a foreign land.

Exotic illness

And she finally she says, "I am in so much pain, I need a hospital, I need a doctor" And so Mexican hospitals do not sound ideal right now, at all.

So I call the hotel concierge and they say they'll send out a doctor cause this has happened before, people drink the water and get little bugs. So they didn't have much urgency and about an hour later finally a doctor arrives and he walks in with um an IV rack, an IV bag and some needles. And he barely speaks any English, so he walks in and says in Spanish and I know a little bit of Spanish so I can decipher some, and he says in Spanish "I have ten minutes and here are the things you will need to cure your mother and make her feel better.

Despite the numerous obstacles facing the narrator in this story, the core and essential action she took is profoundly and ultimately motivated by her mother's illness. The complications in her narrative emphasize the paradigmatic value of her choice of actions in communicating rational agency.

And with ten minutes of time I know he can't administer an IV so I start to panic and realize I am going to have to do this. So ten minutes pass, he instructs me in Spanish what to do and hands over the IV with all the medicated serum, the needle and the rack. And um I start to panic and I look down and look at these um needles and my mom and as he is leaving he says um if I don't take out the needle

in time before the serum runs out it will just pump air into her veins, which is deadly. So um I am kind of panicked right now, my mom is so sick she can't take care of herself.

The narrative structure follows the actual lived experience as she reflects upon how she realized she knew how to administer an IV from a class she reluctantly attended back home.

So as I look down at these needles and these um this IV I realize about three months prior um a girl on my softball team who is diabetic had the entire team attend a medical seminar in order to learn how to administer insulin injections and how to deal with someone if they were in diabetic shock and um, we all kind of reluctantly went to this seminar, because she's um not that ill we have never seen her have any problems with her diabetes. So we decide to go and at this seminar I have never been around needles, I am not really comfortable with that and I learned how to administer a shot, how to do an IV, how to um put a needle in a vein. And all this kind of stuff and I learned a great deal. And so um as I am looking down in Mexico at all these things this doctor has given me I realize that I know how to do this. (Narrative 15)

From the narrator's point of view, the action she took is motivated by both her mother's illness and the moral obligation to save her mother. Causal relations between the mother's exotic illness, the setting of an inefficient doctor, language and cultural barriers, and the training reluctantly attended by the narrator are narrative representations

of the narrator's reasoning in the lived experience. They are also building blocks of her rational agency and episodes in her narrative reconstruction of reasoning governing her behaviors and actions. In accepting the narrator's rational agency, situated explanation of actions, and the paradigmatic value of her story we are also deeming it as "true" (Roth, 1989, p. 457). In this context of analysis, narrative truth or verisimilitude represents a tolerance and appreciation of narrators' paradigmatic value as rational agents. Thus, the paradigmatic truth follows from the superiority of the narrators' viewpoint in explicating their own actions; a superiority realized by privileged access to narrators' motivations and vicissitudes.

Despite the prompt's encouragement of narrating a remarkable event, most narrators in this study opted to explain choices of simple actions and daily happenings such as a laptop swap in the airport, troubling attempts at writing an effective press release, and a new kitten dilemma. This statement does not intend to undermine the value or consequence of such simple events in the narrators' lives but only to indicate a categorization of grand and simple events within the requirement of a remarkable event by the prompt. Corresponding to their choice of simpler events, narrators reconstructed complex settings to prepare for a simple violation of expectation and establish the difficulty needed to account for their specific choice of action.

In their conscious selection of such events and actions and the awareness of the need to elaborately set the "stage" for a violation of expectations, narrators indicate a heightened awareness of their agency in narratively representing their choices and parallel obligation to construct an underlying paradigmatic causal narrative structure.

In a rather long story about toilet-papering her current best friend's home back when they were in kindergarten, the narrator vividly reconstructs the setting to bestow the same paradigmatic value upon her actions in an animated narrative representation.

Toilet paper and my best friend

So, everyone remembers middle school and how awkward it can be, you're just trying to fit in and be popular.

In appealing to shared practical wisdom, the narrator sets up the scene to conjure similar experiences by many. She also assumes that "everyone remembers" what the experience feels like to try to fit and how difficult it must have been for less popular kids.

Well, in eighth grade I was friends with this group of girls, and like everyone else, I was just trying to fit in. I have this one memory of... this night that we decided to spend the night at this girl's house, we were having a sleepover.

And, her parents went to bed and I guess we decided that it would be fun to go and toilet paper someone. And we were talking about who to get and the girls decided that we should get one of our classmates who lived on the same street as the house that we were staying on.

Having conjured up similar feelings and thoughts about fitting in, the narrator then asks that others' acknowledge her own attempts to fit in as an implicit form of reasoning behind her generally lax attitude and participation in toilet papering another girl's house.

I didn't really feel comfortable with this, well with toilet papering in general, but I didn't really feel comfortable toilet papering this girl's house because she wasn't extremely well-liked, she was kind of shy and awkward, and I

just had a feeling that it would hurt her feelings, and I didn't want to take part in it. But they convinced me, it will be fine, she'll never know it was us, it's just a harmless prank, like... come on. So, because I was in middle school and trying to fit in, I joined the group against my better judgment and decided to go along.

In another series of causal connections, the narrator further explicates her decisions to go along with the other girls' prank against the shy and awkward girl.

So, we snuck out of the house in the middle of the night and we went down the street and we threw the toilet paper as high as we could in the trees, and you know it just took a few minutes and then we ran back to the girl's house. And we hadn't been back in the house but for two minutes when the house phone rang and my friend picked it up immediately so that her mom wouldn't hear it and it was the girl's dad who had woken up, saw the damage, and also found my friend's cell phone laying in the front yard. Well she had dropped it or something I guess on her way back. So he of course picked it up, dialed home, and found the culprits.

The narrative representation of the actual offense follows after sufficient personal justification and interconnected causal patterns that draw upon the young age of the narrator, social influences of trying to fit, and the general assumption about the simple and insignificant aftermath of a childish prank.

So we were embarrassed that we got caught, we walked back down the street and cleaned up. Her dad, the girl's dad, older brother, and her were all standing on the

front porch and her dad just looked angry I remember, and the girl that we toilet papered and targeted just looked... I just remember the look on her face, she just looked so sad like someone had killed her dog, like just sad and disappointed and hurt. And I felt awful, we pretty much just cleaned up without saying a word, I think I was the only one that mumbled I'm sorry, and then we went back to the girl's house and went to bed.

The previous segment, while may be easily omitted without dramatically altering the overall meaning conveyed in this story, contributes to the narrator's enactment of rational agency and attributing meaning to explanations of her actions. Evoking emotional response and empathy, the narrator foregrounds her changes of attitude in the following segment.

The next morning it became evident that the girl's dad had called all of our parents to tell them what we did. My dad of course was furious with me and forced me to go apologize to the girl and her family. And I was the only one out of our group that had to go and formally apologize to her family so I was just... mad that we got caught, mad that I was the only one that had to go back and say sorry, really afraid to do it but, I went over there, I rang the doorbell.

Forced to apologize, the narrator honestly recounts her anger and fear as she goes to apologize. The following segments explicate a change in the narrator's attitude and her relationship with the victim of her prank and the victim's family as well.

The girl answered and I told her I was just so sorry, she went and got her dad without saying a word, and, so, her dad and I were in the living room, and he told me to sit down, and I started to apologize, and he interrupted me and started to explain what I never thought that he would. He explained to me that their family was from Mexico and that what we did to their home was not a silly prank like it is in our culture, that it was a personal attack on their family, and umm... apparently they had tried to hide what we did from the man's wife, and she ended up finding out and he said that she cried all night long wondering how girls could hate her daughter so much and why. And so, I had no clue of any of this, I started crying and, I just expressed my sincerest apologies, that we had no intention of hurting their family, that I liked his daughter... and, so, I just felt awful, I felt like the family hated me. They told me it was alright but I wasn't sure.

Attributing a deeper value of the prank to cultural differences, the narrator extends her pattern of causal reasoning to include that of other characters and further support her change of attitude. While everyone laughs it off at school the next day, only the narrator knows how much they have offended the little girl and her family.

The next day at school everyone was laughing about how big of a deal her parents made it, but I was the only one who knew that side of the story... umm, I ended up becoming really close friends with the girl whose house we toilet papered and... it's actually funny cause to this day

I'm not friends with any of those other girls, but I'm extremely close with the girl whose house we toilet papered and I'm really close with her family. Looking back on it I was just so upset and embarrassed that we got caught and that I had to say sorry, but... I'm so glad that we did because I learned so many life lessons that day about culture, and friendship, and the difference between right and wrong, and how to do the right thing after you mess up and sincerely apologizing. So, looking back on it I'm really glad that we did get caught and I grew as a person from it. (Narrative 31)

While this example may fall under the categorization of a simple event, the consequences are grand for both narrator and the characters in her story. Rational agency enacted by the previous narrator is a distinct and lively example of the use of narrative sequencing to develop elaborate causal patterns between events in order to ground the narrator's account of equivocal actions. Like simple events, actions that evoke ambivalent assessments of moral outcome require intricate and involved causality patterns. The lesson shared by the narrator in this story culminates all her narrative efforts in representing internal and external relationships of causality through a simple contradictory statement about "being glad she got caught because she grew as a person from it."

As seen in the previous examples, there are two possible ways to conceptualize "choice" in narratives of explanation. As a core code, "choice" exists at the inception of a decision to narratively explicate a specific action. At the surface level of representation,

“choice” may be categorized as an axial code that appears through narrator’s selection of discourse, narrative sequencing, and action emplotment. In other words, the univocal choice through selective memory is a core code, an essential precursor to enactment of rational agency in narrative representations. Choice of representation, then becomes, a context-bound axial code that explains how narrators subjectively narrativize explications of their actions. This analysis finds that lessons or moral outcomes emerged through narrators’ *self-reflections* after demonstrating a contrast between *what happened* and *what could have happened* through a narrative technique of juxtaposition. Similarly, narrators developed deep meaning structures through myriad details and narrative structures to create a dimension of “*narrative depth*.” The following sections discuss *narrative depth* and *narrative juxtaposition* as they apply to narrative representations of actions in this analysis.

Narrative Depth: Lessons and Moral Outcomes

“Deep experience is never peaceful” Henry James

In every story, there is a moral lesson; a wisdom acquired by the storyteller that is explicitly or implicitly shared with imagined or real audiences. Lessons from explanation narratives arose out of simple events such as missing an exam and grand events such as complete transformation of a vibrant athlete to a hopeless quadriplegic.

In defining the nature of morality, Haidt and Joseph (2004) argue that morality is “innate (as a small set of modules), socially constructed (as sets of interlocking virtues)...and cognitive (intuitions are pattern-recognition systems) and it is emotional (intuitions often launch moral emotions)” (p. 60). The complexity of morality arises from its inherent and

subjective socially constructed multidimensionality. Cultural influences further complicate the nature of morality confining what is collectively deemed as moral and virtuous.

Well suited to the complexity of morality, narratives of explanation create an opportune environment for the reflection of multivalent moral embodiments. Within the context of narrativity, Stroud (2002) defines multivalence as “ an intentional emplotment of vague and ambiguous structures in narratives” to acculturate readers to less familiar or less innately recognized value structures (p. 67). His analysis of ancient philosophical Indian texts, while focused on the readers’ interpretation and construal of multiple meanings of a text, offers some valuable insight to interpretation of narrators’ emplotment of value and moral constructs in their narratives of explanation.

As stated earlier, actions explained by narrators are categorized according to their appearance as part of a simple or grand event. Grand events exemplifying remarkable actions such as illness possess sui generis explanatory powers and usually emerge in less complex narrative representations of explanation narratives. On the other hand, simple events, which constitute the majority of this data set, recurrently and almost universally positioned and accomplished their emplotment of moral constructs through “*narrative depth*.” Ricoeur (1991) defines emplotment as a crucial and meaningful positioning of experiences and events in a sequence towards some end goal of the narrator. In other words, emplotment of moral values in narratives of explanation attributes meaning to position of moral lessons itself in narrative representations of actions. Hence, narrative

depth in this analysis is an assessment of narrator's intentional positioning or emplotment of moral values and lessons within narrative explication of their actions.

Constant comparative analysis of explanation narratives indicates that the moral values and lessons in explanations of simple actions and events appear within deep narrative contexts. Likewise, narrative explanations of actions that hold multiple interpretations or represent polysemic viewpoints of the narrators' actions also emplot moral values and lessons within deep narrative structures as may be exemplified in "my best friend and toilet paper." Alternatively, actions that occur within grand events such as life-threatening encounters with suicidal students in one of the narratives appear readily at the surface of narrative structure and are positioned early on in the narrative sequence.

To further explain the concept of narrative depth and its significance in supporting the narrative representations of a narrator's explanation for specific kinds of actions, I would like to briefly discuss how narrative depth is accomplished. In essence, narratives are primarily linguistic vehicles through which narrators configure and reconfigure past experiences under the guidance of a certain plot or direction in mind (Yamane, 2000, p. 183). Manipulating the representational capacity of language and intentional sequencing to develop a purposeful plot, narrators skillfully construct deep narrative structures to house multivalent accounts of morality and motivation explicating their actions.

Narrative depth is characteristic of stories that emphasizes the role of setting and context in the development of meaningful attributions to narrators' actions. In any narrative, there are at least two kinds of contexts; one where the narrator's vicissitudes are plotted in causal and temporal order with reference to their action, and another where

their actions are referenced against a greater context or setting to which they belong or where the action takes place (Uebel, 2012a, p. 48).

Narrative depth, in this context of analysis, appears through multiple discourse configurations, episodic variations of an event, a double-grounding in context, and intricately complex patterns of causality that follows from the all the previous. To position moral lessons within deep narrative structures, narrators of simple and equivocal actions aptly realized the significant role of context in making their actions intelligible to themselves and others. Subjective or “colored by the wants” of the narrators, narrative representations of the setting adequately position moral lessons within sophisticated context configurations to “deepen” causal attributions behind propositional actions (Uebel, 2012a, p. 48).

Deepening causal claims is also a way to invite others to “reenact empathy”, a necessary requirement for accepting narrators explanatory accounts as “justifiable causal claims out of the plurality of plausible interpretations of” such actions (Stueber, 2008, p. 42). Delving into specific narrative techniques to deepen causal claims and position moral lessons, the following examples offer a survey of some of the recurrent narrative structures in narratives of explanation. In a story about the value of hard work, the narrator recounts simple events and simple actions in a series of contextual emplotments of “fun” and “goofy” memories to attribute greater value to the final lesson. His narrative structure is a demonstration of depth in the learning process and a parallel depth in positioning of the lesson.

And so instead of sitting on the couch just saying, “Oh, I’ll make a good grade”, I go to the library and I actually study. So though these memories...they...they’re fun and they’re goofy they do have lasting impacts to the way you think going forward in your life (Narrative 47)

In another example, the narrator recounts his random decision to get into a completely uncalled for fight with members of a fraternity that he barely knows. He provides a vivid reconstruction of the characters and setting where the fight took place. He also provides a continuous internal dialogue; one that persistently questioned his own decision to endanger himself with no apparent good cause.

Apparently Connor told me I got up and went back to ask for more and I get socked in the face one more time and that was the end of it. What I learned was: one, choose your battles wisely, and two, sometimes it's not best to stand up to organizations when you're outnumbered... Especially if they're a fraternity.(Narrative 51)

Despite the self-admitted lack of causality in the previous example, “choosing your battles wisely” is a lesson that the narrator successfully and efficiently positioned within deep narrative structures of context representations and sufficient correlating structures with his lack of goals and intentions in the process.

Although deep positioning generally applied to simple and equivocal experiences, this last example shows that indirect experiences of illness also follow the same patterns of causal deepening. In the story about “Cooper”, the storyteller gradually realizes that games and competitions are not important any more when compared to all the suffering

endured by a little boy in fighting for his life. The narrator first met Cooper when he was awaiting a colon transplant. Unfortunately, after the procedure, Cooper dies in his mother's arms resetting the storyteller's expectations and thoughts about what really matters in life. Details, images, descriptions, sequences, expectations, and internal dialogues helped the narrator add depth to her narrative representations of context and convey a significantly more profound understanding of the real moral outcome and lesson behind her experience and Cooper's death.

Cooper

I decided to join a new organization with one of my really good friends, Terazha. And we decided to join ABCD so we could compete district level, and state level, and national level. And our advisor suggested that we should work as a team, and we should do Community Service Project, because she had the perfect project for us.

In explicating her initial goals of joining ABCD, the narrator adds a narrative structure to compare her new attitude and appreciation for Cooper's struggle later on.

And that's how we met the Knight family. And the Knight family seemed like any regular family, and they had four kids, and their youngest kid was a little boy named Cooper, who suffered from Mitochondrial depletion syndrome, or MDS. And he was only 2 at the time. Uh, basically MDS caused your digestive track to not work, and this caused Cooper to have to carry around a really heavy backpack daily to relieve him. And he was currently, when we met him he was on a waitlist

for a bowel and colon transplant. And that's, the state he was at when we met him.

Between the disease and illness lies a subjective interpretation of the social experience. The heavy backpack that Cooper had to carry daily as he patiently awaited his colon transplant is the narrator's perception of meaning behind MDS.

And so we wanted to help his family as much as we could. Um we, started a fundraiser, a toy drive, anything to make it a lot easier on the family, um especially financially, because the transplant would have cost half a million dollars. And things just happened so fast. When we competed in district we found out that Cooper was finally getting a colon transplant, and we were so excited.

Um, we thought that this would be the thing that helped him and cured him.

The previous segments and the ones that follow are sequential details and episodic variations of Cooper's suffering and anticipation. Complications that arise further deepen the narrative structure at which the lesson finally appears.

But once he got the transplant, his body was trying to adjust, trying to adjust to this new colon, but it just didn't work. And all of a sudden, his body started rejecting it, he started getting sick, he had to be flown to Pittsburgh, uh, where they specialized in MDS, and he stayed there most of the year. And um, when we competed in state, they finally removed that colon, but Cooper couldn't recuperate as well, his immune system was really, really down. And he was just, sick, he didn't even come back to Florida for a really long time. And, um, when we finally made it to nationals, we were waiting for them to call the award for

Community Service Project, when we got a text message from his grandma saying that he was rushed to the hospital again and he was gravely ill. After all the suffering, Cooper finally gives up in his fight against MDS and the narrator also gives up her initial passion and reason behind joining ABCD. The emergence of the narrator's "real" lesson after a detailed account of Cooper's suffering supports the narrator's moral assessment of what really matters in life.

And, you know, that's when our competition just didn't matter to us anymore. We just realized it wasn't important, this little boy's life was important to us. And um, Cooper was in and out of the hospital for, for a while. And, we just moved on with our lives. I kept in touch with my advisors, Cooper's grandma, and his family. I checked their blog and their twitter constantly. And, on the day before my 19th birthday, I found out that Cooper died. He died in his mother's arms, and um, that's just how it goes. I, I realized and learned a lot throughout meeting Cooper and working with his family. (Narrative 75)

In the previous examples, narrative depth was depicted in narrative structures that strengthened the narrators' development of lessons and moral outcomes through an indirect experience of Cooper's suffering. Much like the narrator, we are fortunate to have met Cooper. Indeed, "deep experiences are never peaceful", but in living storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) we go through the tropes of difficult and deep experiences in the safety of others' narratives.

While narratives help us gain insight from deep experiences, they also help us realize our blessings in comparing ourselves to others or comparing our own destiny to

what could have happened. “*Narrative Juxtaposition*” emerged as a second recurrent narrative technique for explicating narrators’ actions and developing causal webs of reasoning within their narratives structures.

Narrative Juxtaposition

From a literary and stylistic viewpoint, narrative juxtaposition is an effective technique to create contrast at the structural or surface level of narratives (Appel, 2011). However, in this analysis, narrators predominantly used narrative juxtaposition to convey meaning and explain their actions when they were not able to sufficiently develop causal relations between the course of events and violation of their expectations. Appearing through discourse, narrative juxtaposition in this analysis followed a typical dichotomy between narrative representations of *what happened* and *what could have happened*. Unlike narrative depth, the emergence and presence of narrative juxtaposition as a recurrent pattern of narrative representation is traditionally structurally bound to the surface level of narrative or in discourse.

To overcome limitations of narrative juxtaposition as a primarily structural unit of analysis, this analysis follows Kafalenos (2006) suggestion of “function analysis” as an alternative to the confining scope of structural analysis of narrative. Within narrative juxtaposition, adopts her definition of “functions” of meaning that describe “positions that represent events that change a prevailing situation and initiate a new situation” (Kafalenos, 2006, p. 198). Imposing a functional task on narrative juxtaposition as a mode of narrative representation, each narrative representation within narrative

juxtaposition performs functions of meaning that initially surface through language or discourse.

To explicate the functional dimension of narrative juxtaposition in narrators' explication of their actions and behaviors, I would like to further extend narrative juxtaposition by comparing it to Todorov's (1969) classical structural model where every narrator is presumed to reinstate an equilibrium after a state of disruption. In Todorov's model, narrators first present a state of equilibrium followed by an interruption or disruption in the initial equilibrium. Following the disruption, all narrative structures are concerted towards developing a plot that reinstates the initial equilibrium. Narrative juxtaposition, as a functional dimension of meaning, explicates actions or a violation of expectations by demonstrating a probable alternative action through narrative representation. As an expression of contrast at both the surface level of discourse and functional dimension of meaning, narrative juxtaposition positions comparative structures to define narrators goals and vicissitudes in contrasting settings.

Narrators who chose narrative juxtaposition to explain their actions often narrated simple events that caused them considerable confusion yet were not able to identify a solid underlying causal structure to their actions. So instead of explaining what happens through causal relations, narrators choose to compare it against what could have happened to make sense of their experiences and explain their actions to others.

In the following example, the narrator chooses to explain his indirect contribution to the team's success by developing two narrative representations of the event: with and without his efforts. Compensating a lack of causality, the narrator recounts actual events

and probable events and strategically juxtaposes them to explain the unexpected success that surprised his team.

This event should have cost us several, several thousand dollars and literally I think we paid around 500 dollars total, you know because we were like man we can't come up with this kind of money. (Narrative 7)

While in reading their story one may be able to identify reasons for what the narrator deems as an unexplained or unexpected success, the causal schema he provides, even towards the end of the narrative as can be seen in the excerpt, is insufficient and does not causally account for their violation of expectations. Instead, he relies on what could have happened to explain his narrative representation of what actually took place. In another story about roommates, a narrator attributes her disappointment with new roommates to a stark contrast between self-assessment of her past experiences in selecting a roommate and consequences that follow from choosing her last roommate.

I am not quite sure, but with three years of roommate matching experience behind me I just knew this was going to be my year, but unfortunately it is not. And once again I got less than the 'perfect match.' (Narrative 8)

Similar to the first example, the narrator also seems unable to define a strong causal narrative structure to explain unanticipated disappointment with her last roommate.

Again, she resorts to a comparison between her expectations and the narrative representation of her roommate's character to establish a violation in her expectations.

After a recent break-up in another example, the narrator explains her newfound faith in rebound relationships against the traditional expectations that she espoused before meeting her current boyfriend.

And, I think, a lot of people, as I said, are surprised when they find out that our relationship is a rebound but it can really work and four years later um, we had our four-year anniversary on August 14th, we are still going strong. And, um, I think it just disproves the myth that rebound relationships can never work.

(Narrative 9)

Four years later, the narrator does not know why their relationship is going strong. She attributes the unexpected strength of their relationship to a stark comparison against popular expectations of a short-lived rebound relationship.

Some narrators also chose to explain their actions by comparing them to actions and characters of significant people in their lives. Such comparisons ground narrators' interpretation of their actions and goals early on as well as orient the plot towards an expected pattern of behavior for each character. It does not, however, explain why such characters behave the way they do or chose to act in a certain way.

She's just... my older sister Amy, she's just you know, a great person. Everyone loves her, she never gets in trouble, never once got in trouble in high school, never been grounded. So you know, it makes me look like I'm the terrible kid. (Narrative 11)

The narrator in the previous example is the “terrible kid” because she compares herself to her “great” and “loved by everyone” older sister Amy. She does not tell us if she

misbehaves, is not loved by everyone, or if she gets in trouble more frequently. Instead she implicitly judges her lesser character as so in the light of comparing it against her sister's character. In the following story, the narrator explains his constant disappointment when seeing a blood donation truck by comparing it to what he should be doing had things worked out right the first time he went to donate blood.

So now I am on campus and I see those blood donation vehicles and I am like "I would do that. Every single time I could. But I can't because something in my blood said that I had AIDS. (Narrative 29)

As demonstrated in the previous examples, *narrative juxtaposition*, narratively substitutes causal reasoning with a rich palette of contrast between narrative representations of actions and probable actions. Recurrent use of narrative juxtaposition indicates that narrators, while actively trying to make sense of the underlying causes of their actions, sometimes simply do not know why things happen the way they do. However, they still choose to exert autonomous control in making sense of their lives and they do so by comparing it against all the possible other alternatives.

In the following excerpt, the narrator uses narrative juxtaposition to demonstrate his awareness of how much control he has in interpreting his actions and narratively representing such an interpretation.

We get out of there and we look back and you can see um the storm and it was like the tornados were like they took all the clouds in the sky and condensed it to one spot and it's just tearing up this place and when we got out of like the rain and hale and everything it was like this perfect sunny day like this perfect day and um

but we could look only a couple miles back and we could see just this storm and all this stuff going on and we made it out and it was cool but its just crazy how just one little decision we made to like maybe go get a steak or something got us all off route and we got two adventures for the price of one so it was neat. (Narrative 33)

In most cases of narrative juxtaposition, the comparisons and contrasts are between two events; one that took place and one that did not.. Adding to the theoretical saturation and depth of narrative juxtaposition as an axial code of narrative juxtaposition as an axial code, it is important to note that narrative juxtaposition was also used to develop connections within causal patterns. Such uses were simpler and a small part of a functional unit or position of meaning yet still followed a central comparative structure. The following excerpts are examples of narrative juxtaposition in support of an underlying causal structure.

Umm, we both were just laughing because we did not know anything about football but here we were hanging out with the most famous football players, college football players, probably that there are. (Narrative 32)

And I had always thought that adults were there to guide adolescents toward the right thing to do but on that day it felt quite the opposite” (Narrative 34)

“In current economical times, it is common to expect that people marry for money over love. However, in this story, two individuals meet unexpectedly and were married one week later. (Narrative 37)

In sum, narrative juxtaposition as a functional dimension of meaning in personal narratives of explanation is accomplished by developing contrast through multiple narrative constituents such as expectations, characters, conditions, or settings. Variation in modes of narrative juxtaposition indicates theoretical saturation and a depth of presence as an authentic meaning-making structure and functional unit of analysis. In addition to classical narrative structures of re-instatement of equilibrium, peripeteia/breach in steady state, or causality sequences, narrative juxtaposition allows narrators to exercise and externalize their awareness of rational agency and control in explication their actions and the narrative representation to others.

Whether narrators used narrative juxtaposition or narrative depth to reinforce their worldview or reasoning behind a narrative representation of their lived experiences, they always reflected upon their identities and what is expected of their characters as essential cornerstones in developing causal patterns or imposing an interpretation colored with their subjective wants and intentions. The following section discusses self-reflection as an axial code that directly contributes to both narrative depth and narrative juxtaposition as meaning making modes of representation.

Self-reflection

If “stories may be the way through which human beings make sense of their own lives and the lives of others” (McAdams, 1995, p. 207), then self-reflection may be one

way to explain our actions to others in a story. To make themselves comprehensible in explicating a chosen action, narrators often shared their self-reflections as motivation and probable grounds of causality behind such actions. Narratives of the self and relevant self-reflections are constructed in relationship to narrated actions and employed in relationships “to sustain, enhance, or, impede various actions” as well as “indicate further actions but it is not itself the basis for such actions” (Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p. 18). Self-reflection, a component of narrative structure and meaning in narratives of explanation, plays a vital role in projecting expectations of the narrator’s behavior. Tempted by amazing stories, the narrator decides to join a group of mud-covered volunteers to liberate herself from the confining social constructs of gender roles and race.

But I would see the guys come home every uh, night, just covered in mud but just with these amazing stories of how they were helping to find people and I wanted to be a part of that...But some of the things that I will still take with me to this day is just um, to never let yourself be limited by, your job tittle, by your race, by your gender. Don’t let people tell you what you can’t do, if you feel like you can do more and you know you have the capability, you need to go do it, it doesn’t matter. (Narrative 84)

Explicating her choice to join the “guys” who return covered in mud every night, the narrator attributes an implicit revolt against her own perceptions and constructs of gender, race, and organizational hierarchy. Although not explicitly stated, as the narrator encourages and empowers others to never let themselves be limited by such constructs,

she reflects and communicates her own perceptions of the restricting nature of gender, race, and job titles constructs. In explicating a remarkable event, the narrator reflects on a suicidal attack and how it has inspired him to become a better person.

I was not focused so much on how this affected ME, but here we have a young man, 19 years old. Reports say that he was intelligent, he was kind, he was... someone who wouldn't hurt a fly, yet... hurt himself in the worst way possible....And I think from that day forward, I have made a concerted effort to extend myself to other people. And to...for that one man at my bus stop, to not know me at all, and to take all of my stress into him and spit it back out and be like, 'it is ok!' I want to try to do that for other people. He took my worst moment, my worst amount of stress "I'm going to fail my test! (Narrative 17)

The narrator's self-reflection in this example explicates the gratitude he feels for the stranger who alleviated his stress about failing the test at the bus stop. In a story about unexpected leadership in a disabled community, the narrator marvels at the unnoticed ability of blind people to live independently. He also admires and appreciates the leadership of a stranger who chose to help a blind girl when everyone else was a mere bystander. His self-reflections explain the motivation that follows from the two incidents of leadership.

So in both of these situations I saw two leaders. The first leader is the guy who stood up when no one else would and led the girl in the

right direction. The second group of leaders that I see are the blind students among us. Because through their hardships they are among us today”

...From them I'm inspired to take on the challenges that life gives me and still achieve my goals, regardless of how hard they may be. (Narrative 26)

Central to the understanding of self-reflection as an axial code of meaning development in narratives of explanation is again “choice.” Examples of self-reflection demonstrate narrators’ enactment of rational agency through including constructs of the self as a constituent of their underlying causal structure. Narrators intentionally construe dimensions of self-concepts that are likely to garner further support for the probability of their explanations.

Summary

Explanation, as a central function of narrative, is argued to be *sui generis*, autonomous, and facilitated by its isomorphic resemblance to the actual structure of actions and events. For narrators to enact rational agency, they must first recognize their ability to choose a particular action and the consequential representation or explication of chosen action. Rational agency in this context of analysis references the narrators’ capacity to attribute an underlying causal structure to support greater probability of their narrative representations. In instances where narrators did not develop an underlying causal structure, narrative juxtaposition emerged as a narrative tool to organize experience and convey meaning. Narrators who employed narrative juxtaposition chose to make sense of their experiences by comparing narrative representations of their lived experiences to alternate possible representations.

Categorizing actions within simple and grand events, this analysis finds that moral lessons following from simple actions were mostly presented within sophisticated narrative structures to “deepen” causality. In this set of narratives, a prompt offered narrators three main keywords: action, motivation, and moral outcome. Although the aforementioned are easily part of any story we tell, they influenced the emergence of three axial codes: *narrative juxtaposition*, *narrative depth*, and *self-reflection*. Across all three axial codes, *choice* emerged as a central core code. The conscious and intentional decision to explicate an action along the lines of narrative contrast, deep meaning structures, and contingent reflections about one’s character, goal, and purpose in life constitutes the narrators’ perception of choice.

Recognition of their ability to choose, argues Schachter (2011), is essential to “construct a particular manifestation of identity with narrative means” (p. 107). Cumulatively, the lessons narrators acquire in this set of narratives and in the ones that follow in this analysis are cornerstones in building their narrative identity. Fortunately, there are many lessons to learn in every story as in the words of the narrators:

I can truly say that things do happen for a reason... I never understood how much of an impact just one little act can do, one hug can do... There are so many funny, ironic things...But no matter what life hands you, all we can do is just make the best out of it because we’re just floatin’...(Narrative 21, 68, 35)

Based on this analysis, we can claim morality and deep lessons are best communicated through narrativity. We can also conclude that narratives of explanation despite their primary goal of explaining some form action simultaneously provide multivalent and

polysemic accounts of narrators' rational agency. In subsequent communicative applications of narrative under investigation, narrators build on their initial recognition of choice, rational agency, and inclusion of dimensions of their identity as narrative constructs to specifically respond to and apply other functions of narratives such as circumspection and celebration.

Chapter Five: Imagination Narratives

Is not the imagination, by common consent, a faculty of free invention, therefore something not governed by rules, something wild and untamed? What is more it is not condemned to wandering about the internal spaces of what we conventionally call the mental kingdom and does it not therefore lack any referential import, being entirely disconnected from what is really real?

(Ricoeur, 1995, p.144)

In answering these questions, Ricoeur formulated two types of imagination; “one that is a rule-governed form of invention or norm-governed productivity of the mind” and another that is “primarily concerned with giving form to the human experience or the power of redescribing reality” (1979, p. 130). Tuning this discussion of imagination as a communicative application of narrative, it is a capacity that enables the narrative construction of possible worlds, alternate realities, and redescrptions of narrators’ experiences in narrative form. Central to the understanding of this form of imagination is the narrators’ conscious and intentional exercise of will to create alternate worlds. In violation of norm-governed productivity or rule-governed forms of invention to discover new possible realms of experience, narrators exempt themselves from abiding to narrative’s structural definitions and requirements of narrative (Barthes,1975; Lévi-Strauss, 1955) or narrative coherence and fidelity in Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm (1987). In particular, the requirement for fidelity or “whether or not stories ring true with other stories that we know to be true in our lives” (Fisher,1987, p. 64) defies the very

purpose of imagination. Pursuing truth or rather verisimilitude in narratives of imagination inherently obstructs the development of alternate worlds.

However, culture as Bruner (2008) notes influences the mind; delimiting our capacity for imagining alternate worlds by provision of referential precursors and socially endorsed mental schemas. “For it is not just who and what we are that we want to get straight but who and what we might have been given the constraints that memory and culture impose on us, constraints of which we are often unaware” (Bruner, p. 2003, p. 14).

Similarly, Ricoeur (1979) affirms that in our imagination “the components are old, only the combination is new. But the enigma remains unexplained, since all experience is in a sense based on a selection and a combination of elements” (p. 124). Limiting imagination to a combination of old elements, as dull as it may seem, says much about the nature of our imaginative capacities.

While Ricoeur (1979, 1978) and Todorov (1973) do not offer the same ontological or epistemological emphasis in their definitions of the works and scope of imagination, they seem to share the view that imagination, in an abstract sense, is propositional and bound to (lack of) referential contexts. For example, in imaging an alternate image of a tree, we typically conjure an image of a tree from nature, and then exercise our will to alter its natural state or imagine other characteristics departing from its natural state. While the imagined tree imitates the natural tree, it recreates an alternate representation of an image that departs from what we naturally experience in physical contexts.

Although Chafe (1990) argues that the “mind’s constant activity is to create its own representations of the world” (p. 80), such representations are not easily referenced to their parallel “real” counterparts and are subject to several individual and contextual influences. Noting the complexity and difficulty of such a task, Chafe confines the mind’s ability to create representations within two ontologically and phenomenologically different influences: external stimuli through sensory inputs and internal schemas whether innate or socially acquired.

The only exception, and perhaps not entirely to the previous, is a “dream.” While some may argue that dreams are the substance of our imagination and the strongest evidence that the mind goes on busily constructing its own representations, regardless of what may be coming from the outside, our dreams still project representations of referential constructs in the experienced world. However, “the main thing that dreams lack is coherence, when left to its own devices the mind creates a kaleidoscope of loosely strung together experiences” (Shapiro & Hudson, 1991, p. 80).

In addition to their lack of coherence, while still figments of our imagination, dreams also lack the willful imposition of an alternate meaning or character on a recreated possible representation. In conceptualizing imagination as the willful exercise of recreating a representation of possible worlds, Ryan (2006) matches it to narratology’s the philosophical idea “of a plurality of possible worlds” where “the contrast between the actual and the possible provide a model of the cognitive pattern into which readers organize information in order to interpret it as a story” (p.633). Congruent with this

connection, some have even defined human rationality as imaginative (Johnson 1993) in its capacity to bridge between concrete and abstract realms of human meaning.

Rooted in Ricoeur's theory of metaphor, "productive" aspects of our imagination are ultimately linked to some "productive" aspects of language (1978b, p. 154). Indeed, we have no way to access the product of our imaginative representations and those of others without the linguistic capacity to share our recreations with others. Thus, if we define imagination as the willful recreation of an alternate representation of an experience through language, we may very well be defining the raw and essential nature and composition of narrative (Bruner, 1986, 2006; Ricoeur, 1995, 1979, 1978).

Applying the previous discussion to the following analysis of personal narratives of imagination, it is important to note that "imagination" in this investigation as guided by a specific prompt is a context-bound characteristic genre of narrative that still reflects the greater paradigmatic qualities of human imagination.

I would like to reference Genette's (1990) premises for distinction between fictional and factual narrative to further explicate personal narratives of imagination as a genre of narrative. While personal narratives of imagination are "fictional accounts of factual experiences" (p. 755), neither the lived experiences are pure factual nor are their narrative counterparts pure fictional. The rise of this genre in this analysis is enabled by the narrators' abilities to "fictionalize and de-fictionalize" their lived experiences a commonality of obligatory, constant, and permeable indices through language through "self-imposed norms" (p. 772).

Following from the Ricoeurian interpretation of imagination as “opening up a world” (1978a), the “true power of imagination is a capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves not through images but through emergent meaning in our languages” (Kearney, 1995, p.173). Abiding by this definition, the following prompt invites narrators to reflect upon their cognitive capacity to interpret their worlds differently, to fictionalize their factual experiences, and to recreate a referential representations of their lived experiences.

Prompt B

Angles of appreciation: Sequence and Locale

The imagination narrative has the goal of opening up a world of perspectives. The practice of narrative imagination comes with consistent cautions. The goal is to fantasize about events, past or future that cannot be seen, but to do so with a critical distance from the subject being covered. The imagination narrative places attention on being rooted in an awareness of the concrete self that reaches out to imagination and pulls images to one’s self to make connections to possible events. In addition to ,“sequence” and “locale” or time and space (distance), the narrators’ concept of self remains crucial to this analysis of imagination narratives. Ontologically, narrators’ concepts of self are bound to their identity and “the always limiting character of perspectival fragmented experience” yet they also contemporaneously pursue “self-transcending powers of the imagination” (Ricoeur, 1978a, p. 4). Acknowledging this paradoxical state, the prompt righteously cautions narrators from fantasizing at a dangerously proximal distance from their object of fantasy or lived experiences.

Likewise, it also heightens their awareness to their efforts at “humanizing time” into epochs of “past” and “future” experiences (Ricoeur, 1978a, 1980).

Since to “imagine is to make oneself absent to the whole of things” (Ricoeur, 1978b, p. 154) in a lived experience, the conscious and willful narrative positioning of self in this set of narratives served multiple functions. First, dimensions of self in this analysis provided a point of departure to fictional representations and return to factual narrative recreation all within a larger “interposed narrative schematism of human actions” (Ricoeur, 1978a, p.21). Second, in positioning themselves within temporal frameworks of past and future, constructs and dimensions of narrators’ identity mediated time manipulation thereby directly and concretely contributing “to the epoche of ordinary reference and to the projection of new possibilities of redescribing their worlds” (Ricoeur, 1978b, p. 154). Lastly, narrators’ constructs of self and identity created a permeable narrative boundary between actual, imagined, and projected narrative dimensions of space.

The following analysis describes each function as it applies to four emergent modes of narrative representation within the genre of personal imagination narratives. Enabled through narrative patterns of “integration, repetition, reflection” and a parallel “excentric tendency towards wandering away from it all” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 21), narrators manipulated their narrative presence across temporal and spatial frontiers through four recurrently emerging modes: *what if (alternate scenarios)*, *parallel worlds*, *objectified imagination*, and *metaphysical*. In the analysis of the communicative application of explanation narratives, rational agency accounts for narrators’ reasoning and causal

efforts to explicate a certain action in the narrative representation. In analyzing narratives of imagination, narrators employ both rational and affective agency in recreating their probable worlds. Affective agency is further explicated later on. For now, affective agency references discourse and deep meaning structures that evoke empathy or a similar experience of emotions and motivations as the narrator. Each mode of narrative representation employed various narrative techniques and strategies to demonstrate narrators' control of affective and rational agency in recreating possible worlds rational agency

In his discussion of "*Narrative and the rhetoric of possibility*", Kirkwood (1992) finds that narrative's ability to "open up the mind to creative possibilities" is a complex process and can be accomplished in many ways. Yet, he finds that narrators generally accomplish this process in two ways: first, they "may tell stories of deeds which reflect characters' states of mind, or they may enable or challenge people to perform such acts themselves, with striking consequences for their own life stories" (p. 31). Relevant to Kirkwood's view, most narrators chose to enact their interpretation of imagination through constructing fully developed "what if" scenarios.

What If (Alternate Scenarios)

In this mode of narrative representation, narrators developed two possible recreations; one of an actual lived experience and a probable one that could have happened if a certain critical event in the narrative sequence is altered. Constructs of the self, dimensions of identity, or characters stabilize the relationship between actual and probable scenarios. Likewise narrators' distinguish between actual and probable

dimensions of space and time through manipulating their narrative presence across each scenario.

Before constructing the probable scenario, narrators first reflect on their state of mind. Their self-reflections are a point of departure and a door to other possible scenarios. In the following example, the narrator invites others to participate in the construction of her probable scenarios.

And that's when I started to think, 'well Alix had called me.' Alix had asked me to go with her and for some reason I decided not to and everything could have been a lot different if I had just said yes and decided to go with my best friend on that night. (Narrative 2)

The narrator saves herself from a terrible car accident and spending weeks in the hospital by refusing to go with her best friend to a party. Although this is not a structural analysis of narrative, to interpret and further dissect this mode of representation in imagination narrative some structural analysis is called for. Let's assume that "x" denotes the critical gateway to the narrator's alternate scenario, or in her words: "saying yes", and "y" references the possible alternative of being involved in a terrible car accident. To construct the alternate scenario, the narrator willfully assigns "x" the narrative position necessary for opening up the possibility of her involvement in the accident. Without the recognition and narrative positioning of the narrators' self-reflection as a precursor to developing another probable scenario, the narrative value and function of "x" would be close to any other event in her narrative representation of what actually happened. Likewise, time and space also permeate through "x" to indicate movement through

narrator's mind first and then in the development of an alternate scenario. In other words, the narrator initiates recreation of an alternate time and space where she could have been involved in the accident through her self-reflections upon the value of "x" in her lived experience.

In another example of alternate scenarios, the narrator asks others to think about what could have happened if he had not been hurt in the accident. Unlike the simple structure of the first example, this narrative opens up multiple possible worlds. In this story, "x" is the narrator's involvement in an accident that opens the door to multiple probable "y" s. In a series of questions about the nature of his character, the narrator indirectly shares oppositional constructs of a self-assessment of his character. In the actual lived scenario, the narrator is not outgoing and does not have that many friends.

It was at that time when they let me know that Dwayne had actually passed away on impact and that I was lucky to be alive. To this day I wonder what would have happened if my fathers voice wouldn't have told me I needed to wear my seatbelt. What would have happened if I was never involved in the accident? Would I be a more outgoing person? Would I have more friends? (Narrative 71)

The narrator's involvement in the accident, "x", also implicitly initiates another probable scenario where the narrator could have died on impact like his friend Dwayne had he not listened to his father's voice telling him to wear the seatbelt. However, the multiplicity of probable scenarios that emerge from the repetitive inquisitive narrative structures, offering more questions than answers, emphasizes the narrative value of the narrator's self-assessment of probable changes in his character over the value of his "father's

voice.” All the aforementioned probable scenarios are mediated by the narrator’s projection of identity and parallel implicit and explicit constructs of character.

Corresponding to the multiplicity of probable scenarios, the narrator first projects a probable interruption in time and space when he suggests a similar fate to his friend Dwayne. Then, he creates multiple bifurcations in time and space parallel to each dimension of character; being more outgoing, and having more friends. The previous two examples develop probable scenarios on the premise of a change in action: “saying yes” and “not being involved in an accident.” The previous two examples develop probable worlds through the narrator’s self-reflection on the value of a specific single event in offering multiple likely scenarios in changing their characters, lives, and destiny. In the following example, the narrator reflects upon the privileges she took for granted until visiting Costa Rica to recreate multiple “x” and “y” patterns.

And just it really just taught me so many things and as I was just imagining all of this I just realized that I need to be appreciative of everything I have and everything I have been given. I am so thankful for the circumstances I am in but it also made me realize how I want to help out others there and so we donated many of items. And I just imagine how they are doing today and I, I know some of them are off in high school and just doing great things. And I'm just so appreciative that because I was in Costa Rica I was able to learn all of these things about myself and to just imagine myself in a different world and I'm so thankful for that and I had a great time in Costa Rica. (Narrative 8)

While this example follows the footsteps of the first two in exhibiting an “x” and “y” pattern and mediating time and space through self-reflection, the development of a probable world here is synchronously further mediated and complicated by an actual change in space from the narrator’s homeland to Costa Rica. In appreciating all the privileges she takes for granted, she envisions a probable character across narratively recreated time and space and an actual alternate physical space in Costa Rica. In addition to the narrator’s self-reflections, she is also creating a probable world for characters in her narrative thereby multiplying narrative positioning of time and space constructs within recreations of several possible worlds for herself and others.

In the last example of alternate scenarios, a narrator imagines himself in a friend’s character. Witnessing the devastating experience of a friend, Ben, who had lost all his family and loved ones unexpectedly in a car accident invites, the narrator reflects on what it would be like if here were Ben.

and that night going to sleep so many thoughts of how would ben deal with this?
how would he cope? I knew Ben would never be the same person but how much
would this change him? how much would this affect him? where would he live?
would he have to move with his only other relatives who lived in Florida? and
then I thought about my personal life about if it had been my parents if it had been
my girlfriend all gone in the blink of an eye How would I ever have recovered?
How would I have dealt with something like that? (Narrative 63)

Exemplifying another complex mode of narrative recreation of multiple scenarios, narrator’s self-reflections occur at two distinct planes of experience; one through his own

character and another through his friend's character. Thus, an alternate scenario, while still initiated by the narrator's self-reflection, occurs within two recreated dimensions of time and space: as self-experienced and self-imposed through Ben's character.

In the previous examples, regardless of the numerosity and multiplicity of alternate scenarios, narrators' self-reflections initiate the narrative development of probable worlds where time and space are both recreated to situate the departure and return to the narrator's identity. As narrators ask others to imagine "what if" alternate scenarios, they demonstrate their abilities to manipulate time and space at the local level of their lived experience in a pre-narrative phase and then again within their narrative recreations of lived experiences. This mode is simple, straightforward, and easily reversible. Affixing probable worlds to their identity, narrators comfortably navigate between actual event of "narrating" and the probable worlds they recreate in their stories. Across almost all stories following this mode, narrators predominantly enacted rational agency; inviting others to "think" about what could have happened. Of significance to this mode is Kirkwood's (1992) implication of a moral value underlying depictions of alternate scenarios. In offering "plausible impossibilities", such narratives help people discover their capacity to become what they are not" (1992, p. 33). The probable worlds are plausible because they use familiar and recognizable characters and constructs, yet they are by default impossible to occur because of their fictive and retrospective nature. The impossibility of probable worlds provides narrators with a general impression of safety in experiencing frightful or threatening experiences of others to garner similar wisdom and moral value. Unlike the inherent plausibility of alternate scenarios, some

narrators chose to exempt themselves from the unsigned obligation to construct plausible alternate worlds through the liberating nature of parallel worlds or dreams, visions, and fantasies.

Parallel Worlds

Parallel worlds are figments of the imagination that are not necessarily anchored in real time and space nor are they necessarily fixed to the narrator's identity or self-reflection. By definition, parallel worlds are not subject to the laws of nature or structural rules of narrative. In "*The Fantastic*", Todorov (1973) distinguishes between the "fantastic uncanny", the "fantastic marvelous", and the "pure fantastic":

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know....there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination-- and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality--but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (p.25)

Failing to account for an event as an illusion, imagination, or supernatural beyond our familiar grasp creates an uncertainty; an interruption in the flow of our conscious deliberation of experiences. It is within this area of uncertainty that narrators chose to situate their recreations of such experiences as parallel worlds. Upon deciding on the nature of a such unfamiliar event as actually having occurred or merely imagined, narrators enter into the realms of uncanny or marvelous (Chou, 2015; Lem & Abernathy,

1974; Perkins, 2008). According to Todorov's (1973) typology, the fantastic uncanny is an illusion of some sort: a dream, fantasy, or vision. While the event itself is not subject to norms and rules of the real world, the "laws of reality" still guide narrators' interpretations and corresponding narrative recreations of parallel worlds. Dreams, drugs, illusions of the senses, madness, or visions present an uncanny fantastic/supernatural event.

Narrative recreations of parallel worlds reflect the temporary interruption in actual and narrated dimensions of space and time and uncertainty in explaining the event as initially experienced by the narrators in the real world. Parallel worlds, as a narrative mode in imagination narratives, manipulates time and space in an uncertain fluctuating conduct that is often unpredictable to others. Unlike probable worlds in alternative scenarios, parallel worlds are concurrently present in the narrator's realm of existence and exhibit bifurcations in temporal and spatial dimensions of their recreations. The parallel presence of both worlds forsakes the need of an anchoring point. To demonstrate, the following example mirrors the narrator's initial experience of a dream. In a narrative about walking around Bourbon and winning the jackpot, the narrator recreates his dream in the form of a "realistic" narrative representation of the experience.

We later wondered around bourbon for the longest time just talking to people that we knew. Later still drinking and walking we said lets go back to the casino we all walked there to go back and went straight to the quarter machines. I spent at least fifty dollars on this machine kept thinking I was going to win something. It was kind of like you see in a movie I wasn't watching and just pulled that handle

down. And there you know it I hit the jackpot! 500,000 dollars I was on top of the world ordering everything my friends and me were just going crazy in the casino. I bought everything I cashed out right on the spot got the money and left. Went straight back to the Bourbon and started to throwing a party. I don't remember much after that I just blacked out. That Saturday morning I woke up and ran to Dom and John and told them to wake up saying how crazy last night was. They looked at me crazy and said Greg you fell asleep and didn't come out with us. I was pretty pissed because it was the best dream and I was wondering how I was going to spend that money I made. (Narrative 83)

In skillfully weaving his parallel worlds with narrative representation of the actual experience, the narrator first recounts his dream in its own dimensions of time and space. Humanizing time within the realms of dream, he organizes time into epochs of "wondering around Bourbon for the longest time", "later drinking", "spending at least fifty dollars on the quarter machine", and "blacking out." Likewise, the dream also schemes multiple dimensions of space as they relate to the narrator's adventure in Bourbon. Unlike abrupt cessations of dreams in the real world, the narrator chooses to merge his dream's dimensions of time and space with those experienced in the preliminary surreal impression that the dream actually took place. For the narrator, it was enough to have an image of the dream, to "see" it in his mind's eye without the actual presence of experience, to vividly recreate the experience (Ricoeur, 1979, p. 123). In a demonstration of agency and control in redescribing his experiences, the narrator develops and merges multiple congruent temporal and spatial dimensions to demonstrate

manipulation of sequence and locale across representations of lived experiences and parallel worlds.

Varying from the Jackpot dream in the previous example, other narrators develop intertwined dimensions of time and place to accommodate temporal and spatial dimensions of visions or surreal experiences that interrupted their lived experiences. Recreating the experience of bungee jumping, the narrator counts “3-2-1” to merge temporal and spatial dimensions of a parallel experience her mind with those of the actual bungee-jumping experience.

It was unreal. Um and it was as if it was in slow motion, they say “3-2-1-bungee!” And I jump off, and they gave me a little push, and it was just all of the music, everything in my head, all my thoughts, all the voices, they just went silent. It was the most peaceful place I’ve ever been. And it was one of the greatest experiences I’ve ever had. (Narrative 80)

While there are several distinctions between probable worlds and parallel worlds in this analysis, one of the most important differences is a *willful* enactment and recreation of alternate scenarios through narrativity. In parallel worlds, a possible realm randomly and spontaneously emerges in the narrator’s lived experience and is correspondingly focalized in his or her narrative representation. Owing to the particular narrator’s focalization of an “imagined life without his father” as a dream in the following narrative, the following story is typified as a parallel world because it was not willfully imposed upon the meaning of his lived experience.

And suddenly I start to imagine, imagine my life without my father anymore. Without my father being able to see me graduate high school or college see me get married I just it was so hard to fathom like kids not being able to see their grandfather just that thought going through my head was overwhelming, so five minutes later I feel like I just woke up from a dream, I gather up the courage and tell Robert I let him know the news and um he starts to tear up and start crying.

(Narrative 82)

Likewise, the narrator in the following example unconsciously travels across dimensions of time and place to experience being a gladiator who is wearing “armor that is so heavy it’s hard to stand” to abruptly come back to parallel dimensions of her lived experience.

I just imagine myself being a gladiator. I'm there. I'm standing on this platform, in the middle of this huge theatre. There are sharks and other scary sea-creatures swarming around me in the waters. I'm wearing armor that is so heavy it's hard to stand, and I'm being chased and chased by lions. I can feel how nervous they were. I can feel the people in the crowd pointing at them, throwing, maybe spiting on them. I'm literally there in the moment. I went through a whole scene in my head of a lion chasing me before Tony said "alright and the exit's to your right" and the whole tour was over. (Narrative 96)

In this mode of imagination narratives, narrators controlled temporal and spatial dimensions to narratively embed and intertwine sequence and locale of parallel worlds with those of their lived experiences; parallel worlds that emerge in an unexpected and random manner and end in an equally abrupt and erratic form. Unlike alternate worlds,

narrators' did not feel the need to self-reflect on the meaning of such experiences, nor did they feel an obligation to impose meaning upon the value of experiencing parallel worlds.

In the third mode of imagination narratives, narrators attributed imaginative powers to objects. Extending their agency to redescribe their experiences to objects involved complex and elaborate narrative structures and “revealing commentary” and “careful stipulation of contextual details” (Kirkwood, 1992, p. 31).

Objectified Imagination

In one of Ricoeur's (1978b) elaborations on the definition of imagination, he emphasizes narrators' “ability to produce new kinds (of recreations) by assimilation and to produce them not above the differences, as in the concept, but in spite of and through the differences” (p. 148). In this mode, narrators grant intricately positioned objects in their narratives the capacity to assimilate varying degrees of agency in recreating imagined and real experiences. The object encapsulates manipulations of time and space to mediate between multiple recreated experiences.

The following examples demonstrate the application of this mode through familiar objects, a metaphor for a specific feeling, or a tangible concept that everyone can relate to yet possess intrinsic agency to activate unique dimensions of time and place for the narrator. Narrative representations of such objects, metaphors, and concepts illustrate sophisticated contextual attributions to the nature and significance of the object within the totality of event experienced by the narrator. In one of the classical works on imagination, Ribot and Baron(1906) contend:

“Imagination” in its complete form, has a tendency to become objectified, to assert itself in a work that shall not only exist for the narrator but for every one else. On the contrary with dreamers pure and simple, the imagination remains a vaguely sketched inner affair. It is not embodied in any aesthetic or practical intervention. (p. 11)

I would like to start the analysis of this mode with one of the most vivid and well developed examples of objectified imagination: a pair of hideous red shoes. Similar to the shoes of Alice in Wonderland, the narrator tells us about the imaginative powers of a pair of hideous red shoes as they initiated her travel across time and space multiple times between homes, families, and experiences.

“Hideous red shoes”

I remembered looking down on the floor to see the most hideous pair of shoes I have ever seen. They were very memorable to me; it was just so unique looking. It was made out of red leather with a huge odd-looking flower on it. And I wondered to myself, who in the world would wear these shoes? So I looked up to see who would. It was this lady with beady little eyes, with a large nose, and a frown. She just gave me a really negative vibe... (fast forward many years later) It was then that I realized, the lady who the ugly shoes during the night of the baby shower is now my stepmom. Funny how things turn out. (Narrative 3)

While the pair of red hideous shoes lacks any powers of their own, the narrator strategically connects it with and within temporal and spatial dimensions of multiple memories and experiences. The red shoes are also positioned as a symbol of a central

character in the narrator's representation of unexpected events and turns in her family life. Every time the narrator thinks of her step-mom or sees a similar pair of hideous red shoes, she recreates her lived experience. Focalizing the narrative sequence and extenuating spatial dimensions around a central object bestows unique attributions of agency upon that object to reenact parts of the overall narrative experience.

In another example, after their family pawn shop was completely destroyed, the narrator tells audiences that they had the best Christmas holiday because her father managed to save Christmas or "the antique watch he planned to give her mother." Realizing that they still had each other and for that they should be grateful, the narrator gratefully celebrates the presence of their father despite having to start from scratch.

And he just keeps saying, "Stacey, they didn't take out Christmas, they didn't take the Christmas". Um, and it was just that moment, after such a horrible, horrible day that was the spark of hope that we needed.

In addition repetitively describing the watch as metaphoric of Christmas spirit, the narrator strategically "emplots" the watch her father intended to give her mother as central object in the development of causal, temporal, and spatial between events. For the narrator's family, Christmas is the antique watch that her father managed to save from the robbery. For others, much like the hideous red shoes, the unique watch is a way to recall the totality of narrators' experiences. In some examples, objects are replaced by metaphors of strong emotions that embrace the entire emotional experience in narrative recreations. In a story of about faith and believing in God, the storyteller captures many difficult feelings and turmoil in an elusive "hug."

I remember my mom hugged me and it was one of those really tight hugs that that kind of hurt um I remember it so clearly because I was a bratty teenager and I didn't hug my mom much at the time. So uh that hug always has stuck with me um I remember that night I went to bed scared and I just prayed. (Narrative 12)

In the first two examples, narrators emphasized the imaginative powers of their objects through vivid descriptions, strategic emplotment, repetition, and an overall centrality of meaning around that object. On the other hand in the last example, the narrator emphasizes the almost magically unique nature of a hug by highlighting its unexpected dimensions in the nature of such a hug; “one of those really tight hugs that hurt”, a “hug that has always stuck with me”, and one that is not so frequently shared with her mother.

An ugly pair of red shoes, an antique watch, and the “really tight hug” all capture modes of objectified imagination and narrators’ extension of their control of time and space to some form of object. These examples are also a demonstration of the narrators’ capacity to control narrative representations of time and space through attribution. By attributing emotional and cognitive value of their experiences to objects, they narrators encapsulate similar structures of meaning into such objects.

Comparing objectified imagination and parallel worlds, this analysis finds, that true to Ribot and Baron’s (1906) remarks about varying degrees of wholeness or completeness of objectified imagination and the sketchy nature of dreams, narrators recall and recreate representations in a similar fashion. Objectified imagination is fully developed, attributes agency to narrator, and extends such agency to objects as well. Parallel worlds, on the other hand, leave sketchy unaccounted for memories and continue

to do so in their narrative recreations. The last mode not only follows the same path as parallel worlds but also compels narrators to surrender their sense making efforts to the higher powers of the “fantastic marvelous” or the metaphysical.

Metaphysical

Unlike the fantastic uncanny or examples of it the parallel world, in the fantastic marvelous, the supernatural event is narratively redescribed as actually taken place. Therefore the "laws of reality", at least from the narrator's point of view, have to be changed to account for unfamiliar nature. Events depicted under this mode of representation are supernatural with intense metaphysical qualities. Under this mode, all requirements of plausibility are suspended as well as disbelief of what actually transpires across the narrator's actual lived experience and narrative representations thereof. Our eager acceptance of supernatural events that defy laws of reality and human logic are attributed to a basic and instinctive appreciations for myths and forms of fiction that liberate us from the confining boundaries of our realities and keep our hope in humanity alive (Campbell, 1991; Nell, 2002; Todorov, 1969). Surprisingly despite the collective tolerance towards lack of causality, plausibility, or coherence in stories about such events, the narrators in this study still tried to apply some law of reality as they grappled for some meaning of their lived experience.

The afterlife is a frightening thing to think about. No one knows for sure what it will be like. Everyone uses their imagination to decide what it is. To a child, maybe death is like a giant water park or a candy land filled with toys. For an

elder, it might be a place for friends to meet from the past and the present sort of like a reunion (Narrative 1)

Although we accept and acknowledge how little we know about the afterlife, we still choose to impose structures of meaning from our lived experiences on the unknown, unexplained, and unforeseen. We often wonder about what happens to our loved ones when they pass away. Fortunately, there comes a time when we get mysterious answers from unbeknownst messengers. Sometimes we search for the answers and other times they just come at an opportune moment to reassure that all is well or restore our faith in a divine promise of a better world. After his friend James dies, the narrator searched for answers until he suddenly realized that his search was not necessary. He reached an inner peace in the conviction that his friend is alive but in a different place.

I knew then, at that moment that James was looking down on me. It was a sign from above that the fab four hadn't gone anywhere. I've realized, that it's not who's in your life physically, but it's about who's in your heart emotionally. Just... now, I realize that the fab four is still together, just this time, we're in different places (Narrative 29)

Manipulation of spatial and temporal dimensions in this mode is relatively easier yet it is also equivocally more elusive to capture in narrative discourse or tangible narrative structures of meaning. For example in the following story, a sudden feeling of cold air is all the narrator has to support his experience of realizing that there is another world out there; one that we cannot experience but nevertheless exists.

Now that seems like one hell of a coincidence that the person to my left

felt something cold move from his side down across his leg, and I felt something cold move from up here down. And he said to me, "It wasn't like a wind, or a breeze, or a draft or anything. I can't explain it Aidan, it just felt cold." Now, needless to say, for the rest of that night I was freaked out, but I guess sometimes all it takes to open your mind back up a little bit, is a little bit of a cold shock. (Narrative 5)

Themes of the afterlife, the unseen realms, and unexplained feelings or sudden realizations controlled plot development and manipulation of time and space to explicate the narrator's sense of confusion and lack of coherence and plausibility. In a story about "Ghost Town", locale or multiple dimensions of space are the main agents and context of metaphysical representation.

Ghost Town

Until I was 14 years old I went to a summer camp called Camp Sequoya in Southern Virginia in the middle of the Appalachian Mountains. I was the only girl from Louisiana who went there, I always got made fun of for my accent, but I had a good reason to go. My aunt, who is now deceased, and my mom both went there when they were little, growing up in Virginia. And my grandfather, who owned a nursery, planted all of the trees on this beautiful property on South Holston Lake.

In the first part of this story, the narrator focalizes "Camp Sequoya" as the main plane of interaction and the a central feature in the development of meaning in her story. The

following sections recreate the narrator's experience at camp while she was a child and organize the narrated experience into distinct epochs.

Every summer I went, I felt like I was going home. I could see my mom and aunt playing in the cabins, riding horses right next to me, and swimming laps with me; I could see my grandfather planting those trees. Just as many people find their identity in the house they grew up in or in their grandparents' house, or at the beach with their family, I found my identity in Camp Sequoya. I grew up a lot those summers.

Self-reflecting upon the value of camp to development of her identity, the narrator further thickens and deepens her connection to the camp in preparation for what follows.

However, after my 6th summer at camp I got a letter in the mail saying that camp would be closed because of liability issues and it would be sold off; all the property would be sold off. I was livid, along with a lot of my friends, wrote pretty much hate letters to the company, and created a fundraising group to try and buy back the land but it failed. But I lived with it and, as sad as I was, everything went on as normal.

In this last epoch, the narrator returns to what was once a lively source of growth and persona development for herself and her family before her. Similar to the vivid descriptions that the narrator uses to reconstruct her view of camp when she was a child, she develops an equally powerful recreation of the deserted camp.

Four years later, when I was 18 years old, I went back to the camp to see what it looked like now. And much to my surprise, nothing had changed.

It was a ghost town. The cabins were still there, the riding stables were still there, there was artwork on the walls, Kleenex in the garbage, counselor's schedules hanging from the walls in the lodge.

Nothing had changed at all, it just wasn't operating as a camp anymore.

And it was the most eerie feeling I've ever felt in my life.

She comes to a powerful realization about the nature of her lessons, memories, joy, laughter, and friendships. The divine cause behind such realizations is narratively recreated in the presence of God.

I felt like I was in a ghost town. And not only did I feel like a part of me had died, I felt like a part of me was hollow. Because here was this place, exactly the same, just not producing the same joy that it used to. I walked away from my family and sat at the top of a hill underneath the biggest tree that my grandfather had planted, looking over South Holston Lake, with the mountains in the background, and I felt the presence of God. And, in that moment, all the sadness of this Ghost Town left me. Because I really understood that a part of me didn't die, that was ignorant for me to think that... Because places don't define who you are, what you take away from places is what defines you. And what you take away- all the joy and the laughter, the lessons, the friendships- that is what can't die and what will never die. It just took me eight years to realize that. (Narrative 7)

Narratively, the life of Ghost Town is resurrected by the volume of vivid and intense details. In the actual lived experience, the narrator's faith in her childhood memories, the emotional value of lessons learned and friendships made is resurrected by feeling the presence of God. In another story about meeting grandparents in heaven, the narrator leaves us wondering just like she has been ever since her little brother told her about coming back from heaven to "pray with people." The story starts as the narrator and her mother rejoiced in being able to save her brother from a near-death experience by the pool:

the water just spewed out of his lungs out of his mouth and um he started coughing and we were all so relieved and uh so thankful but the story doesn't end there my mom was holding my little brother inside later um he starts telling my mom how he went to heaven my mom looked at him and said no John you didn't go to heaven you just were unconscious for a little bit but you're ok now you're a healthy little boy and like you're fine and he was like no momma I went to heaven and it was more beautiful than all of my toys and uh my mom was like you're fine and little brother was no momma I did and I saw grandma and grandpa there too. And uh my mom was kind of taken back for a second because she said my grandma and grandpa were still alive and they live just a couple of miles away on Tom Hans street. And uh she told my little brother this and he goes no momma not them your mom and dad um which was very extreme because they had passed away before he was born he was only three years old and he would not have any memory of them or ever seen them and so um my mom didn't know what to say

or any of that and uh she was just kind of shocked and my aunt had heard all this and she was just like I wouldn't read into this and my momma was really like what's going on this isn't normal for a three year old to say things like that so my aunt says why don't you get a photo album and uh sit down with him and have him point out who he thinks he saw and so my mom gets the photo album and she sits it in front of my little brother and they look through and my little brother picks out my grandpas picture not only as an old man as he last was but in every stage of his life um from when he was in the military to when he was um working construction just times with the family just crazy pictures and um my mom was shocked we all were and um no one really knew what to say and so they kind of looked at my little brother and said well why did you come back why what happened and he goes they sent me back he sent me back to pray with people

Far from the Ghost Town story, this narrator recreates a remarkable sequence of events that possess inherent metaphysical dimensions that facilitate narrative reconstruction of meaning without further development or manipulation of temporal and spatial dimensions. In this set of stories, near-death and trauma experiences usually evoked alternate states of mind where narrators recalled the incident with surreal and strong emotions to evoke others' empathy. And faith was also often intermixed with gratitude even in the harshest and most dire narrative examples of the metaphysical. The narrator's gratitude usually reflected an implicit or explicit manifestation of trust in God and their sincere belief that God was on their side.

Despite the presence of powerful metaphysical experiences exemplifying Todorov's (1973) fantastic marvelous in this set of narratives, some narrators chose to attribute the supernatural powers to themselves or significant characters in their lives after severe trauma and near-death experiences. This was accomplished through narrative manipulation of time and space to engulf themselves by an aura of surrealism that initially surrounded their traumatic experiences.

And then, again I saw a rainbow It was a perfect rainbow. It was a perfect arch. Absolutely beautiful. And, at the time I wasn't just thinking, this is a rainbow. I immediately imagined that this was a sign that said "great job, you did an awesome job this month, you worked so hard, and now you're finished, and, um, everybody is proud of you for doing this. (Narrative 23)

Culminating their multiple and skillful narrative recreations of unfamiliar and difficult to account for experiences, narrators realized that they can cautiously and safely explicate their experiences in the safety of narrative; one that is afforded by the retrospective "remoteness" from their lived experience and "proximity" to the actual meaning conveyed by their narratives.

Summary

Ricoeur asks :

What is common to the state of confusion characterizing a consciousness which inadvertently takes as real something which for another consciousness is not real and the act of distinction, possessing a high degree of self-awareness, by which a

consciousness posits something at a distance from the real thereby producing otherness at the very heart of its experience? (1978a, p. 6)

And the simple answer to his question is a story. In stories of imagination, narrators controlled their confusion about the real and imagined through self-reflections and variant manipulations of time and space. Four modes of representation recurrently emerged: *what if (alternate scenarios)*, *parallel worlds*, *objectified imagination*, and the *metaphysical*.

Although narrators manipulated temporal and spatial dimensions distinctly across each mode, theoretical sampling of random data slices of modes under this genre, indicate a permeable boundary across all four modes. Some narrators easily navigated from parallel realms such as dreams and fantasies to objectify their imagination into a single physical aspect in their story as they made sense of a metaphysical event. It is important to note, however, that although most stories fit into aforementioned modes, some narrators chose to simply use their imagination to describe vivid mental images for audiences while facing an angry elephant, riding a wild boat, or watching barefoot children in Costa Rica. Such stories were about narrators' unexpected and surprising realizations about themselves and other characters in their stories as well. Simple examples such as these were predominantly affective in nature to assure "success in the struggle against other states of consciousness" (Ribot & Baron, 1906, p. 112).

Imagination brings us closer to "the possibility of an undivided self" but the "task of becoming a whole soul begins with the reflective analysis" (Ricoeur, 1978, p.4). In recreating experiences of imagination, narrators fluctuated between "poetical imagination

(where all is permitted and passion for the possible reigns supreme) and ethical imagination (where we are answerable to the suffering and actions of human beings)” (Kearney, 1995, p. 32). In exercising both modes of imagination, narrators realized that they are safe to retrospectively learn from their experiences as well as invite others to share their wisdom through captivating and intriguing narratives of the unfamiliar.

Chapter Six: Celebration Narratives

The nature of celebration, although seemingly simple, is surprisingly multifaceted, paradoxical, and culture-bound. While we share some universal appreciation for some things in life such as birth, love, victory or just life itself, our causes and rituals of celebration are subject to personal configurations of identity, extended ancestral heritage of cultural values, and collective experiences of socialization (Etzioni & Bloom, 2004). In studying modern societies, Manning (1988) attributes the paradoxical nature of celebration to an inherent randomness in individual reasons and motivations behind celebration. He further argues that as we take time from the ordinary and mundane practice of personal affairs to openly and deliberately celebrate something or someone, we seek sensual and social gratification instead of offering tributes of gratitude and appreciation to who or what we celebrate.

However, results from constant comparative analysis of personal narratives of celebration invalidate Manning's (1988) view on the paradoxical nature of celebration in modern societies and offer a liberating reiteration of hope and strength of humankind. In an elaborate display of gratitude and appreciation of others, narrators developed multifaceted, deep, and culturally revealing narratives. They celebrated "strangeness", "imperfection", and "resilience" in a remarkable domestication of fear from the unknown, inherent shortcomings, and misfortune. The following prompt provided narrators with two essential cornerstones for their development of celebration narratives: character and identity. Although most narrators avidly constructed dimensions of characters and identities in their narratives, the themes that emerge from this analysis

exhibit narrators' abstract conceptualizations of celebration beyond surface description provided in the following prompt.

Prompt C

Appreciation angles: Character and Identity

Becoming more aware of premises about character and identity in stories enables us to develop and express our appreciation for, and celebration of, the lives, actions, challenges and accomplishments of those around us. Stories that apply concepts of character and identity often celebrate others, giving expressions of high regard and offering homage for the person's unique contributions.

Celebratory narratives about others honor them and express gratitude for what they have done. (Browning)

In response to the prompt, narrators reflected upon what they value and appreciate in their identities and characters of others. Their celebrations of others are concurrent recognition and testaments to what they value most in life. Celebration narratives cast lively and animated reconstructions of characters who exemplified strength, passion, integrity, loyalty, persistence, and love. In order to honor such qualities in others, narrators first reflected upon their own identities. Indeed, "how can we ask ourselves about *what* matters if we could not ask to *whom* it matters? Does not the questioning about what matters or not depend upon self-concern, which indeed seems to be constitutive of selfhood?" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 137). Distinctions between self, identity, character and narrative identity are essential to a deeper understanding of celebration narratives.

The self is an internal answer to the question of “who am I.” Reacting to situational prompts and external stimuli, we translate our selfhood into an identity. Unlike selfhood, identity is both a category of practice and category of analysis (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Cautioning us against limiting identity into a rigid internal conceptualization, Somers (1994) advises us to incorporate into the core conception of identity categorically destabilizing dimensions of time, space, and relationality (p.606). Likewise, this study views identity as a socially co-constructed, culturally-dependent and evolving concept of the self that influences who and what we prize in the characters of others.

Reifying their sense of self, narrators constructed characters that mirrored constructs and dimensions of their identities. The narrative construction of celebrated characters, in this analysis, follows general premises and assumptions about the construction of a narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1991; Redman, 2005; Ricoeur, 1992; Somers, 1992, 1994). Because it is through narratives that we come to know, understand and make sense of our worlds, it is through narratives and narrativity that narrators constituted characters in a “sensitive coupling of social identity and agency” (Somers, 1994, p. 635). Unlike the ephemeral, transient, and elusive nature of identity, narrative construction of character granted narrators an opportunity to construct tangible and cumulative premises for celebration with a unique “flavoring of their self understanding” (McAdams, 2001, p. 106).

The following analysis shows how self-tinged characters emerged as narrators reflected on hardships, illnesses, unexpected misfortune, and opportunities to help others.

The following axial codes emerged after collapse of initial open codes: *imperfection*, *resilience* and *strangeness*. Each section presents an axial code and its underlying supporting narrative mechanisms as they appeared in narratives of celebration.

Imperfection

Although upon initial mention, a celebration of role models suggests an impression of completeness, coherence, and perfection, the following narrator celebrates “the rock” of a father for his lesser-known and unforeseen traits.

B-I-G Guy

This is a story about my dad. Here's some background before the real plot unfolds- my dad is a big guy. And when I say big guy I mean B-I-G. The kind that like shops at the big and tall section at Dillard's, six' four, upwards of 300 lbs. big guy. The kind of dad that daughters love when it comes to ex boyfriends. And boyfriends fear, regardless of whether they're an ex or not. He's stereotypical like that. And in many other ways too: loves football, lives for deer season, and the only alcohol he drinks is beer. Miller Lite to be exact. I thought my dad to be this rough and tough man, and he is (don't get me wrong), but he's also sensitive, heartfelt, and really the biggest teddy bear you'll ever meet. And I learned all of this the day we went to his brother's (my uncle's) surprising funeral. My dad was in on the family business. It's a produce company where they buy produce from the central market in Porto and sell it to school districts, hospitals, and restaurants in neighboring cities to Porto- like New

Guinea, Frederickson, and the likes. It was a thriving company, with three brothers and one sister working all the time.... Full time. Seeing each other every day except for Sundays.

In this example, a stereotypical depiction of a big guy serves multiple narrative functions. In addition to constructing the character of her father, the narrator is also inviting others to further augment her father's character with their own socially acquired perceptions and expectations of a big, beer-drinking, football-loving rough and tough man. For her family, all was well until, as she promises, the "real plot" is unveiled in the following segment.

Until my uncle got sick, and passed away of cancer all within the same week. It was a shock to everyone, especially my dad (the baby of the family) who was the closest to my uncle... Johnny in age. The funeral seemed like it was out of a movie. We walked in as a family. All dressed in black. And then my dad fell before the altar. My dad, my rock, was on his knees right in front of the casket. Screaming. And crying. Yelling asking why. And begging God to take him instead. You can imagine this moment in the eyes of a four year old. That was me. And I will never forget it. The biggest and strongest and most protective person I knew was the most vulnerable and emotional person at that moment. My heart was in my stomach and tears filled my eyes though out the entire burial, obviously for my uncle's loss. But more selfishly for my dad.

When her father fell to his knees, screaming and crying asking God to take him instead of the younger brother, the narrator's depiction of the stereotypical big guys falls to the ground as well. Even though she confesses to an initial shock and a selfish sadness for her father instead of her uncle, she rebuilds her father's character to celebrate different qualities as she reaches out for comfort in the preacher's words.

I would never look at him the same. And in the mindset of a confused four year old, you can imagine... like... this seems like the end of the world. Then the preacher read John 14. Which goes like: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, but also trust in me... I am going there to prepare a place for you." I found comfort in this scripture, and at that moment, I think my dad did too. Think about it: I was initially so scared when I thought of him in a whole different way. Here was this big, strong, stereotypical man. With this side of him that few, if any, would ever see. That day, he showed me part of his identity that I never even knew existed. And I'm glad. You see, after the rapid death of his beloved brother, my dad has yet to surprise me with how he lives his life. And whether it's through work or play... to say the least, he definitely lives it to the fullest. (Narrative 27)

At the surface level, the narrator celebrates her father for living life to the fullest, for allowing himself to fall and rise, and for having the courage to accept the fragile human condition. She celebrates his weaknesses before his strengths while acknowledging the shared comfort and strength that they both find within the preacher's words: "Do not Let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, but also trust in me... I am going there to prepare a place for you." John 14

Inadvertently, the words of the preacher are a source of instant comfort as well as a message from her uncle that adds a spiritual dimension to the narrator's celebration of imperfection. Her acceptance and appreciation of imperfection brought her closer to a truth about our transient presence in this life; a truth that eased her anxiety as she contemplated opposing dimensions of her father's character. The mind of a "selfish" four year old, the "rock" who wept at a funeral, and the big strong man who hides that "side of him" are all vivid contrasting images of the imperfect, paradoxical human condition; one that we blatantly choose to forget. In this story, imperfection gave rise to a "truthful" role model who showed his child how to live life to the fullest.

In the following example, the narrator honors a different form of human imperfection as they reconstruct disability into valuable lessons of personal growth and identity development.

Cody: my superhero

A lot of people have role models...heroes...people they look up to and strive to be like. And some peoples are celebrities, big sports figures, but uh mine is just your ordinary first grade boy. And he became my hero two years ago when it was an ordinary day at swim practice when we were all sitting on the bleachers. And in walks this first grade boy, and he stands right up in front of all of us, about 35 of us, and tells this story. And as he's telling this story you completely forget he's in first grade. He's so well spoken, so cheery, nothing is getting him down, and he's speaking of overcoming obstacles, and dealing with adversity. In

ways that a lot of us....the majority of us couldn't imagine.

In this example, the narrator develops a consistent construction of Cody's character throughout his narrative. Without an intense depiction of his imperfection, Cody would not be the hero he was in the narrator's eyes.

He's sitting up there with two prosthetic legs, he shouldn't be alive, he was given birth at 34 weeks old emergency C section with numerous health problems, and at three months old had his legs amputated from the knees down. But here he is, Cody, standing tall up there, talking/giving us a lesson on being optimistic and loving life. And a lot of us think/thought, myself included, I already did. And I'm an optimistic guy and I love life, but listening to this kid was like...wow...he really....that's amazing.

The narrator implicitly compares his sense of self and outlook on life to Cody's image with prosthetic legs from the knees down. The following segments accentuate Cody's heroic stance against disability while overcoming circumstantial challenges beyond his disability.

He doesn't have legs he's in first grade, going through the most brutal years of elementary school where kids make fun of, you know, if your shoes are different, you know, simple things like that. And Cody, none of that gets to him, its uh, he just all cheerful, and it was just something that made you scratch your head, cock your head, and say wow...I need to be like that...cause a lot of people aren't.

The last segment in this example rounds up the relationship between the narrator's identity and Cody's character. In his wheelchair, Cody does not just overcome his disability, he is ahead of everyone else.

But the reason Cody came to talk to us was to go for a little swim with us. Because he competes in events that kids his age don't....and he does what kids his age do and way more. He skateboards, snow boards, horseback rides, he loves triathlon, swimming, biking, running...everything and more...it's truly amazing. So what we did with him was we went for a swim...and it was just a pleasure to get to know him, cause he just seems way older beyond his years, it blows your mind. Since then we've shot emails back and forth, a few of us have gone to his triathlon events, he's got many fundraisers, Hope Fun Run for the kids, and just raising awareness for certain diseases and things like that. But that, being in 1st grade and having a life worth celebrating like that and just the unshakeable optimism in life, it was really amazing to meet someone like that at such a young age. (Narrative 32)

In the previous two examples, narrators celebrate characters while interlacing instances of imperfection in the larger narrative construction of their character. Human imperfection is “thousands of years old...timeless, eternal, and ongoing, for it is concerned with what in the human being is irrevocable and immutable: the essential imperfection, the basic and inherent flaws of being human” (Kurtz & Ketcham, 1992, p. 19). However, it is the

narrators' acceptance and appreciation of such imperfection that made it worth celebrating.

Celebration narratives “focalize” certain characters through structures of narrative repetition that accumulate meaning and develop relational dimensions with the identity of the narrator (Browning & Morris, 2012, p. 84). In a story about his recently acquired appreciation of his grandfather's character, the following narrator utilized narrative repetition to highlight the qualities that he appreciates most about his grandfather.

Things can always be worse

Alright, so growing up my mom's parents lived in suburban Annandale in a town called Deer Park, so it was really a big deal when we got to go visit them. My grandma was this tiny sweet little lady. She really fit that grandma stereotype that we all think of. She was really talkative, always babied her grandkids. Then on the other hand my grandfather was this really big tall man. He was of Indian decent so he was really dark complexioned, never talked, he was really steady. You always knew what you were going to get with him. He was always going to be wearing a denim shirt and khaki pants, regardless of the weather that's what he was going to be wearing, and I can just remember as a kid that I was really scared of my granddad. I knew he was a loving caring man, but I was pretty intimidated by him. So about age eight, nine, ten, or somewhere in that range me and my grandfather you know have a good relationship, but we really don't talk much. So we really start to bond over sports, I was really active as a young kid in sports, and all the way up till I was in college, so I was always participating in sports, and

my grandfather was a coach while he was an educator, so that was something we really found some common ground there.

Juxtaposing his grandmother's stereotypical sweet little character against his grandfather's intimidating character, the narrator prepares for a series of developments in his relationship with his grandfather.

Our relationship really took a pretty big step. So I really became close with my granddad. So teenage years come, and uh me and my grandfather really start to have some deeper conversations, and I learned more about him and his life. So my grandfather was an orphan by age seven, he lived in foster homes and with different aunts all the way up till he was in high school. He was really poor, really just an unfortunate childhood, so after high school he joined the Navy in World War II. While he was in the Navy he was a prisoner of war and he was shot, so you know he really had a lot of adversity all the way up from being a young kid you know up into his mid twenties. So he gets out of the navy and starts a family, and pretty soon after he suffered his first heart attack, he has heart surgery and the whole nine yards. Then ten years later he has another one, life-flighted, the same situation basically, heart surgery all those things. And he ends up suffering a third about 20 years later. He has a triple bypass.

The brief and factual presentation of all the difficulties his grandfather has been through accumulates meanings of strength, perseverance, and frequent misfortune. But what the narrator really appreciates about his grandfather's character is yet to appear in the following segment.

Really then I realized my grandfather was a really tough guy. Mentally and physically he was tough, and that was something I really admired about him. He was always going to persevere in all situations. He was really steady, so I really start to develop a big admiration for my granddad, really saw him as one of my biggest role models. So he's about 65 at this point, and he knows his health isn't very good, and my grandma is diagnosed uh with dementia and Alzheimer's and the beginning stages of that disease, and so he knows they aren't in good health and he realizes he needs some help. So he gets them out of the city, and takes them to West Virginia, where I live, and so now he has my mom, me, my brother, and my dad to kind of assist them, take care of them, and help him out.

In the last part of his story, real cause for celebration is gradually revealed as the narrator finally witnesses his grandfather break down after his grandmother passes away.

So you know that was a big deal because my grandfather never really accepted help you know, much at all. Pretty soon after they moved, my grandmother goes down hill really quick, and she passes away. That was really the first time I had ever been around my granddad, whom I saw as having no emotion, and never talked, and one day he broke down and cried, and that was really impactful on me. To see this man who I admired as being so tough really break down. He loses his wife who he was with for 60 years, and just to see the connection he had with her, and just to see what a big part of his life she was, uh it was just a different side of my granddad I got to see. Then the irony, he had this tough life, and he tells his nurse one day about six months after my grandma died, that he is going to go take

a nap, and he dies peacefully in his sleep. So uh my granddad you know, is somebody I learned a lot from. The perseverance, being steady, things can always be worse, and just having a good attitude about everything. It's something I take from my granddad and a main reason why he was such a big role model, and why I celebrate him so much. (Narrative 94)

While this is an example of celebrating imperfection in strong characters as projected by narrators, it is also a celebration of the characters' perseverance and resilience.

Across almost all narratives of celebration, narrators celebrated one form of *resilience* or a manifestation of it.

Resilience

Reminding us of what really matters in life, narrators celebrated the unique human capacity to persist against all odds or resilience. Individual resilience is defined as an emotional and cognitive ability to “reintegrate” as we “bounce back” from disruptions in life (Buzzanell, 2010; Coutu, 2002). “Reintegrating”, “bouncing back”, “standing up again”, “picking it up”, and “holding on” are all ways that narrators chose to celebrate their characters' demonstrations of resilience. The narrative structure of stories celebrating resilience steadily reintegrates an implicit “force that drives a person to grow through adversity and disruptions” (Richardson, 2002, p. 308). To narratively reconstruct resilience, narrators first developed a steady routine prior to a disruption and then followed with a powerful and dynamic demonstration of their characters' ability to overcome adversity as they rise again. Resilience can take on many forms; some are tangible and visible for all to celebrate and some we only learn about after their heroes

are gone. In the following examples, narrators construct resilience out of intricate representations of daily routines, simple events, determination, hardships, calamities, vulnerability, and the sheer power of hope. The story of Paw-paw celebrates resilience in the form of an eternal love; a love that continues after its heroes are gone.

Paw-paw

My Paw-paw hoped that by the age of 70 he would wake up at five, go down to the river, check his trout lines... clean any fish that he caught then go down to the farm and take care of his cattle, feed them then get back to the house to where my grandma had breakfast ready and they started their day together. This was his dream life; this is the life he had dreamed of since he was a small boy. He had grown up on a farm with his family, a poor farm boy that showed his worth by his ability to help his dad feed his family; in his mind this was the way to prove to the world you were a worthwhile human...by fishing hunting and farming a true man's work.

A simple routine of fishing at five in the morning before having breakfast with his wife constituted Paw-paw's dream life. It is a simple yet powerful routine that the narrator starts and ends his narrative with. Between the beginning and ending, the narrator constructs characters of Paw-paw and Shirley to bring their love back to life.

Well, once he got towards the end of high school he had more than just his love of farming, hunting and fishing...his new loves including football, drinking and a girl named Shirley Gerber. He was really in love with Shirley and if it was up to him,

they were going to date. She was two years younger than him, but in 1955 that didn't matter. He was the starting fullback on the football team and was pretty good, she was a very popular sophomore, with a head made for books. My paw-paw chased her half of the first semester until she finally agreed to go to a movie with him on a Saturday. My paw-paw and Shirley dated for the rest of his senior year of high school, going together just about everywhere and being the couple of the school. Well, my paw-paw got a scholarship to go off to George Hanson University to play football, he got halfway there and decided he didn't want to go to school anymore, especially without Shirley, she was a national merit scholar and without her helping him out he was afraid he'd be lost. when he got back and told Shirley what he'd done, that he was no longer going to be a college boy... he was going to take over his dad's farm, he found out Mr. and Mrs. Gerber were not okay with their genius daughter dating a non-college, poor farm MAN... this was not her life, so they cut off her contact with my paw-paw, he was not allowed to even see her. He was heartbroken, even after only a year he seemed to know that she was his only girl... My paw-paw decided that day what to do, he got a job. He got a real job as a delivery man for Frito-Lay, never trying to talk to Shirley, giving up his dream of farming and fishing and hunting. He sold his rifle, bought a pickup and began his life as a working man. He turned this job into his own business, using his newly made contacts to turn this delivery job into a delivery company. He now

got up, went to work came home went to sleep...

Giving up his dream of a morning routine of fishing and hunting for a bigger dream, Paw-paw persevered against his less fortunate life circumstances and continued to fight for Shirley, the true love of his life.

My paw-paw had completely given up his dream, he didn't fish or hunt or farm for almost two years. He'd given it all up for Shirley. After those two years he went back to the Gerber's and told them what he had done... he told them of his business, he explained his idea of his future, and told them that he could help pay for Shirley's schooling. He explained that he had become a MAN that their daughter could date. they gave their blessing and he went and picked her up from school, and proposed that day... after two years of nothing except a letter every couple of weeks... well my grandmother said yes... and they were together for the next 52 years. My Paw-paw had sent off everything that he knew and that he loved to become a man that was "good enough" for my grandmother and in doing so proved that he was the best man anyone could possibly have.

In the end, Paw-paw was able to wake up at five in the morning to fish and hunt *and* return to Shirley for more than 52 years.

After 40 years with my grandmother they had accumulated enough money to buy a house, on the river... with a farm...in cash, all while traveling the world, my grandmother teaching abroad and my paw-paw doing anything he could to make money while still being able to hunt fish and love my grandmother. And his

greatest love, Shirley Gerber, loved him more every day of their 52 year marriage... even today 2 years after his death, she cannot go more than a couple hours without telling another "Peanut" story to anyone who will listen... My paw-paw's love for my grandmother is still the most inspiring love story I've ever heard, and At the age of 70 he was able to wake up at 5, go down to the river, go to the farm, then get back to the house to my grandma where they had breakfast, and they started their day together.. Every day. (Narrative 39)

Much like narrative structure that develops from an awareness of breach in the steady states, a break in the ordinariness, we only realize our resilience when we come across obstacles and hardships that test our abilities to make sense of our lives even when the odds are not in our favor. The following story celebrates a powerful reaction to terminal illness and death.

Paddle-out

So my step-mom has terminal cancer, and about a month ago, the doctors said that it's gotten to the point where pretty much, we're just waiting. There's nothing else that can be done. No more radiation. No more chemo. The tumors aren't reacting to anything. So, u, my step-mom's best friends heard of this news, and decided that they were going to have a paddle out with my step-mom. So typically in the surfing community you have a paddle out when the person passes away. Um. Everyone paddles out into the ocean with his or her surfboard or paddleboard, and you all create a circle, and you celebrate the person's life, and

you say good things about him or her, and you remember them. And it's hard and you cry, but it's more like a celebration, kind of like a New Orleans funeral than anything else. You know, you're celebrating their life, appreciating what they've done.

Celebrating her step-mom's life instead of brooding over her ominous destiny, the narrator vividly describes a unique surfing ritual, a paddle-out to honor her step-mom.

So my step-mom's best friends decided that we're going to do the paddle out with her. So this Saturday, this past Saturday, I flew back to California. And, got to take part in one of the strangest, um, hardest, and coolest experiences and celebrations that I've ever been apart of. So Saturday morning, I got to walk my step-mom, hand in hand, to the end of the cliff. My dad was already down there getting the P.A. system set up for people, so if they wanted to speak they could say something and everyone could hear. But there were literally four hundred people on the cliff. Everyone from the community, from the other end of the world, there were literally people that flew in from another country to partake in this, and to be able to tell my step-mom how much she had effected their life, and to be able to celebrate her life with them. And to just be able to tell her how much they loved her. So I was crying the entire day. My day was crying.

In sharing her emotional reaction to the paddle out, the narrator creates a strong backdrop for her step-mom's remarkable resilience. The giant smile on her face, the goal she had set out for herself to paddle-out, and the determination to stay strong are critical constructs in the development of the character celebrated by the narrator.

But I don't think my step-mom cried. I don't think she shed one tear. She was just radiating from all of the love and joy that everyone was sending her way. She had this giant smile on her face, and one of the things, one of the goals that she had set out for herself, because she prides herself on being a good athlete, was that she was going to paddle out to her own paddle out. You know, here is this woman with terminal cancer, but she's still going to out paddle you. She's still going to be faster than you. And she's still going to do it. I was really nervous. And my dad got stuck in the crowd, someone was talking to him. But it was time for my step-mom to paddle out, so we paddle out, and we had to take a few breaks, but she was determined to be able to be strong enough to be able to paddle out by herself. And I think just that mental strength is what's gotten her this far in life. And it was amazing to see all of the people that love her, and the people that had come to celebrate her life. But it was also amazing to see her set her mind, and accomplish her goal, and paddle out by herself, and I think, well... Not I think. She said that it was one of the best days of her life to be able to know how much you're appreciated and loved before you pass away.

The narrator ends her story with a valuable lesson. In most cultures, characters are appreciated and celebrated after their death. This lesson also explains why Manning (1988) finds celebration paradoxical in our modern societies.

We typically save that until after the person has passed away, until after the person has died. Sometimes there are things that you need to say to them while they're still alive, and so it was definitely one of the most spiritual days that I've

witnessed, and, um, it was amazing to be able to celebrate someone's life with them. And share that joy, and that love, and let you know how much you care about them. So I'm really glad that I got to take a part in that, and it was cool to be able to see her so happy. (Narrative 86)

The paddle-out not only honors the life of someone who is strong and determined, but also collectively celebrates the human capacity to selectively and willfully organizes consciousness towards intrinsic sources of strength and perseverance. Narratives of resilience are constructive, therapeutic, and invite others to contemplate about their own capacity for resilience. And as Meichenbaum (2006) argues "constructive" narratives act as "common final pathways" to influence the levels of adjustment and stress associated with traumatic events in one's life (p.356).

In the following story, the letter to Aunt Ween illustrates a common final pathway that helps the narrator overcome her remorse for not appreciating Aunt Ween before her death. Unlike the paddle-out story, the discovery of Aunt Ween's resilience in the following example is retrospective and supported by elaborate narrative reconstruction of an animated and lively character.

A letter to Aunt Ween

Thanksgiving of my sophomore year in High School I had an assignment that was to write a letter to someone for, and tell them all the reasons I was thankful for them. I wrote this letter to a woman named Anne Conrad Wise, who is my grandmother's sister, who hated her name and was known to everyone as Aunt Ween. I'm really glad I sent this letter to Aunt Ween because a year later,

Thanksgiving day of my junior year, we got a really unexpected phone call that she was in the hospital, and about a week and a half later she passed away. The letter sent to Aunt Ween reappears at the end of this story with a more vital role in celebrating her life and death. In the following segments, the narrator remarkably reconstructs Aunt Ween's character in an interesting sequence of small details and lively descriptions of traits and qualities.

But I don't even know where to start as to why Aunt Ween is a figure that deserves celebration. She was such a character she was almost six feet tall, had bright red hair, wore double her weight in this fabulous turquoise Indian jewelry, um, she was pickiest eater I've ever known but she had such a sweet tooth and pretty much lived off of Snicker bars. She hated the movie Finding Nemo because why would anyone want to watch a movie about talking fish. Um, and I think it's funny that she's the person I want to celebrate because when I was little I didn't ever like being around her that much and I think it's because whenever my grandmother would come over to take care of us um we would go do fun things like Toys R Us and go get ice cream and other typical grandmother things but when Aunt Ween would come along we'd go to antique stores and other things that were boring as kids. But I got over that. Um but I always loved going to her house because when we were little she would go light all the candles in her house and me and my sister would get to run around and blow them all out which was such a treat, it was just a lot of fun, and then she would always give us Diet Coke in these crystal probably really expensive little glasses, which I'm amazed we

never broke. But the downside of going to her house was that she always would tell us that there was a Mean Boy that lived under her bed um that wanted to get wanted to meet the Smith Sisters and me and my sister just freaked us out when we were kids so we would never go to her room by ourselves.

The tall red haired woman in blue turquoise jewelry who lived off of snickers bars and drank coke in expensive crystal glasses gives the narrator the best advice about life in the following segment.

Um, but as I got older I realized that there was more to Aunt Ween than just "Mean Boy" and candles um but uh, she was extremely perceptive, uh she was able to give you the best advice for any life problem you had she was able to just see straight through the nonsense n knew what the right answer was um she was very loving to her family especially my grandmother, her sister they spent all their time together throughout their entire life and were best friends till the end. Um, but most importantly she passed down some advice that I still try to live by to this day. The first is um "don't squat and eat" which I'm doing a terrible job of living because it's basically she's saying why would you want to spend your time sitting at a restaurant when there's so many other things you could be doing with your life. And someone who likes to eat that's hard for me but I do understand what she's talking about where you have a limited amount of time in your day and you need to live life to the fullest. The second thing that I heard her say which became sort of her motto was "pick'em up" and put'em down" it just means just take it one step at a time just keep going and I definitely try to live by that. um. Thirdly,

she um would never let other people in on her problems which I think is a good way to live and was shown very drastically by the fact that she was suffering from lymphoma in the last few years of her life and nobody, not even my grandmother whose super close with her had any idea. Um...so I wish that she was still here, I wish I still had the letter I wrote her, but I think it got used as a makeshift Kleenex when I read it out during her funeral. Um. but yes, I wish Aunt Ween was still here so I could tell her how much I love her and I cherish her and how much she is celebrated. (Narrative 58)

Among all narratives of celebration, this was perhaps the most skillful reconstruction of a celebrated character. Small details, all-encompassing dimensions of character constructs, and an overall animated and lively representation of physical, emotional, and perceptive capacities of Aunt Ween collaboratively celebrate the memory of a cherished character as well as the resilience of the narrator in remembering her with such vitality.

In contrast to elaborate narrative constructions of characters exhibiting resilience, some narrators chose to celebrate the profound and unexpected influence of random acts of kindness from complete strangers.

Strangerness

In defining who we identify as a stranger, Ahmed (2000) tells us that the “stranger is not somebody we do not recognize, but somebody that we recognize as a stranger, somebody we know as not knowing rather than somebody we simply do not know” (p. 50). Recognizing the following celebrated characters as strangers, narrators justify a pronounced impact of unexpected acts from unfamiliar characters. Instead of celebrating

characters for their resilience or imperfection as in the previous two categories, the category of strangeness implicitly reveals and emphasizes prominent constructs in the identity of narrators. In the following examples, despite the presence of many people worthy of her recognition and celebration, the narrator honors a stranger who taught her a valuable lesson about random acts of kindness.

Random Kindness

I have many great people in my life that deserve recognition for what they have accomplished. However, the person I am celebrating here is different. It all started when I pulled into the parking lot at 24-hour fitness, got out of my car with my hand towel, water bottle, and iPod and started walking towards the entrance. I checked in as usual and started looking for open treadmills. It was about 6pm and the gym was completely packed, so I knew I was going to have to wait. I decided to sit down and stretch until a treadmill opened up. When one finally did, I plugged in my iPod, turned up Nicki Minaj, and slowly started jogging. Fixing a normal workout scene, the narrator sets up a parallel narrative representation of her experience to prepare for the unexpected role of a blind older woman and another lady working out on one of the other treadmills.

About 20 minutes into my workout, I spotted an elderly woman who was blind walking between the rows of treadmills searching for one that was open. She was using a long, white-cane to tap each treadmill to see if the belt would hit the white cane. And since all of them were in use,

the cane shot back at her multiple times. Then finally she came to a treadmill that was unoccupied, so she carefully climbed onto it and started pushing buttons. The buttons weren't working and the treadmill was not responding because it was out of order. There was a big, white sign that said the machine was not working, but this poor woman could not see it.

In creating a neutral and objective account of the older woman's attempts to find a vacant treadmill, the narrator emphasizes the action of the lady who, out of 21 other people, gives up her treadmill for the older lady.

Me as well as 20 other people were just looking at her wondering what was going to happen next. This young lady beside me turned off her treadmill and began walking towards this elderly woman. She got up to her and told her that the machine was out of order, but there was an open treadmill and she asked the elderly woman if she wanted to lead her to it. The elderly woman agreed and the next thing I knew, I was jogging next to the elderly woman. This elderly woman had no idea that this young lady had given up her treadmill, so she could do her exercise.

The narrator's sudden urge to become a better person is a reflection of exaggerated influences of strangers' acts. Although kindness, thoughtfulness, and generosity are universally appreciated, the narrative value of the stranger's action is context-bound and reflects relevant constructs in the narrator's identity.

Although I don't know this young lady, she impacted my life in multiple ways. Her kindness, thoughtfulness, and generosity that she showed during this gesture, just melted my heart. I... After that moment, I knew that I needed to be a better person and help people who needed it instead of just being an onlooker wondering what was going to happen. This elderly woman was completely satisfied and so honored that she was able to find an open treadmill, but she didn't know the back-story. And although I was lucky enough to witness this, I will forever be grateful that I was at 24-hour fitness on this day. (Narrative 18)

The following excerpt from another story about unexpected kindness from strangers indicates that “strangerness” as a concept is essential to the narrators’ construction of a narrative identity or “an ongoing effort to extract meaning from their narratives” (Singer, 2004, p. 437).

Small towns are typically known for their kind-hearted, community-oriented, and laid-back nature. A few semesters ago I met a woman who embodied all these characteristics. I only spent about an hour with her, but her personality stuck with me for a while. (Narrative 51)

Narrators’ accounts of “strangerness”-influenced contemplations of the self follow Ricoeur’s (1992) formula for constructing a narrative identity. Positing that all knowledge of the self is an interpretation, he argues that “self-narrative takes on meaning, and an evaluation as “good” or otherwise, through its relationship to the “other” who summons the self to responsibility” (1992, p. 187). In the previous examples, narrators

interpreted themselves through assessments of unexpected acts of kindness from strangers. In reinstating objective meaning of their lived experiences through subjective narrative representations, narrators actively contribute to the intersubjective constitution of their narrative identity and give “lived experiences a clearer and richer meaning” (Ezzy, 1998, p. 251).

Summary

Celebration, as a communicative application of narrative, is surprisingly deceptive, complex, and multifaceted. In celebrating others, narrators first had to reflect upon what they value most. Thus, categories of imperfection, resilience and strangeness are key constructs in the narrative identity of narrators. Subjective narrative representations of events and characters worthy of appreciation captured the complexity inherent in celebrating others. Cody, Paw-paw, and Aunt Ween were powerful examples of colorful characters who accommodated reflexively prized qualities of perseverance, cheerfulness, determination, and resilience.

In this study, subjective narrative representations of lived experiences and influential characters become building blocks of narrators’ narrative identity; an identity with a “unique flavoring of people’s self understanding” (McAdams 2001, p. 106). In celebration narratives, narrative identity is a subjective construct of the narrator’s character, a mediator of multiple identities and characters, and a communicative device for interpreting narrators’ concept of selfhood.

Chapter Seven: Transportation Narratives

Within the greater discipline of narrative impact, narrative transportation has received considerable empirical and theoretical attention. Nell (1988) loosely defines it as being “lost in a book.” Green and Brock (2000, 2002) further develop narrative transportation into a wide-ranging emotional, cognitive, and imagery based theoretical model that generally explains media effects and specifically ascribes a transformative influence to all forms of narrative. Their initial conceptualization was based on Gerrig’s (1993) description of a traveler who returns from his travel a changed man:

Someone ("the traveler") is transported, by some means of transportation, as a result of performing certain actions. The traveler goes some distance from his or her world of origin, which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible. The traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey. (pp. 10-11)

Gerrig’s (1993) literal description provided the foundational basis for a convergent immersion model of narrative influence where readers or viewers are “transported into a narrative world through a distinct mental process, an integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings” (Green & Brock, 2000, p.701). Although the set of narratives under investigation retell instances of transportation in accordance with Green & Brock’s (2000) model, they carry a closer resemblance to the literal meaning initially suggested by Gerrig (1993).

The factual travel dimension of narrative has also been represented by Noy (2004)

as he explored the “profound self-change” reported by Israeli backpackers. He attests to the deep and interactive influence of the relationship between an external voyage towards an “authentic” destination and an internal narrative of self-change that facilitates an overall effect of narrative transportation (p. 78). Transportation, in the eyes of Gerrig (1993) and Noy (2004), is not bound to the influence of a story but instead to an experience that induces similar states of complete immersion and life-changing effects on the identity and character of travelers, or in this case the narrators.

In lieu of the traveler’s transportation metaphor, narrators willfully and consciously traveled to a time and place where they experienced an effect similar to that of narrative transportation. While the typical definition of narrative transportation as it appears in Green and Brock’s (2002) model is not fully applicable to the narrators’ perception and application of the prompt, narrators still re-enacted their transportation experiences through constructs of narrative reconstruction of emotional and cognitive effects, moderating influence of context, and transformative outcomes.

Before introducing the prompt that elicited this set of narratives, a brief overview of narrative transportation and its underlying mechanisms of influence are necessary to understand how the narrators’ chose to present narrative transportation differently. As an interactive process, narrative transportation supposes agency of both readers and narratives. However, “being engaged in a story involves deep yet subjectively effortless concentration” (Green, 2004, p.53). The subjective nature of our susceptibility to narrative transportation has been the subject of several investigations (Green, 2004; Green, Tesser, Wood, & Stapel, 2005). Individual differences in subjectivity to narrative

transportation have been attributed to personal identification with story-consistent beliefs and perceived realism (Mazzocco, Green, Sasota, & Jones, 2010), need for affect (Appel & Richter, 2010), ability to narratively self-reference (Escalas, 2007), and the overall persuasive effects of the narrative itself (Green & Donahue, 2009).

While all the previous may still remain applicable to construction of personal narratives of transportation, the setting of this analysis places narrators in a state similar to that in the concept of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 1996, 1992). In a recent review of “flow”, Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) define flow as complete absorption in what one does to create an optimal experience (p.89). Both “flow” and “transportation” are states of complete absorption in a particular experience. However, the underlying structures, effects, and span of involvement that initiate such states of complete absorption are not the same. The seamless experience of flow, according to Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2014), is characterized by the following: “merging of action and awareness, loss of reflective self-consciousness (i.e., loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor), distortion of temporal experience (typically, a sense that time has passed faster than normal)” (p. 90).

Generally, flow brings about positive intrinsic rewards and motivates individuals to completely immerse themselves at the present moment. On the other hand, narrative transportation is relatively neutral, retrospective, and bound by the relationship between readers and narrative. Corresponding to some dimensions in the concept of “flow”, narrators have crafted representations of their own transportation experiences as moment of complete immersion beyond the traditional boundaries of narrative. Their perception

of time or temporal dimension was distorted but not necessarily as faster than normal. Merger of awareness and action reappeared in narrative representations of dynamic events where narrators lost a sense of self in their social environments.

Consistent with premises of narrative transportation, narrators usually recounted memories of events evoking states similar to “suspension of disbelief” (Green & Brock, 2002; Hollands, 2003). However, their narrative representations of such experiences projected retrospective and reflexive “willful constructions of disbelief” (Gerrig & Rapp, 2004) to simulate the actual experience of transportation. In sum, narrators in this context of analysis subjectively merged premises and characteristics from flow and narrative transportation to narratively represent memories of events that evoke effects similar to narrative transportation yet cannot be directly attributed to narrative influence.

From this perspective, this analysis of transportation narratives reflects the self-perceived impression held by narrators about the nature and effects of transportation as an experience of complete immersion beyond the realm of narrative influence. Personal narratives of transportation in this analysis are interesting examples of “willful and conscious” narrative positioning of specific memories, rather than narratives, as sources of transportation.

The following prompt invites narrators to reflect on their inherent capacity to transport themselves in weaving narratives of similar experiences. In other words, it asks narrators to share their story about being narratively transported. Similar to Gerrig (1993), and Noy’s (2004) deployment of narrative transportation, narrators, in this analysis, developed narratives of transportation that may be considered an example of

meta-transportation, or transportation within narrative transportation.

Prompt D

Appreciation angles: Interest and Memory

The transportation story captures a moment when a person is captured by or “lost in” the story s/he is reading, hearing, or seeing to such a great extent that their attention is totally captivated. The effect of such a story is so powerful that the listener is changed forever by what they have seen and heard. Your purpose in this assignment is to tell such a transportation story.

Through a constant comparative analysis, initial open coding identified keywords and themes that narrators utilized to recall and represent their experiences of transportation. Open codes were collapsed into two axial codes describing *transportation cues* and *transportation mechanisms*. Interest and memory, angles of appreciation suggested by Browning and Morris (2012) in the prompt, have been necessary to the development of cues and mechanisms of transportation.

Transportation Cues

Across almost all narratives in this set, narrators developed a cue to signal the initiation of transportation within their lived experiences. Functioning within the realm of memory, a transportation cue encapsulates the “transportative” effects of narrative into one of the three forms: object, character, or concept. When narrators choose an event to build their stories around, they subjectively and “actively select memories, composed of emotions, details, causal relationships, and dialogue, to evoke memories of a place and time” (Browning & Morris, 2012, p. 99). Accordingly, the subjectiveness of

transportation is dependent upon the inseparable nature of memories and narrative (Ricoeur, 2010).

Narrators managed their selective recall of events evoking transportation effects through cues. In order to represent an instance where they were completely immersed in a story, narrators have to narratively bridge two recreated environments; one where they experienced transportation (the world of origin) and another of the complete immersion they experienced when transported in a narrative world. In this context, a cue separated their lived experience (as the world of origin) and moments of complete immersion as an equivalent of the narrative world in Green and Brock's (2000) model of narrative transportation. Even though transportation effects are not induced by reading a story, I will use both terms world of origin and narrative/alternate world to illustrate the lived experience and moments of transportation as retold by narrators.

The following sections present examples of objects, characters, and concepts as they perform functions of facilitation, initiation, and organization of transportation effects within personal narratives of transportation.

Objects. In the following example, the narrator separates two dimensions of experiences in his narrative with a "nickel." The beginning of transportation effects or the complete immersion in an alternate world begins when the narrator sees what he thinks is the "nickel" on his shirt.

A Nickel

And so as the night went on there came a point where we were gathered around circled talking and I kind of sat down and leaned back against the wall was just

kind of there talking and laughing and all of a sudden I feel something land on my chest. I looked down and my shirt had caught a nickel that somebody threw. I didn't know where it came from. I kind of looked around and the first person I saw looking at me was my friend Louie and I threw it back at him or threw it at him. I came later to find out that he didn't actually, wasn't the initial thrower. But anyways, I threw it at him and hit him in the head. And then I turned away not really thinking about it. Somebody said a joke, I started laughing and as I started laughing he threw the nickel back. I didn't see him, but I just felt something hit my chest again. I was like "what?" and I picked it up thinking it was the nickel and I see something white.

The first part of this narrative sets a casual and playful environment where friends are tossing a nickel at each other. The nickel, with no actual agency of its own, becomes the focalizer of action and source of interest in this narrative. The following section utilizes the nickel as a cue to initiate transportation as experienced by the narrator.

I look at this and then all of a sudden all my friends got quite. They all stared at me for a second and then started hysterically laughing and kind of freaking out. I was like "what?" and couple second later I realized the nickel had come hit my front tooth and broke it in half. I'm sitting there staring at half my tooth thinking "oh my gosh, how am I going to explain this to my parents when I get back?" It was interesting story to say the least. Don't throw change at people. I will never throw change at someone again. (Narrative 6)

Contributing to the focal position of the nickel in this narrative, the narrator willfully constructs a state of emotional suspense and anticipation as his friends look at him quietly and then hysterically laugh. He does not include any factual details about the broken tooth, the probable attempts to remedy it later on, or what happened of the other friend who tossed it back. The factual incompleteness of this narrative furthers the object's perceived agency in initiating transportation and organizing the overall meaning of his narrative. It also highlights the narrator's transient physical "inaccessibility" to parts of his world of origin before realizing that the nickel just broke his tooth in half (Green & Brock, 2000) .

As the narrator sits there looking at his tooth, a second episode of transportation ensues from another object: half the narrator's tooth. The second episode is an example of the narrator's psychological inaccessibility to the world of origin as he sits there wondering about what to tell his parents. While there are several characters and events in this story, the real hero is the nickel. As a transportation cue, the nickel first reminded the narrator of the time he broke his front tooth and will then remind us not to throw change at people. Much like the lived experience, all action, in this narrative, is based upon and recalled through the nickel. In other examples, comparable levels of agency were attributed to characters; heroes that narrators construct to capture the complexity of their transportation experiences into a single entity capable of holding and organizing meaning.

Character. In the following example, the narrator encapsulates her narrative transportation effects in Mitch's character; "an angel, a teddy bear who was loved by

everyone.” A vivid mental image is what binds her world of origin and the narrative world together. Her narrative invites others to empathize through multiple emotional appeals and vivid descriptions of Mitch and his accident.

Mitch

When I normally drive home to Fairfax for the weekend to visit my parents, I usually drive down South Woodlake, take a left on Hillsbury and then I get home that way. But I usually just take that way to avoid a certain area of my neighborhood where there's a tree that has a lot of significance to my friends and I.

While the first mention of the tree hints at a greater role, the narrator initially ignores its agency in evoking transportation effects only to bring it back later on as an auxiliary cue of the memory. Unlike the structure of the nickel story, the narrator in this example goes back and forth between her world of origin and the transportation effects she experienced after the loss of a really close friend.

About four...yeah, about four years ago, on August 1st one of my really close friends passed away. And I had no idea until the day after. When my brother woke me up saying he was running through the neighborhood and happened to see a tree with a car wrapped around it.

The weird feeling, almost a premonition about the unidentified victim of drunk driving, helps the narrator construct a point of departure from her world of origin to a another world.

And I was like, "that is so weird. I feel bad for whoever it was..." you know, blah, blah. And I figured that someone was drunk driving and something bad happened but I most likely wouldn't know who it was. Sure enough, a few hours later my best friend Doreen calls me bawling her eyes out. I had no idea what she was saying on the phone and I had to calm her down and eventually she told me that Mitch had died.

Developing connections between her brother's story, her friend's phone call, and the weird feeling combine to construct an alternate world where the narrator reflects upon Mitch's character instead of his tragic undeserved death.

And I had no idea that this had any connection to the story my brother had told me a few hours earlier. And so I asked her "what are you talking about...what??" And she told me "you know there was a party last night...we were supposed to go to but we didn't end up going to...and there were some drugs, there was alcohol, there was all kinds of stuff going on. And Mitch got mad and left the party. And apparently Mitch drove home. No one stopped him. No one took his keys. (which to this day, I'm still pissed about...because he was such an angel. He did not deserve for this to happen) But anyway, he was racing down the street and a friend was following him and they went different ways and well, I don't really know the exact story of what happened.

But he was drunk driving and had some drugs in his system and went up the curb and wrapped around this TINY little tree.

Although the tree that first appeared in the story reappears in the following segment, it does not play a vital role in bridging between the narrator's world of origin and narrative world. Instead, the character of Mitch and its contrast against his unexpected death contain the transportation effects.

Like the width was probably like this (show width) big. Tiny little limb of a tree. Whenever I drive down this certain street and I pass by this tree, it just takes me back to the day we all found out. And whenever any of us are home for holidays or a just random weekend, we just sit in front of the tree and tell stories about Mitch and all the great things he did for us and what a great friend he was and what a big teddy bear he was and how he comforted us. I've known him since we were probably 8. We went to camp together for so many years. Freshman year, I studied abroad and then I came back to go to Virginia and that summer he was supposed to transfer to UM and live in West Virginia with us. It was all so exciting. And so the fact that he's not here with me today is just so sad and I just get transported back to that memory. Everyday I think about him and I hope that he's doing it big up there and having a ball, and hopefully looking down on us and making sure nothing bad happens to us like what happened to him. I just love him so much. (Narrative 5)

It is important to note that the agency of Mitch's character to trigger transportation is narratively enabled by descriptive details and vivid imagery. In this example, the narrator develops both a means and destination to her experience of narrative. Cues, whether in

the form of Mitch's character or the tree, are merely tickets to the narrator's destination: a memory of Mitch.

In addition to inherent complexity in constructing narratives of transportation, the narrator utilizes emotions, metaphors, and vivid imagery to develop a captivating sequence of events. She meta-models narrative transportation as she reminds us that driving down the street, she can still see the "tiny" tree that metaphorically killed Mitch. Although the narrator recounts a tragic experience, she reminds herself and others that there is a happy ending; a reassurance in the presence of a better destination where Mitch lives happily and watches over his friends.

Concept. Unlike the previous examples, some narrators "repetitively" and willfully condense construction of disbelief as a prerequisite to narrative transportation in concepts and metaphors. The following example relies on the concept of dreams and its ontological connections to alternate worlds.

Dreams

You know, we all have dreams inside. We dream about traveling. We dream about spending time with certain special people. We dream about doing stuff. You know, learning something, building something. And, so often, you know, those things just never come to the fore. Or, they stir inside us and we just get on with life, you know. My family has been like that. We've been busy. We got married. We got jobs. We had kids. We're mowing the lawn on the weekends, trying to keep up with everything. We bought a fixer upper that keeps us busy.

Establishing her world of origin, the narrator invites others to think about their own dreams while simultaneously preparing herself for departure into a narrative world when something unexpected happens.

Well, something happened that transported our life into a whole new way of living. That day came when my husband was sitting in his doctor's office and I was sitting beside him. And, the doctor spoke the words, "Brain cancer." Now those are, like, just about the scariest words you can hear out of a doctor's mouth. And, um, after we had time to think about it, and we went home. We decided that, that was not a call to die. It was going to be a wake up call for us to live. And, we decided that no more are we going to let those dreams sit dormant. We need to do something.

In the previous segment, the narrator does not create a narrative world nor does she depart from her world of origin. Likewise, she does not willfully suspend disbelief. Instead, she exhibits remarkable acceptance of their new fate and a determination to live their lives differently.

So, redeeming the time, we decided to take that trip we'd always talked about taking. We are teachers, our summers are off, we'd always said we wanted to go on the ultimate road trip. So we did. We went and got this travel trailer. We outfitted it. We put our boys in it, like middle school aged, they are...they were. And, uh, we went to Mount Rushmore. We went to Yellowstone. We went to, oh my goodness, we went to Carlsbad Caverns. We went to General Sherman. We

even went to Roswell to try to see aliens. We had the most ultimate road trip.

Something that we only dreamed of doing. (Narrative 22)

Although this story is about how the narrator was transported to another way of living when she heard the words “brain cancer”, the transportation effects of this narrative are captured in the recurrent appearance of the narrator’s hopes and dreams. The unexpected news about brain cancer may have transported the narrator to an alternate world, yet she chose to willfully construct her narrative of transportation around conscious choices and decisions to live the life of their dreams. In recounting all the trips they have embarked upon after their first encounter with the “scariest words”, the narrator demonstrates mastery of willful construction and representation of an alternate reality.

Transportation Mechanisms

Whether narrators rely on objects, characters, or concepts to trigger back memories, feelings, and thoughts, they cannot reconstruct experiences of transportation without incorporating sufficient narrative interest. Parallel to Green and Donahue’s definition of transportation as an “integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings, focused on story events” (2009, p. 241), narrators consciously created narrative interest through control of detail, imagery, feelings, and emplotment of a specific event. Their integrative melding efforts were channeled across three emergent mechanisms of narrative transportation: *affect*, *reason*, and *surrealism*.

Although affect and reason are necessary in any narrative, narrators interchangeably depended on one mode more than the other to reconstruct their transportation experiences. Unlike cues, transportation mechanisms are closer to a general all

encompassing disposition or tone that may not be reduced to simple structures, actions, or events.

Affect. In this set of narratives, affect readily emerged as an appeal to “empathize” with others. Keen defines “empathy” as a “vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, that can be provoked by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s condition, or even by reading” (2006, p. 208). Through a state of “shared intentionality”, we feel that “their (others’) feelings are our own or, at least, could be our own” (Brockmeier, 2008, p. 230). The distinction between empathy and sympathy is essential to understanding affect as a mechanism of transportation. Empathy, as an other-oriented positive emotion (Haidt, 2003), is experienced on multiple levels and through several channels. Although categorized as an emotion, Feshbach (1975) identifies three interrelated cognitive and affective capacities: the ability to take another person’s perspective, the ability to distinguish another person’s affective state, and the affective ability to personally simultaneously experience multiple emotions. When we empathize with others, we “vicariously experience the feelings and emotions of others” (Tangney, et al., 2008, p. 28) while still having distinct feelings of our own. Unlike local and limited emotions of sympathy for others, empathy has substantial implications for moral behavior and encourages us to take some form of action towards others in less favorable circumstances.

Applying these distinctions within the larger framework of narrative transportation, we can view empathy as a mode of narrative transportation where narrators’ departure from world of origin is facilitated by vicariously experiencing the

emotions of others in a narrative world. In Ruby's story, the narrator is transported via emotions she felt for Ruby as she looked in her eyes and indirectly shared her emotional burden.

Ruby

And I look into her eyes, and there's this depth of sadness of being there, and I come to find out that her name was Ruby and that she has five children. Swell, she has four children, but she's pregnant with her fifth child. And I look into her eyes, and it's in that moment, that I am transported, because I'm like I know Ruby that God has something greater for you than just being on the streets, and than just being a prostitute. And we were not supposed to get out of the car, but I knew I just had to. So I just pull her into this long hug, and I can feel the tears from her eyes, covering my shoulder. And I feel this emotion rise up in me, and I feel tears building up in my eyes as well.

Ruby's character evokes two distinct moments of explicit narrative transportation. The first one appears as an emotional influx in a really long hug and tears falling on the narrator's shoulders. In the segment that follows, the narrator attributes transportation to divine intervention, a powerful experience that transfers God's love for Ruby into the narrator's heart.

In that moment I am just completely amazed at this transfer of God's love into my heart onto Ruby. It's just this powerful experience. I get back in the car after we tell her goodbye. And it's this powerful exp. I got back into the car, Well I Prayed for her, then we got back in the car, and as we driving away, and I thought-that

moment I will remember forever. I will be marked by that transfer of love that I felt for this woman, that God feels for this woman and the hope that he can give her to get off of the streets. (Narrative 3)

In Ruby's story, love for another individual transports the narrator twice. The distinction between sympathy and empathy as it emerges in this narrative reflects a dimension of agency and control. When the narrator empathized with Ruby, she willfully lost access to some aspects of emotional control in her world of origin to experience Ruby's distress in an alternate world. In another example of affect-mediated transportation, the narrator tightly weaves affect into an interesting narrative sequence to demonstrate transportation "beyond words."

Dusty Memories

Several years ago my family was in Alexandria. my dad was sailing in a regatta down there so we'd all and we were staying at a hotel so me and my mom and my sister were had just been hanging around Alexandria while my dad was off doing his regatta and we decided to order pizza and have it delivered to the hotel. Umm, so we're sitting in the lobby waiting on the pizza to get there and this old man comes up to us, he's like this really old guy and like pretty dressed up clothes and he has his little walker and he's just slowly kind of making his way up across the lobby and he stops and talks to us and he just says you know Hi, excuse me, may I, may I tell you about some, eh, may I tell you a story?

The old man's question initiates a long series of mini episodes of narrative transportation that start and end with every story he tells about his life.

And we're just like, oh ok, you know, hi, so we kind of talked to him a little bit, tell him a little bit about where we're from and he starts telling us about his life, I guess? And it's been so long I wish I could remember better what he said but ultimately it boiled down to he was a World War Two vet, and he was talking about how he'd lived in Alexandria his entire life and this was his home and then how he'd you know been deployed and joined the army and this whole like, his whole life story basically, just even like he even touched on some of the more horrible things he'd seen in the war to like, um, how he and his wife had ended up meeting here in Alexandria, and had gotten married and lived here once he was out of the war and um, just on and on and on and we're just completely entranced by this mans story this you know he's this super old guy sitting right in front of us telling about just brutally, just in such a raw way telling us about his life.

After a brutally raw telling about the old man's life, the narrator moves on to the empathize with the old man's terminal diagnosis and recent loss of his wife.

I remember I started to get extremely touched when he was talking about his wife, and everything he was just telling this happy story about here's how we met here's about our kids and then he's, he's telling us like but she passed away not that long ago and you know I'm just I don't know how to live without her and on and on and on and I was just kind of like oh my god, that's horrible but then uh, even worse he went on to say that he himself had been diagnosed with um terminal cancer, I don't remember exactly which type he said it was, I don't even think I understood I was too young but um, he was telling about how he had he didn't

have he only had mere months to live and um he was just planning on spending his life in the same place he'd grown up and just living as he'd always done to the fullest.

To conclude her transportation experience, the narrator culminates her experience in tears of gratitude and appreciation as the old man hands her a little blue book called dusty memories.

And then, he said well since I don't have that much longer to live I have a book that I would like, I just wanted to show you and hopefully you will consider purchasing from me. It was this little book of poems that he'd written since he'd been in the war all the way up till now, it was a little blue book called Dusty Memories and I still have it it's at my parents house but it's they're actually really good poems and it has his picture on the back and um so we said well of course we'll buy a copy you know like thank you for taking your time to tell us about your life cause it's just we were all just stunned by what he'd had to say and what he'd had to tell us and again I'm really upset that I can't remember in more detail what he'd said but what really stuck with me and what has made this a transportation story is cause as soon as he left I just like burst into tears I was just so touched by his life and his passion for life and what he'd been through like compared to me who was really young at the time and who was so naive and he was just had this still like he still saw the beauty in life even though his life was almost over he was still living and he was going on to the fullest and I was just beyond moved by his story and his bravery. (Narrative 10)

In the previous example, dusty memories in an old blue book hold the keys to an emotional portal that facilitates the narrator's recall of the old man's stories, her empathy for his loss and terminal diagnosis, and her appreciation of his passion for living life to the fullest. While elaborate details and an overall emotional disposition bring dusty memories to life in the previous examples, other narrators crafted persuasive narratives and appealed to arguments of reason to elicit representations of narrative transportation.

Reason. Unlike affect, reason, as a mechanism of transportation, demands significant degrees of narrative coherence and solid logical arguments. In an empirical investigation of the effects of identification on persuasion, Sanders, Graaf, Beentjes, & Hoeken (2012) insist that identification with a storyteller's perspective or the narrative viewpoint is more likely to have persuasive effects. Narratives of transportation exemplifying reason as a transportation mechanism deployed identification and rational appeals to represent their experiences of complete immersion in narrative worlds.

Identification. At the individual level, identification is an expression of affiliation that reflects our innate tendency to belong and concurrently stand with who/what we belong to (Haidt, 2012). Identification begins with a recognition of who we are and then develops into a life-long pursuit of ideas, beliefs, and values that resonate with our identity. In the following example, the narrator adopts "the pursuit of happiness" as a lifelong motto.

The pursuit of Happiness

So I was watching the Pursuit of Happiness one night, um, when it was on USA or something, back in, like, 2009. And I'm not one of those people who really remember movie quotes or movie quotes don't really stick out to me. But there was this one scene, in the movie, where, um, Chris' wife leaves him and takes his son, and he's sitting there, um, in the rain in the middle of New York on a payphone. And he says, "It was right then that I started thinking about Thomas Jefferson on the Declaration of Independence and the part about our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And I remember thinking how did he know to put the pursuit part in there? That maybe happiness is something that we can only pursue and maybe we can actually never have it. No matter what. How did he know that?"

The narrator was never really the kind to remember movie quotes, but "for some reason this quote stuck out." She vividly recalled the script and included it in her narrative reconstruction of transportation because she readily identified with pursuing happiness herself. In the following segment, the narrator explains how her identification with this quote has prompted several other experiences that constantly remind her of who she was and her goals in life.

And for some reason this quote stuck out to me so much, um, and I, kind of since then, always wanted a tattoo with the word "pursuit" on it, because it's such a powerful word to me because, if you think about the pursuit of happiness you, like it's something that some people are never able to reach. And so that was kind of

my goal to one day get a tattoo of the word "pursuit". This was before the Kid Cue song, "Pursuit of happiness", cause it kind of ruined it for me, but it really didn't stop me from wanting to pursue this tattoo.

The tattoo, quote, and an extended identification to include her family as well reinforce the mediating effects of reason as a mechanism for narrative transportation.

Um, but for me, pursuit of happiness was really connected to my family, and how my parents were on their own pursuit of happiness to escape, um, you know their country, they're immigrants, and decided to pursue a life here, and I kind of think that they've definitely reached their happiness, and I'm still continuing, and I think I always will be on my own pursuit. And um, I'm really influenced by my parents, and that's why it's so powerful to me. So, um, in my, uh, in the summer going to my sophomore year of college, my friends and I randomly decided to go to a tattoo parlor, because someone wanted a tattoo and I kind of decided right then and there that's what I wanted. And I did like mock ups before and, um, wasn't really hard to do, but, that was, that was what I really wanted. And I went and got it at a super shady, um, tattoo parlor up in Houston. And I have it on my, um, I don't know what you call it. My, my forearm I guess. And it's there, and every time I look at it and I look down it makes me happy and, um, really pushes me to always pursue my goals, and not only to work hard for myself, but work hard for the future of my family, and hopefully that one day I will make my parents proud. Um, yeah it's funny how just a movie quote stuck out to me so much that I went and actually branded it on my body, but it was a really powerful statement, and to

me, even to this day, it still means a lot to me, so I definitely don't regret it.

(Narrative 2)

In this story, the narrator captures transportation effects of her story through identifying with a quote, etching tattoo, and a value shared by her family. This is an example of multilayered identification and its persuasive potential to transport the narrator and others in “pursuit of happiness.” In another example, a lack of identification caused the narrator to reassess her entire life.

I'm on a completely different path. I feel like I'm a much stronger person because you have to reassess who you are. You associate yourself with something, and then you lose that, and it's like you lose yourself and you don't know who you are. I didn't know how much I could, sort of like, pull myself through. And how much I can figure things out on my own. And I'm actually, like, really blessed that it happened, even though, at the time it was heartbreaking, but I'm glad that it happened. (Narrative 17)

The narrator's ability to reach strong life-transforming realizations through identification or lack of identification was also mirrored through the presence of simple rational appeals.

Rational appeals. Following rational appeals in a well-written argument, one narrator decided to stop smoking after reading an article about health hazards of smoking.

Cold Turkey

And as I read through the article my heart just dropped. just sank from my chest to my stomach. As I turned the page and saw this huge photograph. That took up

took up the whole page, of a very pink and healthy lung and very dark, brown shriveled up smoker's lung. It was photograph to represent the effects of smoking over 10 years. And as I looked at it all I could think about was myself and my future and what I was doing to my body. And I looked at this picture and thought to myself this is what it is going to look like in ten years then I've got to stop.

The image-induced transportation effects are immediate and last for a life-time.

And so I did, completely cold turkey. threw out all my cigarettes when I got home. And haven't touched one until today. but any time that I'm walking around and I see someone light up a cigarette my mind always goes right back to that picture that I saw, that old national geographic. And I think to myself goodness "what are you doing? what are you doing to yourself? that's just terrible." Now I probably sound a lot like my mom ironically. And that is the story of how I quit smoking outside of the doctor's office. (Narrative 48)

While most smokers are well-acquainted with harmful effects of smoking; it is the power of realization that makes the previous example of transportation possible. The narrator looked at the image of both lungs and suddenly realized how irrational smoking was. Rational appeals in the article and the influence of narrator's realizations are captured in the image of two lungs that he recurrently recalls to keep himself on track. In another story, the narrator realizes how he would like to live his life after a lesson once shared by a friend.

Work to live

He went to school in America and he worked really hard and then he got this job and he was telling us how he had really, really long work days and he was at point in his life, he said he was around 25 or 26 and he was making all of this money and doing all of these things But he Never really had time to appreciate any of things that he was doing. He was American but he had never really saw America, all he had saw his office. All this money and things like that but he wasn't able to spend it because it was so focused on his work and his job. He said one day he realized you should work to live and not live to work and that is something that really stuck with me it was just such a big lesson especially at this point in my life. Don't get too caught in what you're doing and being able to step back and admire the work that you do. By the time he was thirty he quit his job and really took time to travel and do things like that. (Narrative 61)

Rational appeals are reminders of unexpected realizations that cause life-changing consequences. In the minds of narrators, rational appeals reside as memories of lessons learned. Their effects are unexpected, residual, and enjoy trans-temporal influence. The previous examples illustrate how reason and affect are effective transportation mechanisms that build narrative interest and facilitate narrative representation. The last transportation mechanism to appear recurrently in this set of narratives was surrealism. Browning and Morris (2012) argue that transportation is a form of entrancement “to such an extent that they (narrators) are transported out of the consciousness they are presently in and removed to the site of the story” (p. 112). In the following examples, narrators

recount incidents where their unconscious mind took over to create a surreal alternate experience.

Surrealism

Surreal narrative transportation operates through a liminal presence across both conscious and unconscious narrative minds. As narrators reflect on their experiences, they cannot recall how transportation was initiated but they can recall their departure from worlds of origin.

Switzerland

And I'll never forget when we turned that corner and I looked down that road, and the way I can describe it best is I felt like I was transported into a movie. I mean you looked at it and there was a soccer field, there was a bunch of kids playing soccer on the sideline. They had a pizzeria, they had a chocolate shop and they even had this town hall that had this beautiful architecture unlike anything I had ever seen. And this was a really really small town but the fact that they still had a town hall and a town center like this, it really just blew my mind. That's when I really felt like I was starting to understand because everything I had seen previously had just been the big monuments and the big tourist place that pretty much everyone goes to when they go to Europe. I had never been to a small country town like this where its just the city folk living not trying to impress not trying to sell you something not trying to do anything except just live the way they naturally do there. And just everyone was talking French because the part of Switzerland we were in, everyone spoke French there. And that image has just

always been ingrained in my mind ever since then, and I can still remember it perfectly to this day that that is what Europe is like and that is what Switzerland is like. And I remember when I came back everyone wanted to hear about the mountains, or how was the Swiss cheese or did you buy any Swiss watches? And I told them all about that stuff in time, but I couldn't help but tell them about that town and the feelings I experienced. Because it was just so surreal and I don't know I feel like that's when I really started to understand. (Narrative 7)

In the last example, the narrator is surprised at the special surreal effects of narrative transportation unexpectedly occurring in an ordinary moment.

Eyes of Texas

The moment, though, in that game, on that day, that I truly, truly was lost in the moment was when the Eyes of Texas were sung though. I had heard the Eyes of Texas been sung god knows how many times up to that point, but in that particular instance it was truly special because, when we started singing it, you couldn't hear the band play. It was that loud. TO me, that represented a day that, as a kid, it was the ultimate day. (Narrative 20)

Summary

In discussing narrative transportation, Browning and Morris (2012) identify five challenges to developing and maintaining interest and memory as prerequisites for narrative transportation:

Connecting with, yet departing, from context; balancing the novel with the familiar; juxtaposing the liminal and the persistent; matching the uncertain with the reliable; and uniting practical and aesthetic relevance. (pp. 113-114)

The previous analysis reveals narrators' intuitive navigation of aforementioned challenges with the help of cues and mechanisms that facilitated recall and organized meaning of their experiences into interesting and captivating narratives. In willfully and consciously developing cues that facilitated their departure from worlds of origin and return when needed, they juxtaposed familiarity of their worlds against the novelty of unexpected transportation.

Despite the emergence of recurrent themes and keywords that gave rise to theoretically significant concepts, narratives of transportation were the most difficult to analyze. Even though the prompt asked narrators to develop a story about the powerful transportation effects that changed them forever, I found myself looking for the power of their narratives to transport others, including myself as well. An additional source of difficulty in analyzing these narratives stemmed from narrators' various interpretations of the prompt. Although the prompt explicitly asked for an example of narrative transportation, one that is simply induced by a story, narrators attributed their transportation effects to real lived experiences beyond the realm of narrative influence. For some narrators, transportation effects were directly evoked by memories of lost friends, unexpected small accidents, or characters. Findings from this analysis indicate that transportation while captured through narrativity in this context of analysis is an

experience of full immersion that share some grounds with flow yet remains a distinct psychological phenomenon in need of further investigation.

Constructs and characteristics of processes of both flow and narrative transportation were merged in the construction of narratives about transportation experiences. The willful construction of disbelief, or narratively reconstructing narrators' experience of suspending disbelief, allows emotions to play a greater role in eliciting transportation (Murphy, Frank, Chatterjee, & Baezconde-Garbanati, 2013; Sanders, et al., 2012). Likewise, the "power to sweep readers away to different places and times or to alternate universes where they lose track of time, fail to observe events going on around them, and feel they are completely immersed in the world of the narrative" (Green & Donahue, 2009, p.247) was mirrored by the narrators' perceptions and representations of their own transportation experiences. In examples that offered different modes of transportation, contextual stimuli replaced the role of narratives in narrative transportation. Similar to Green and Chatham, and Sestir's (2012) conclusion about the nature of transportation as bound by variables in both readers and texts, this analysis finds that narrators' experiences of transportation are also bound by external sources of influence in their environments. Variations in the narrative representation of narrative transportation models as exemplified in this analysis may offer further insight about the nature of transportation as a general total immersion state beyond the influence of stories. Perhaps the effects of narrative transportation, as unintended and interruptive of readers' consciousness, cannot readily be recalled or accounted for through narrative agency. These assumptions remain in need of further investigation.

Chapter Eight: Elevation Narratives

In elevation narratives, narrators recount episodes of personal transformation, realizations of newly found abilities and talents in others, and an overall state of empowering positive emotions. Indeed, “people are often profoundly moved by leaders, saints, benefactors, and heroes, as well as by ordinary people who do extraordinary things” (Algoe & Haidt, 2009, p. 105). In this set of narratives, narrators told of ordinary people who did extraordinary things that lead them to experience a state of elevation.

Elevation as an emotional, cognitive, and behavioral state, has been the subject of concern for many scholars across multiple contexts such as leadership (Allison & Goethals, 2014, 2015; Palmer, Begley, Coe, & Steadman, 2013), positive psychology (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011; Haidt, 2000, 2003; Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Schnall, Roper, & Fesler, 2010; Schnall & Roper, 2012; Siegel, Thomson, & Navarro, 2014; Thrash & Elliot, 2004; Thomson & Siegel, 2013; Vianello, Galliani, & Haidt, 2010), positive organizational change (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2006; Dutton, 2003), and narratology of the workplace (Boje, 2001 ;Browning & Morris, 2012; Gabriel 2004).

Defining elevation is a complex endeavor as it simultaneously exists on multiple planes of human interaction and emerges in several forms. As an internal emotional state, elevation is defined as “a warm, uplifting feeling that people experience when they see unexpected acts of human goodness, kindness, and compassion” (Haidt, 2003, p. 1). Similarly, Ellithorpe, Ewoldsen, and Oliver (2015) define elevation as a “feeling of meaningfulness and poignancy” that connects us further to humanity (p. 236). Most

definitions position our experience of elevation as a response to an external stimulus prompting us to experience some kind of uplifting positive emotion. Oliver and Bartsch (2011) study media effects on the perceived states of elevation in audiences to learn that elevation “arrives with mixed affect, often in response to narratives involving moral virtue or human connectedness” (p. 29).

From a cognitive perspective, “elevation is a moral state in response to seeing humanity’s higher or better nature” (Haidt, 2003, p.280), extending beyond the affective influence of initial emotional responses. Many scholars have suggested that experiencing elevation has prosocial consequences such as goal activation and moral license to explain similar behavioral effects (Ellithorpe et al. 2015), encouragement of altruism (Palmer et al. 2013; Schnall et al. 2010), enhancement of organizational citizenship behavior, and affective organizational commitment (Vianello et al. 2010), and provision of “ a motivational impetus to act on one’s moral values” (Schnall & Roper, 2012, p. 373).

Whether an emotional, cognitive, or behavioral state, Seigel et al. (2014) view “elevation” as ontologically rooted in a positive “other-praising emotion” (p. 414). Englander, Haidt, & Morris (2012) define these emotions as “elicited by a positive appraisal of another person’s actions “to” generally motivate people to praise others to third parties” (para. 1). Our tendency to emulate and praise positive behaviors of others can be real or imagined. In Jefferson’s (1975) words as chronicled by Haidt (2003) in his initial development of elevation:

When any... act of charity or of gratitude, for instance, is presented either to our sight or imagination, we are deeply impressed with its

beauty and feel a strong desire in ourselves of doing charitable and grateful acts also. (p.349-350)

Our deeply impressed state with the beauty in others' acts and characters foregrounds our experiences of elevation. Although Jefferson's depiction focuses on charity and gratitude, it is important to note that gratitude and elevation are distinct kinds of positive emotions. In their experimental attempts to distinguish between elevation and gratitude, Seigel et al. (2014) discover that "people feeling elevated will focus on emulating the moral exemplar, while there will be more of a focus on reciprocity with the benefactor among those feeling grateful" (p. 415). Their distinction further contends that "recalling a moral deed performed for someone else boosts elevation beyond an individual recalling a generous deed performed for the self" and likewise "feeling elevated promotes an increased salience of the moral implications of one's actions beyond feeling grateful" (p.424).

Although elevation and gratitude are distinct in their life-spans and outcomes, experiences of elevation as demonstrated in this set of narratives are often tinged with a sense of gratitude; an untold gratitude for our human ability to experience elevation. Across all the previous definitions and categorizations, elevation is initially experienced as an emotion. The prosocial consequences that follow have garnered significant empirical support to indicate that we are active observers and enactors of the "beauty" we see in moral virtue and exemplars of others. Algoe and Haidt (2009) argue that we must deem an action or character morally virtuous in order to experience elevation. Hence, they contend that what elicits elevation is the realization of the beauty that we identify in

morality and virtuousness. In media contexts, Oliver and Bartsch (2011) suggest “that feelings of elevation experienced via moral beauty result in a heightened motivation to be a better person or to help others” (p.32). Similarly, Seigel et al. (2010) also see elevation as “an emotional response to witnessing moral beauty” (p. 414).

In this study, narrators responded to a prompt that encouraged them to recall a situation where in their actual experiences they realized alternate conditions and possibilities offering empowering and liberating effects. Such narratives, as guided by the prompt, were required to demonstrate instances where people surmounted their circumstances. Recognizing beauty as a requirement to experiencing elevation has been translated into a requirement of greater aesthetical exhibits in narrative mode. Browning and Morris (2012) maintain that stories are ontologically aesthetic as they simultaneously allow for the discovery and weaving of feelings, identity, and meaning in a seamless narrative. They further contend. “if aesthetics are expressions of the senses to things of beauty” (p. 118), then narratives of elevation are an expression of the beauty that we see in others and our surroundings.

Prompt E

Appreciation angle: Aesthetics

The elevation application refers to the ability of a story to raise the stakes for a person by opening up possibilities and changing expectations by altering the context and the conditions one is in. The elevation application shows how such a story that is based in fact can increase possibilities when it shows how conditions have changed beyond what could be expected. Elevation is about narratives that

show what can be done, not by merely imagining what is possible, but by offering a concrete, dramatic example of creating conditions that cause people to rise up and do more than they ever have before.

As guided by the prompt, elevation, from a structural narrative perspective requires some vertical movement; one that is grounded in the present but offers a concrete and solid projection towards the future within a narrative framework. Browning and Morris define such narratives as ones that “raise the stakes for a person by opening up possibilities and changing expectations through altering the context and the conditions one is in” (2012, p. 128). Perhaps it is important to note that the prompt does not in any way require an expression of moral elevation. Yet, most of the narratives are strong and vivid examples of powerful moral elevations.

Through a constant comparative analysis of elevation narratives, a recurrent theme of “hitting rock bottom” emerged as narrators recounted their uplifting experiences. Although not a necessary requirement, for an elevation to take place in this set of narratives, many first experienced their lives at “rock bottom” before experiencing an epiphany about themselves or others. In a “broken family”, the narrator tells us about her family’s coping with the death of her younger brother. Around Christmas time, her family reached a “low place” that helped them see the beauty in rising up again from the emotional debris of loss.

A broken family

My mom didn't even want to decorate a Christmas tree around the holidays which was her absolute favorite thing to do. It was a huge family tradition, but we were

just a broken family. The holidays were always the hardest, and I remember one time when my mom and I were Christmas shopping. We were in the car listening to the radio on the way to the mall when Chris's favorite song came on. It was Garth Brooks "Friends in Low Places", and we immediately started crying. My first instinct was to reach over and just turn it off, I couldn't handle it, but my mom said "Shh just listen, just listen". And we listened to the whole song through, I mean bawling crying. And at the end my mom turned off the radio and she said she just had an epiphany. We were in a very low place, and realized that this is not what Chris would have wanted. He wouldn't want us to sit there crying, missing him, thinking of him. He would want us to be inspired, and in that day in the car that's exactly what happened. My mom got inspired. She decided that because Chris was so selfless and such a happy kid (regardless of his condition) that he would want us to be helping people just like he always wish he could do. So my mom started a fun run called Christopher's Heart fun run. (Narrative 57)

When her brother died, the whole family stopped living. After listening to Garth Brooks on the radio, her mother decided to regain her strength and celebrate the life of her dead son instead of his death. While it may not be the result of a song, the narrator develops a meaningful connection between their emotional state while listening to the song and their elevated state later on. Realizing the beauty in other possibilities as a prelude to elevation is not a process that we can consciously plan or predict. Elevation is often a complex “epiphany” that can only be captured by the beauty of narrative form as it engages multiple senses. In the previous example, the narrator attempts to engage senses through

images of Christmas trees, songs about low places, and strong descriptive statements about her emotional states.

Indeed, “ stories are beautiful communication “because” they have the capacity to engage the senses that respond to quality” (Browning & Morris, 2012, p. 116). In another example, beauty emerges from the narrator’s ability to depict her “lowest point” from multiple aesthetic viewpoints.

Like a mountain

But it was like God sent me so many signs saying, “Kayla something life changing is going to happen, you need to trust me, and you need to go on this journey with me.” So I decided I would trust him, and I went. Well one morning when I woke up in Colorado I was feeling really down and really upset, so I figured hey what is better than going on a run right now in this beautiful scenery and maybe I could be happy again. So I went down to the nearest mountain and I was looking at the mountain from the very bottom, and it was not just a mountain that day, it was a metaphor of my life. Because here I was starting from the bottom in the lowest point in my life where I felt like nothing was ever going to get better, and that I was always just going to be this sad girl, and that I was never going to reach my highest potential or make it to the top of this mountain, because everything was impossible. I was so upset and nothing mattered. I thought to myself if I didn’t have him, what did I have. (Narrative 71)

Looking at the mountain, Kayla develops a complex metaphor of elevation where her experiences of life at the lowest point are only an indication of her chances of making it

to the top of the mountain. Rationalizing her epiphany as some form of divine intervention that lead her to go on a trip to Colorado, Kayla experienced elevation by looking at a mountain. “Hitting rock bottom” and “epiphanies” are planes of interaction in elevation narratives where narrators create anchor points for their narrative development. Examples that followed this pattern were linear with easily identifiable anchor points that demarcate narrators’ emotional states before and after experiencing elevation. Linear elevation experiences heavily depend on narrative aesthetics and are fulfilled by the narrators’ use of description of sensory stimuli.

Narrative aesthetics, unlike other angles of narrative appreciation proposed by Browning and Morris (2012), cannot be defined into categories or specific structures nor are they universally shared or appreciated. Therefore, the beauty of every narrative lies in the eyes of narrators and is reflected upon by others. Through initial open coding, axial codes emerged depicting recurrent themes in two types of elevation: *moral* and *material* elevation. The complexity and form of narrative aesthetics varied across axial codes where moral elevation required greater mastery and exhibits of narrative aesthetics and an elaborate setting for juxtaposing emotionally low moments against newly acquired emotional states of elevation. Additionally, moral elevation indicated an untangible intrinsic improvement in the morale of narrators or characters in their story; one that was not readily translated in external tangible or material units of elevation such as a bigger home or a more successful career. On the other hand, material elevation, while still including a dimension of emotional elevation, placed a greater emphasis on the significant tangible improvement in the material worlds of narrators and their characters.

Moral Elevation

Moral elevation is powerful, uplifting, inspiring and “awe” evoking. In “*Approaching Awe*”, Keltner and Haidt (2003) tell us that awe is an outcome of our “perceived vastness” of an experience and our consequential “inability to assimilate such an experience into our current mental structures” (p. 297). They recognize that while many objects can trigger our awe, three states remain commonly shared in our experiences of awe: admiration, astonishment, and mild feelings of beauty. In retelling experiences of moral elevation many narrators represented their awe through expressions of admiration, astonishment, and recognition of beauty in unexpected characters like Heather, the six year old with blonde hair and braided pigtails in the following story.

Scout

Growing up, I always went to a summer camp. And, I would look forward to going there for a week every summer. It was so exciting and I loved all the counselors, and all the people all the skits and all the games. So, when I was in high school I applied to be a day camp counselor which meant I would just be with the younger kids, they would come in the morning and leave in the afternoon. And my first summer, I didn't really know what to expect from being on staff because I'd just been a camper and you don't really see anything from being on that side. I think by my third week I was really getting the hang of it and this week there was a girl in my group whose name was Heather. She was just the cutest little six year old girl with blonde hair, with braided pigtails. Everyone called her Scout. Her family would say "Bye Scout!" when they'd drop her off, so

she told me that's what she would like to go by. Through the entire week, she was just so drawn to me and I felt like she was just so different than all the girls in our group or that I'd known from other weeks. She loved to be near me and see everything that I did, she would copy me and sit by me at meals. And she would TALK to me, she'd ask me what I would do when I'd go home at night, who my friends were or what my parents were like and for a six year old this was really deep conversation that I didn't really get from other campers.

In the narrator's construction of the story about Scout, she sets up the stage for a "normal" volunteering experience at a summer camp. Mimicking her actual experience of moral elevation, she does not give away any hints or clues about the extraordinary character of Scout that she reveals later on in her story.

Through the week, I felt like I got to be close with Scout and she got to know one of my friends, Levi, well too. We just kind of felt like there was something different about her, which was really weird for a six year old. So, one afternoon after camp, I think it was Thursday and camp ended Friday I asked her Mom, "Does Scout connect with you so deeply? She's so wise, and mature for her years..." And, her Mom told me that she had been diagnosed cancer, she was currently going through chemo and hadn't lost her hair yet, she had been diagnosed about six months before going to camp with cancer and it's terminal. So, she had begun to grasp what that meant as a six year old to have a sickness that was probably going to take her life. From then on, her Mom said she just started to love people and connect really well. She said they had been granted, by

the Make A Wish Foundation, a week in Disney World and a week in Paris so she could see the Eiffel Tower, which is what she had wanted to see. And, they also had paid for her to go to summer camp before maybe her last days on Earth. Scout's behavior is elevating because it is unexpected. The appreciation, astonishment, and beauty that the narrator discovers in Scout's character is awe-inspiring because for a six year old diagnosed with terminal cancer life has already stopped. Scout's persistent interest in others despite her circumstances pushed the narrators' ordinary presence in camp to the following elevated state that continued well beyond the duration of summer camp.

So, that moment, hearing those things about that six year old, was so impactful to me. So that next day I just felt like I needed to know and love Scout so well because she'd shown so much life to me and that whole time I didn't know what it was about her but she was really just trying to grasp life for all that she could because she knew that she might not have 15 years to go, or she may not get to be 18 like me or whatever...so, knowing Scout changed the way that I get to know people. She ended up passing away about a year after that week at camp. So, I hope I can impact someone the way that she impacted me one day. (Narrative 80)

A string of beautiful gradual but powerful moments develops into a narrative that admires remarkable abilities of a six year old to transform the narrator. There is no doubt that Scout's mother is also someone who may trigger our awe. However, the narrator limits her presence and role in the story. Her limited appearance as she dropped off Scout and told the narrator about Make a Wish Foundation reinforces the role of Scout as the sole

and perpetual source of moral elevation in the narrative. In this example, the narrator experienced continued effects of moral elevation as a newly acquired meaningful and poignant connection with humanity (Ellithorpe et al., 2015).

In the next story, the narrator experiences moral elevation as she plays Christmas carols and “Rudolph the red nosed reindeer” to young children in a hospital instead of pursuing her own “selfish” needs.

Rudolph the red-nosed Reindeer

So when I was in high school I was like the go getter kind of girl. I was in tennis, volleyball, a bunch of organizations...orchestra. And I turned sixteen and my dad said you know your going to get your first car. And I was really excited but then he said, you have to put down a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars and you know I was like okay. I'm a go getter, I'm going to do this. And so I got my first job. I was sixteen; I worked at a clothing store. And I figured out that it took a long time to make one hundred, two hundred dollars. Especially because I spent like half of it. And it was paid hourly. So then, I decided lets do tennis lessons, but then it turned into winter time and I realized that during the winter a lot of people don't like playing tennis. And so I wasn't making as much money as I wanted to make. And I couldn't get my car!

In the first half of her narrative, the narrator develops dimensions of her character to foretell why playing music for young children without significant financial compensation seemed like an act that did not properly fit with her goals and needs.

I was carless and I was sixteen and I wanted to be cool and independent and so I came up with another idea. Uh I played violin so I said oh my gosh lets put a string quartet together and you know lets go out there and play for events. So I did. I picked you know a couple of us from the orchestra. And we called ourselves like the flaming quartet or something ridiculous but we were actually pretty good. And we played at weddings, and graduations, and quinceaneras dances, a bunch of different parties just different events every weekend. And we were making really good money. We were getting paid like two or three hundred dollars for an hour or something which was actually cheaper than what they paid professional musicians. And so I was like oh my gosh this is what I need to do. And so every weekend we were booked playing Friday Saturday and Sunday events, sometimes during the weekend...during the week. And we were making really good money. And I was like oh my gosh I'm going to get my car.

As the narrator came close to financial independence, she gained greater control over decisions. While it remains unclear, at least in the narrative, why she suddenly decided to direct her efforts to a more altruistic cause, she comes to a superior realization about the real value of our jobs.

I was really happy, and one day actually we decided. It was around Christmas time and so for one of my organizations I thought; maybe we can go play some Christmas carols for the you know kids at the hospital. And so we decided to go. It was all four of us. We got dressed up in our uniform. We didn't take any toys or anything like that. We just took our instruments with us. And I remember going through the elevator thinking what are these kids going to think. I wonder if they're going to like us, ignore us. We're going up the stairs and we set up our little quartet. We pulled out our Christmas; white Christmas, Rudolph the red nosed reindeer. Just basic jingles and we had those little red hats to the side. And we start playing and no one's really listening. It's just us and... we're in the middle of our first or second.

Much like sudden epiphanies experienced by other narrators at rock bottom points in their lives earlier in this analysis, the narrator here experiences a sudden elevation as she sees the young bald boy with the biggest smile on his face.

all of a sudden out of nowhere, this little kid about ten years old in his white like robe comes out no hair and has the biggest smile on his face. And he just stares at us and he's just smiling. And it was one of those moments; it was like a mutual understanding. Like all of us looked at each other and got teary eyed and we said like in our minds you know we thought lets make this song amazing. And sure enough we did. We played it from our hearts. And more and more kids started coming out of the room smiling. Everyone gathered around to clap for us. And it was one of the best days of my life. And that's when I realized that not

only music but a lot of our jobs you know we have to take it more as a gift, like giving to others and not necessarily as a commitment. And just remember not to think so much about yourself. And I was worried about my car, my independence. I was being selfish. But it's not always about that. It's about being giving and making others happy with gifts not necessarily material but music. (Narrative 19)

The continued effects of this story live on with the narrator as she advises us to look at our jobs as “gifts” that we can share with others. Tangible aspects of this experience are well illustrated in the narrator’s vivid description of children who stood teary-eyed. The amazing sense of fulfillment and self-achievement that the narrator experienced in looking at the children’s faces culminated her elevation episode.

In another example of unexpected extraordinary characters, the narrator shows us how his memories of the moral elevation that he experienced as he got to know Esteban better are put to use every time the “going gets rough.”

So back in high school I was in this church youth group that did a yearly trip down to South Padre. We'd hang out on the beach of course but every day in the afternoon we'd drive about thirty or forty minutes down the road to this little church in this poor town near the Mexican border, and we hosted a bible camp type slash sports camp type thing, and it was fun I'd been doing it for a while and I ran the basketball part of it and one day we were walking down to the park one of the first days from the church and there was a house I noticed with a wheelchair

ramp in front of it there was a little kid with a wheelchair chair in front and he looked at us kind of puzzled and said, "What are you doing?" I said, " We're going to hang out at this park over here, you should come hang out with us." So he went and asked his mom, and she said yes.

Similar to Scout's story, the narrator sets up a normal backdrop for a soon to emerge exceptional encounter with a powerful young soul.

We headed over there and I started talking to the kid, his name was Esteban, and it was going to be a little awkward because obviously he's in a wheelchair, and this is a sports camp, but I knew I'd figure something out to do with him. We got there and started playing, and I'd give him the basketball and I'd teach him how to dribble a little bit. He'd do it, he'd start shooting the ball and he actually wasn't bad at shooting the ball, and he was so happy, he just had the best outlook on everything, on life, nothing got him down, and one day I was talking to him and he said that his lights had just been turned off. So he didn't have any electricity in the heat of the summer near Mexico. But it didn't get him down, nothing did.

Esteban's character starts to shine through in the previous segment, but it is not until the next event that the narrator really experienced a moment of awe central to moral elevation narratives.

And then one day near the end of the sports camp, all the other kids started complaining about anything they could complain about. The heat, they wanted more water more food, even though we had fed them and had plenty of water and it wasn't even that hot. Basically anything they could find to complain about they

complained about and it just swept like a wave through all of them. And it got out of hand it got ridiculous and I was about to stand up and say something to everybody and out of nowhere, Esteban starts yelling at the top of his lungs, yelling at all these kids.

The juxtaposition of Esteban's wheelchair and lack of electricity in Mexico's hot weather against ridiculous complaining of other children lays a strong narrative foundation for Esteban's next action and his narrative elevation from a simple handicapped child to a hero.

What are you complaining about?! What is wrong with you? What could you possibly not be happy about? You're out on a beautiful day, running around, playing. I don't have legs and I'm not complaining. I'm happy.

What do you have to complain about?" Everybody shut up after that. All those kids stopped, and before that they had been making fun of him a little because kids can be mean. But after that, nobody made fun of him, they looked up to him. He became one of the cool kids. And that day that poor little Mexican kid in a wheelchair with no electricity taught those little kids a lesson in being happy. He taught me a lesson in being happy. And to this day every time things get a little rough for me, I want to complain about something, if things aren't going well. I think about Esteban. (Narrative 26)

Esteban, sitting in the wheelchair on a hot summer day in Mexico, shouting at the top of his lungs to other kids who complained about trivial nothings is an example of how

narrators master narrative aesthetics to reconstruct the moment of awe that triggered their elevation in simple yet powerful details.

Mastery of aesthetics as a mediator and moderator of meaning in narratives of elevation is vividly portrayed in the next example. In this story, the narrator reconstructed her experience via a colorful palette for all senses and vivid impressions of characters and scenes that helped her reach an elevated moral state.

Aunt Madge

There is a proverb that says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” And, for me that was really true. I was able to get through some very difficult times in my life because I had a vision. The vision came from the environment that I grew up in, not the one I was born into. See, I was born into a home that was in the middle of a city, center of acres of asphalt and concrete. The city’s biggest employer was the state prison. And, the single, Hispanic mom I was born to was living with someone who had recently been paroled. The house was littered with ashtrays, bottles of alcohol, pages of pornography. The adults were very impatient with children and when the children became too frustrating, they would be smartly struck on their back side with yard sticks or smacked in the face. Meals were cans of foodstuff that would be opened and warmed in a pan and stuck on a table. I, for one, was a really chatty child and found myself to be um insulted frequently and gotten my swats or smacks on a regular basis for it.

For this narrator, her parents’ home symbolized rock bottom but her epiphany unlike others was not sudden but gradual, cumulative, residual, and easily conjured.

But all of this changed when I was placed in a foster home. This foster home was like no other. It was out in the countryside in this huge farm house in the middle of all this farm community, huge yard, amazing garden. The mom of the house I called Aunt Madge. The family had six children of their own and I was the youngest and their only foster child at the time. And, Aunt Madge was just this incredible person. She kept a garden and put the produce up in shiny glass jars. She baked her own bread which, when it was baking, the smell would just transport me to a whole 'nother place. It was like just a dreamy place.

The surreal aura she paints around her narrative adds a magical dimension to color, taste, aroma, and sounds. Aunt Madge was not her foster mom, she was her hero and savior.

In fall, the big majestic oaks and maples would turn their amazing chromatic colors and I would pile them up and jump into them with delight. The taste of a strawberry picked fresh from the garden and her freezer jam, when she put it up, was just to die for. And, if you can believe it, she made the most amazing egg salad. When I went to school, I could trade Twinkies or Oreos for one of her egg salad sandwiches. They were just that good. Homemade bread, it was just, I don't know what her secret was, but everything she did was spectacular.

The best part was, I would love to watch her as she made her amazing meals in that big farm kitchen. And, while I watched, of course, the chatty person that I was, I would talk her ears off. And she would look up at me with a sparkle in her eye and a smile. It was so accepting.

In narratives of moral elevation, narrators and readers alike get to take away some keepsakes. The narrator's memories in this example are treasured keepsakes that remind her of a certain vision in life; a vision that she would have been lost without.

I have such good memories from that place. And it's those memories that give me the vision in my life. Because after a while, I had to go back to that home. I couldn't live in that foster family. And, it was the vision of that different life, that different home, that different world, that got me through to adulthood. And it was that vision for that kind of life that caused me to go to college, to work hard. My freshman year, I had three jobs to get myself through college. I was very much, um, careful about who I chose to marry. And, we had children, and every things been radically different than the home I was born into because of the vision that I got through living in that foster home. And the proverb has proved very true for me, cause I know that without that vision, I certainly would have perished.

(Narrative 86)

Keepsakes from elevation narratives can be memories, characters, or objects. Scout, Esteban, Aunt Madge, mountains or songs are all examples of anchoring in moral elevation. And it is through such anchoring keepsakes that narrators recall the elevating effects of their experiences. In the last example of moral elevation, the narrator tells us about a personal keepsake; one that she never took off until she traveled to South Africa.

My most prized possession

When I was in South Africa this summer, I had the opportunity to volunteer in this community called Sir Lowry's Pass. And it's a really um impoverished

community. It's in a township where the houses are made out of tin, and there's just little kids running around everywhere unsupervised, and it's just-it's very dangerous, but at the same time it was an awesome experience. And we got to volunteer at this after-school program. And we really got to know the kids and we got to know the families. And it was just awesome getting to know them because at first we were all so scared, you know, we couldn't bring any of our belongings with us when we went into the township, we had to take off all our jewelry. I even had to take off this ring that I've had since I was 12 that's very important to me, I never take it off, I have this tan line from it. So I didn't really like that, but it was for our own safety.

Unlike the stories about Scout and Esteban, the narrator here gave away hints about the value of her ring and the value she would acquire from giving it up during her trip to an impoverished community in South Africa. The narrator developed a fragmented narrative structure that mimicked her personal fluctuations between her most prized possession and the true meaning of grace, kindness, and generosity.

Um, but the people that we met were incredible. You know they have nothing compared to what we have in America, and they're happier than most people I know that live in America. They are just so gracious and love each other so much, and you know they don't know where their next meal is coming from or their next cup of drinking water is coming from, but they just live day to day and enjoy life. And they taught me a lot about myself and how I should be living my life, and it was just a really cool experience. The night that we left to go back to America,

um two of the women that I had gotten close with from the township, they came to the airport. They had been there since 2:00. They knew what day we were leaving but didn't know what time. They took a train at 2:00 to the airport and waited for us until we got there at 8:00 p.m. And they hadn't eaten all day um I found out later. It was just incredible that they would even wait there that long. The narrator gave away her most prized possession in exchange of a more generous reward from a simple lady; time and genuine affection.

And not only did they wait for us to tell every one of us bye, they waited in line, and I talked to one of them for over an hour as I waited in line. She shared with me her journal, and she just talked with me as I waited. She is just the most wise person that I know, and it was just, it was surreal. And when it came time for me to say goodbye to her, I don't know what came over me, but I had the sudden urge to give her something because I felt like she had given me so much. And I felt like I was leaving there without helping them enough, and they had given me so much. I was going back to my privileged life in America, and she was staying here where she had to worry about where she was getting her drinking water from, or where, you know, it was just, I don't know what came over me.

The narrators' most prized possession as she experienced a state of moral elevation became a greater appreciation for the things that we take for granted and the simple yet irreplaceable token of affection and care.

Without thinking much about it, I took off my ring, that was probably my most prized possession, it was very, very important to me. But at that moment, I just

thought that I didn't need it- she needed it more than I did. And I felt like it would be my way of giving back to her what she had given to me. And she instantly started bawling crying. That's when I realized my life had really been changed. I never thought I could give up something that important to me, but I realized what she had taught me was more important. These people that I met, they gave me a new meaning of gratitude, and showed me the importance of helping others, and inspired me to live my life differently. (Narrative 62)

The lessons that narrators took away from all the previous examples demonstrate concrete examples of narrative anchoring through keepsakes, characters, and objects in states of moral elevation, mastery of aesthetic narrative representation of beauty, and vivid reconstructions of moments of awe. Initial emergence of acquired lesson occurred as narrators reconstructed their moments of awe. Later on in their narratives, they encapsulate perceived and narratively reconstructed "vastness" of extraordinary behaviors from unexpected characters into moral lessons. However, not all moral elevation examples in this study depicted life-changing experiences. Some of the narrators celebrated simple victories like a morning jog in cold weather.

Best I felt

I take off. For the first minute it's normal, nothing to it. Just a normal run, just me trying or wake up, it's cold. But as soon as I hit the bridge, this bridge is about.. I know don't know, quarter mile long. So it takes me a little bit to cover it. The sun is rising so it's to my right. I'm starting to feel pretty warm now I can still see my

breath. I'm feeling warm and I'm feeling pretty good. My legs are feeling really good, I feel amazing. This is.. Is the best I felt, no longer dreading that I'm up at 7 in the morning up running, in the freezing cold. I am enjoying this. I can see my breath, I can feel my feet stomping on the concrete as I cross the bridge. I feel so free from every worry that I had. I am in my own world. Not having to worry about pain, stress, school. It was amazing, I still remember how refreshing I felt taking every deep breath. To this day when I walk out of my house or a building. When it's around 45 or 50 degrees I remember that same moment. I remember how good it felt to have the sun shining on me, feeling so fresh and so alive.

(Narrative 66)

The beauty of this narrative rests in the narrators' reconstruction of details and sensual descriptions tempting others into similar sensations. For the narrator, every time he felt cold on a morning run, memories of this moment of elevation were enough to overcome harsh weather. Parallel to potent simplicity of the previous example, few narrators chose to recount incidents of material elevation where they acquired a newly prized possession.

Material Elevation

Material elevation is tangible, simpler to construct, and requires less creativity and mastery of aesthetics from the narrator's side. Getting the job of your dreams, building your own house, or finally finding a lost key are all examples of elevation narratives that incorporated minimal spiritual elevation as the moral of the narrator is "raised due to a change in context." In this story, the narrator recalls chasing an Xbox back in Babylon, Iraq in 2001.

So, once I got into the military in 2001, it was before 9/11. So I'm thinking it was going to be an easy road. I was going to play video games all of the time. I am going to go through the military, I'm going to get my college money, eventually I'll come back, go to school and everything is going to be golden. Well, six months after I get in, 9/11 happens and for the next two years I am doing nothing but training operations getting ready for war. So 2003 we go to war. I'm in the very front. I'm pushing through the front lines the old way and I get to Babylon, finally in about June and Babylon is where I am going to stay for the whole summer. So when I get there, there is nothing there. Finally after 6 months of being out in this Iraqi heat we're finally in tents with air condition. So we go and find ourselves a TV, and then we get a DVD player. The next thing you know we're watching movies all of the time, there's guys happy at night, we can sleep. Things are getting pretty good, right? Well, they are about to get a little better because I like to acquire stuff. I felt like it was a duty to go and find stuff to and bring it back for the benefit of the whole group. So to me, video games was something that I really missed. When I heard an opportunity that there was a convoy going to this army base that was at this college about two hours away from Alhila or Babylon, I was on that. So as soon as we get to this army base, I go to this dispensing clerk. What a dispensing clerk does is he gives you money, basically just cash and since I haven't spent a dime in six months, I had a lot of money to burn. So I get out \$400, I head over to the BX. I go inside and wouldn't you know as soon as I walk in, sitting right there

is this brand new X box just hanging out so I grab the Xbox and I get two controllers and I grab Halo. So this is new to me at the time Xbox had just come out in 2002. There were a couple of guys who had it, but the majority of us didn't. Had never even touched it and Halo was one of the best first person shooters ever to come out. It still is, I think so. It still is. So I go get that, come back. Get back to the tent and once everyone saw it they freaked out. I don't think that Xbox turned off for the next at least three months.

(Narrative 47)

Although the narrator experienced some form of elevation by discovering an alternate means of amusement, the effects are short-lived and the Xbox as a keepsake does not narratively contribute to the narrator's personal development or assimilation of newly acquired constructs. In the last example from this communicative application, the narrator masterfully combines both moral and material elevation as she paints a bright and colorful image of a light-filled cheery hospital that helped her aunt regain her strength in a fight against breast cancer.

Ribbons everywhere

This past July my aunt got diagnosed with breast cancer. My dad has had cancer and heart disease and my grandfather passed away from Lou Gehrig's disease, so unfortunately I've had a lot of experience around terminal illnesses and being in hospitals and stuff.

The narrator crafts an introduction to illustrate her familiarity with terminal illness and stamina to cope with what comes her way. In the following segments, she provides a

detailed account of her trip to the hospital to explicate a pleasant moment of contrast that facilitated their moral elevation as soon as they arrived at the hospital.

My aunt though had to go through radiation and chemo, which is different than my father who just had surgery. So one she was about to start her radiation and she didn't have anyone to drive her to the hospital in Boston. So I took off a day of work and picked her up at five in the morning for her eight o'clock appointment. We hit so much traffic, and we were almost late. So the whole drive into the city took about three hours for a normal thirty minute drive and the whole time she was just rambling out of nerves and clutching her teddy bear that she decided she was going to bring and keep through out this process. It was kind of a gloomy day, which is unseasonable for New England in the summer, and it kind of felt a little bit like foreshadowing.

The teddy bear, atypical gloomy weather, and a longer than expected drive are necessary structures to establish the unexpected architecture of a place that deals with terminal illness. Ribbons and smiles everywhere.

We got to the garage at the hospital in Boston and it was really dingy and just all cement kind of upsetting. There was a weird feel in the air; I don't know if it was just because it was a cancer hospital or what but it just felt a little off. So we walk in and the vibe of the hospital was just completely different. For a place that deals with such terminal illnesses and sees so much death, this building was one of the most light hearted and beautiful buildings I've been in. You walk into the entrance and it's just floor to ceiling glass with ribbons strung everywhere and

just people with smiles on their face regardless of what's going on. So we go up to the fifth floor where breast cancer patients were being treated and my aunt sits down, she still has her hair but everyone else around her has wigs or scarves. I can't imagine what she must have felt seeing everyone else around her already in later stages of their treatment and seeing what's to come.

In this last paragraph, the narrator weaves in a double impact elevation as she sees the sun "perfectly hit" her aunt while nervously hugging her teddy bear as she waits for treatment. Acceptance of what was to come started with sun hitting at perfect angles and continued as the narrator assimilated external and internal constructs into a meaningful episode about the remarkable human capacity to cope with fear and illness.

As she sat down, clutching that teddy bear that she brought with her, the sun hit her perfectly. It was like something out of a movie where she was just sitting there peaceful; and at that moment, it kind of looked like she was just coming to acceptance of what she was going to be going through. This was kind of a changing point because as she started her treatment, she lightened up; she kind of accepted that yeah this is terrifying, but being scared isn't going to make her healthy. So the whole time she was sitting there clutching her teddy bear, making jokes, and laughing. I think that seeing such a beautiful place, such a beautiful building, and seeing all of these people who are so strong got to her, and I know it definitely got to me because after I left I was still terrified of being in hospitals and being around cancer and stuff like that.

In the last paragraph, the narrator develops a newly acquired perception of personal strength to a collective state of human perseverance against adversity.

But it made me see that all these people are going through the same thing as she was and they're surviving and they're persevering and it showed me that the human spirit is very strong. It can go through so much stress and grief but the surroundings and being around people you love in a beautiful setting can make it a little more bearable; and now she's done with her radiation and chemo and has another look on life. While it was such a horrible situation, I now have a different view on life, and our time here, and cancer. (Narrative 56)

While there were some examples of material elevation, narratives of moral elevation conveyed meaning of deep life experiences where narrators assimilated newly acquired lessons into their identities. The narrators' ability to recall "at least one real-life example of uncommon goodness and to report it" influenced their emotions, thoughts and behaviors (Aquino et al. 2011, p. 715). Previous analysis of personal narratives of elevation finds that narrators, without specific guidance in the prompt, mostly shared a state of moral elevation with profound lessons that last a lifetime. The vastness witnessed by narrators in everyday heroes such as Scout and Esteban was easily accommodated in narratives of elevation. Starting as an "other-praising" emotion, moral elevation follows from a positive evaluation or inference about others but simultaneously incorporates constructs of the narrator's identity in the experience. In further empirical and scientific evidence, findings from neural assessment of experiences of elevation speculate that "one's own self is modeled when making inferences about others in a process of

simulation” and that “while moral elevation may involve feelings of self-transcendence- a reduction in attention to the self- the actual feeling of elevation is dependent upon an increase of self-referential processes” (Englander et al., 2012).

In an exhibit of mastery of narrative aesthetics, many narrators encapsulated the beauty of their experiences in keepsakes and elaborate representations of their surroundings. They also skillfully anchored their elevation experiences in reconstructions of moments of awe about external stimuli. External stimuli whether characters, objects, or concepts inspire us to discover the beauty in our surroundings (Thrash & Elliott, 2004, p. 957). But this analysis finds that narrators first experienced elevation at a deep emotional level before externalizing it in narrative form. To construct narratives of moral elevation, narrators recalled events and characters that have inspired them to become better individuals. In studying personal narratives across a plethora of contexts, many have argued that there is a fundamental reciprocal relationship between our autobiographical memory, construction of a narrative identity, and externalization of character constructs through narrativity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; McAdams, 2012, 2006, 1993; Nesler, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2005, 1991; Redman, 2005; Riceour, 2010; Somers, 1994, 1992). Thus, one can safely argue that constructing narratives of elevation is likely to extend positive effects initially experienced by narrators as narrative facilitates the recall of elevating events and experiences (Ellithorpe et al., 2015; Schnall & Roger, 2010). In telling elevation stories, narrators unveil a meaningful and poignant relationship between their identity (narratively constructed), others, and a greater probability of

extended positive prosocial behavior (Aquino et al., 2011; Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan, & Carstensen, 2008).

Summary

Similar to transportation narratives, elevation narratives demonstrate the narrators' aptitude to manipulate narrative representation of experiences through intricate and elaborate aesthetically pleasing depictions of raised stakes and emergent moral and material possibilities. Although the distinction between moral and material elevation narratives is a reflection of meaning and actual event configuration, the language and discourse composition varied significantly between the two modes of elevation. Moral elevation narratives heavily relied on narrators' mastery of aesthetics as they emerged in vivid reconstruction of moments of awe. Alternatively, material elevation while still fulfilling the requirements of the prompt, merely reflected a tangible change in contexts or events that elevated the stakes for the narrator. In examples of moral elevation, metaphors of hitting rock bottom and surreal epiphanies emerged recurrently indicating that actual experiences of moral elevation are random, unexpected, and elusive. Epiphanies much like seeing roses through the thorns are transient experiences. Telling stories about epiphanies in moral elevations is like stopping to smell the roses amidst all the turmoil in our lives. The keepsakes we take away from such narratives remind us of the beauty and goodness we unexpectedly come across in dire circumstances. Many narrators captured the elusiveness of their epiphanies in tangible constructs about the sources of such epiphanies such as characters, mountains, and architectural details of building

Chapter Nine: Circumspection Narratives

Circumspection, by definition, requires a certain degree of prudence and caution. Storytellers in this set took small steps towards their narrative goal with relative neutrality and a timid less confident narrative tone than previous narrative applications. They narrated events that were small and insignificant in the larger scope of life yet demonstrated greater degrees of complexity and polyvocality in constructing their representations. Circumspection narratives “encapsulate what they took away from the incident, which is often a newfound sense of understanding and capability” as well as the “prudence on the narrator’s part about how to approach similar situations” (Browning & Morris, 2012, p. 147)

To understand circumspection narratives, we must first understand circumspection as a necessary human ability for ascribing value and meaning to our surroundings as we contemplate external threats in our experiences. Although an internal state of human condition, it remains externally correlated with something that we care about. In his discussion of the inseparable nature of narrative and time, Ricoeur (1980) finds that “our thrownness among things” creates a basic characteristic of caring about some things more than others. Extending an elaboration of our thrownness among things, Ricoeur argues that things of our concern, according to Heidegger, are divided into two categories “ things which our concern counts on” and “utensils offered to our manipulation” (p.172). Heidegger’s trait of “circumspection” is an everyday mode of concern bestowing more than the external characteristics upon objects that we care about.

This state of concern, as Ricoeur points out, as prerequisite to circumspection, has deeply hidden traits; elusive and difficult to capture. It is only through language that we can translate our care about certain things in life into circumspection. Language, with its “storehouse of meanings keeps the description of concern in the modality of preoccupation or circumspection” and prevents it from “slipping back” into the surface and external description of things and tools proposed by Heidegger. Yet, mere descriptive language alone cannot capture the depth and complexity of circumspection as a specifically human condition. Our cautious concern about things is multidimensional reflecting multiple constructs of our identity as they interact with external characteristics of things that we care about. In addition to multidimensionality, circumspection reflects a certain depth that corresponds to a degree of significance and impact encapsulated by the object of our concern. For example, on our first visit to the dentist we are cautious about the experience as it compares to our inventory of similar experiences or others’ descriptions thereof yet we also care about our wellbeing. The more we care about our wellbeing, the deeper our concern. Likely, the more we have pre-existing constructs and expectations about our first visit, the more likely it is for us to develop a multidimensional state of cautiousness and prudence about our first visit.

In a brief discussion on the definition of mindfulness, Black (2011), finds that circumspection is another way of practicing mindfulness; a way to remember “to pay attention to what is occurring in one’s immediate experience with care and discernment” (p. 1). He highlights four main characteristics as prerequisites to mindfulness that also remain relevant and essential to circumspection: 1) an open and receptive attention to

what occurs in the present, 2) an intentional accepting awareness of our surroundings, 3) an elevated state of receptiveness and sensitivity towards all experienced sensations, thoughts, emotions, and memories that may come about, 4) a suspended state of habitual living and response.

Perhaps, the clear and persistent distinction between mindfulness and circumspection as applied in this analysis of personal narratives resides in a temporal dimension. Mindfulness enacts all the previous characteristics in the present and eminent time (Shapiro 2009). Circumspection, on the other hand, is a retrospective and cumulative depiction of our care and concern about certain things in our lives. It requires a re-enactment of the mindfulness we practiced against the complexity and immediacy of events and happenings in our environments. Similar to the distinction between mindfulness and circumspection, Ochs (2004) finds that

formulating a personal experience in narrative form is a species-wide means of enhancing self-awareness... while inside an experience, participants are not able to adequately grasp how they and others are acting, feeling, and thinking in a situation at hand. (p.305)

Accordingly, narratives of circumspection invite narrators to exercise a retrospective state of mindfulness and increased receptiveness and sensitivity towards their narrated events. Hence, to tell a circumspection narrative, we recall a certain memory of an event and corresponding feelings, thoughts, and actions as they have appeared in their own context but with a heightened awareness of our receptiveness and openness to the complexity embedded in our surroundings. Through discourse or language as “the treasure house of

all human meaning”, we depict our care and concern through embedded complexity of event representation (Ricoeur 1980, p. 170). And it is through the agency of discourse that we manipulate narrative logic. Duranti (2004) identifies two mutually constitutive dimensions of agency in language: “performance and encoding” (p.474). Parallel to dimensions of agency in language, narrative construction adds multiple dimensions of agency through narrators’ representation of events, sequencing, and meaning development.

Of relevance to performance as a dimension of language agency, Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical circumspection, falling under impression management within the greater realm of symbolic interaction, positions humans as actors who are cautiously placing themselves in less threatening environments to minimize risks and potential problems. Within the narrative mode, we retrospectively become aware of our prudence and caution in the face of novel contexts. The following prompt provided narrators with a probable context for circumspection and invited them to retrospectively practice a mindful state upon their feelings and thoughts as they positioned themselves within their narrative representations.

Prompt F

Angles of appreciation: Complexity and control

Narratives of circumspection involve the details around what happened in a situation over which you initially had little or no control, For this assignment, tell a “first day at” story. This could be the first day at school, the first time at driving the family car on your own, your first day on a paying job. The goal of the “first

day at” story is to capture the fear and excitement of innocent experience, where doubts about competence are real, where things often go wrong, but somehow we muddle through. This story can be one of irony, surprise, and paradox because “first day at” stories are often about the attempt to control something that produced the opposite effect.

Browning and Morris (2012) propose complexity and control as relevant angles of appreciation for this communicative application of narrative. The prompt offered narrators multiple clues about potential sources of complexity and challenges to their perceptions and abilities to control course of events. Through a constant comparative analysis of circumspction narratives, complexity emerges from an inherent multidimensionality and depth in our cautious concern about certain things in our surroundings. Following the premises of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical circumspction, narrators enacted and projected their prudence through linguistic choices, narrative composition, and meaning development.

The prompt for this set of narratives asked for “a first day” experience; one where the storytellers shared an “innocent” experience in a new context. Innocence in this particular context refers to the novelty of presence in a specific place, time, and role. This prompt also emphasized a degree of complexity present in every new context because of a potential discrepancy of what we expect and what actually takes place.

As a communicative application of narrative, circumspction can be regarded as both a technique and genre. Language encoding of circumspction appeared at the surface level of narrative where narrators carefully chose words to convey and develop

meanings of prudence. Alternatively, meaning that emerged from each narrative reflected narrators' sense of threat from external circumstances or characters.

While complexity is inherent in every narrative, the source of complexity in narratives of circumspection was multidimensional and deep. Browning and Morris (2012) generally limit the source of complexity to two types: structural and dynamic. Structural complexity reflects the actual constituents of narratives: characters, events, and the emergent relationships leading to plot development. Structural complexity is directly proportional to the number of events and characters in a story. It is also directly related to levels of elevated uncertainty. In this set of narratives, structural complexity was multiplied by the narrators' representations of multidimensionality and depth of foundational concern for events and characters in their narratives and projections of their identity. Through a constant comparative analysis, open codes indicate that narratives within the circumspection application are primarily distinguished by their emphasis upon two axial codes: "Locus of sequential control" and "source of complexity." While both concepts may apply to any narrative application, this set presents a particularly rich context for the analysis of narrators' perception of control and their ability to circumspect "following enmeshment in complex, consequential interactions" to generate interesting stories (Browning & Morris, 2012, p. 134).

The following section presents "locus of sequential control" and four axial codes further explicating sources of narrative complexity that lead to the development of narrative layering as a core code encompassing multidimensionality and depth of circumspection.

Locus of Sequential Control

In this set of narratives, “locus of sequential control” refers to the perceived ability of narrators to control the sequence and development of events in his or her narrative context. It also represents a narrative space where both external and internal influences determine who and what “controls” the narrators’ orientation of their narratives towards a specific narrative goal. “Locus of sequential control” builds on an interdisciplinary term rooted in personality psychology (Lefcourt, 2014) and is a main indicator of an individual’s perception of their ability to control their surroundings and occurring events. As it is developed here, it refers to the ability of the narrator to control the development of the narrative.

An “external Locus” is exemplified by the narrator’s belief that fate, luck, or outside forces have primarily directed the development of events in his or her narrative. Alternatively, an “internal locus” reflects forms of inner strength and determination where narrators’ characters, efforts, and identities determine outcomes of retold actions in a narrative sequence. The “locus of sequential control” begins in the pre-construction phase and is enmeshed in the focalization efforts of the narrator. Narrators consciously depicted events through a specific lens that determined sequential control in narratives of circumspection. In this set of narratives, the locus of sequential control is either predominantly internal or external.

An internal locus of sequential control indicated that individuals attribute a high degree of control to themselves and believe they are able to alter their surroundings.

Alternatively, an external locus of sequential control places greater emphasis on the influence of narrators' surroundings and pertinent events and characters.

Locus of sequential control exists at three potential frontiers: *characters (others)*, *identity of the narrator* (as presented in personal statements about the narrator), and *context* (circumstances and events). Characters representing others in the story and contextual factors fall under external locus while the identity of the narrator indicates an internal locus. In this context and as applied through a grounded theory analysis of circumspersion narratives, locus of sequential control fluctuates between character, context, and the identity of the storyteller. However, sequential control is not a clear and sharp selection. For in any narrative, the narrator will attribute some degree of control to his or herself and a certain degree of autonomy or ability to make a choice. In the following narrative, the narrator shares his experience of becoming an orientation advisor and how his earlier expectations created multiple sources of complexity that clouded this ability to control the situation.

My first real job interview was to become an orientation advisor for the University. I remember coming into the university, and I was so excited to be on campus, and I had such a blast at the orientation program, and I thought, "Hey, what's the best way to give back besides being part of the orientation program?" So I applied for the position, and I remember as I was checking in my name, I was so excited.

The narrator's first memory about being an orientation advisor discloses a certain dimension of the narrator's identity; a passion to give back and an excitement to do so.

He attributes his excitement about being able to participate in the orientation program to everyone else's friendly attitude.

Everyone was so friendly. I signed my name, got my picture taken, and got my name tag on. So I was walking into the waiting room, excited to meet everyone that applied for the job, and I see that everyone was dressed in business casual. At least business casual. I was shocked because I was not dressed business casual, I was only dressed casual. And I felt so unprepared and so unprofessional. And I thought, it's okay. Maybe I can make up for it by being super awesome at the job interview.

Realizing he is not properly dressed for the interview, the narrator projects an external locus of sequential control where everyone else's professional attire exaggerates his feelings of uncertainty and emphasizes the development of an external locus of sequential control in the following segments.

So the first process is the group interview, which I'm placed in a group of potential orientation advisors, and we're supposed to talk through a certain issue. And naturally I'm a pretty quiet person, so I told myself, okay I have to force myself to talk. And I tried but everyone was trying to get their two cents in...and I just, I didn't really get to say much throughout the entire group interview process. And I was pretty disappointed because there were people walking around with clipboards, writing notes on everyone. So I was really nervous, and I felt like I should've talked more but I couldn't.

Further emphasizing the influence of external circumstances, the narrator shares dimensions of timid and less confident personal characteristics that explain his intimidation and the greater influence of external setting. In the following paragraph, the source of intimidation extends from setting to the character of a previous orientation advisor who did not react to any of his responses.

And then the second process was the one-on-one interview with a previous orientation advisor. There were actually two previous orientation advisors in my room, and one of them was really nice. She kept smiling and nodding. But the other one was super intimidating. She didn't react to any of my responses so I felt like I didn't know the answers to her questions. And I thought, "What did I get myself into? Maybe I'm not the right candidate for the job." I just started questioning my decision regarding applying for the job. But then I took a few breaths, and moved on to the third process, which was talking about myself in front of the supervisors and other potential orientation advisors.

Here the narrator reverts to further disclosure about personal evaluation of himself as a public speaker. He knows he is not the best and the situation is not helping. The narrator projects a character more likely susceptible to be affected by the negative and intimidating recruitment process.

And, uh, I'm not the best at public speaking, so I was really nervous and I talked really fast, which is something I tend

to do when I'm nervous. So overall I was really disappointed when I came out of the interview process and the activities. And I just felt like I could do better, and that I wanted the job but it didn't matter now because I did such a terrible job at the interview. So as the days goes on, I convince myself that if it's not meant to be, it's not meant to be. And that there are tons of other opportunities out there for me. But then the decisions came out for the orientation advisor position, and it comes out the day before Thanksgiving. And you're supposed to get an actual letter before you get the email, but I saw the email first. And so I opened it, it said, "Decision regarding your orientation advisor position." And it said, "Download the attachment for the decision, blah blah blah." And so I download it , and it said, "Congratulations, you've been chosen to become an orientation advisor." I was so happy. I jumped in the air, literally. (Narrative 31)

In the previous example, the narrator shared his self-perceptions and personal assessments during the interview to support his expectations about the outcome of his performance. The character he projected is essential to the development of circumspection in this example. He also attributed a significant degree of sequential control to unexpected circumstances such as not being appropriately dressed for the interview and the intimidating nature of one of the interviewers.

Another example of an external locus of sequential control is provided in the following narrative about a narrator's newly acquired appreciation of cultural differences.

On a trip to Mexico, the narrator encountered a different interpretation and value for time habits. Her narrative structure placed greater emphasis on cultural differences and their role in the development of a narrative sequence than on her role in addressing a “late” class. Her role as the narrator was rather reactive and descriptive.

“Well, 30 minutes goes by and no one has showed up to our class. So we are really bummed thinking, no one is going to be here, it is not going to work out, we are going to have to restructure the entire thing. Another 30 minutes goes by and like 5 students are there, and then another 30 minutes goes by, a whole hour and half after the class is scheduled for, we have had 100 students show up. Like so many we didn't even know what to do with them. We only had 25 desks in the classroom and an activity planned for 20 students, so we had a lot of improvising to do. We quickly learned that the Mexican culture is completely different from the American culture and that students don't show up on time necessarily because that is just not the way that they live on their day to day basis and they showed up late because that is just how they live their daily lives. And we also realized we had to figure out something to do with all of these 100 students. So, we took them outside, and decided you know what, today is not the day we are going to be teaching about health, we are going to have to figure something else out. (Narrative 49)

As the narrator realized cultural differences, she acquired an awareness about her role in bridging cultures and began to improvise with the other teacher to accommodate her students. Variations in narrative structure and composition under the locus of control indicated an inherent value in narrators' perception of the source of control: internal versus external.

In the following example, the narrator first tells us a brief episode about losing his job to later orient a contrasting sequence of events from his second job at Lowe's towards an internal locus of sequential control. Projections of the narrator's identity were clear and strong throughout the story indicating an internal locus of control where contextual circumstances and unpleasant characters did not influence the narrator's choices and decisions during his first day at work.

A couple years ago I lost my job on new years eve. ah. Your probably wondering why I'm smiling all..all.. silly like this right now just talking about it. ah.. but It is because I hated the job. I was a Federal Security officer. Paid well but my management was terrible, micro-managed really awful. So basically everyday I came to work I was looking over my shoulder and every hour; every minute I spent there was an eternity. So I wasn't too sad to loose it and I lost my job on New years because of something really silly..and it was a whole...anyway.

Even though this episode does not contribute to the development of the following segments, it creates a contrasting milieu for the narrator's second experience at Lowe's. In addition to school, he tells us about his family commitments and other obligations that

compel him to find another job as soon as possible. He reconstructs caution and prudence within a internal locus of sequential control as he recounts an animated retelling of unfriendly characters and uncertain work contexts.

Especially since I had to work and everything to provide for not only a wife at the time but also these 8 apartments we had bought and were currently renovating during the midst of a housing market collapse. Which, by the way, I still do have so you already know this story has a happy ending,

In another demonstration of an internal locus of sequential control, the narrator grasps the ending and beginning of his narrative through ensuring a happy ending well before developing a sequence about his second job at Lowe's.

Well I get this job there no problem, Everybody, It is my first day at work, Everybody is being really friendly to me, they're showing me the ropes. I got this lady in my department she is really nice. BTW, my department is flooring and they were so happy to have me there because if you have ever worked around flooring products, you got tile, you have wood flooring, you know you got these big heavy boxes that these little ladies don't want to have to pick up and strain their back and all these old people who don't want to have to do it either. So, they were happy to have me around and I was happy to be there. It was great work, I was enjoying my job, I was loving it and I was smiling every second. But. My first day of work this guy, he had manager written

on his little badge right here, comes up to me and goes. "Here is my phone." and he hands me the store phone and that was the department phone for the electrical department. And I said " What's this?" and he goes "I'm going to lunch, I'll see you in an hour. I say "ok",. and So I walk around, and like I said, It's my first day, I don't know where anything is at and I have all these customers, It's a busy Saturday and I'm doing a great job as far as I' m concerned. I'm helping people out.

The narrator set-ups a scene where he is doing a great job and helping people out. He also tells us about the constant demands of other managers and how he casually shrugs it off to extend a degree of greater control over his environment.

I'm being really friendly but while I'm helping I'm getting all these phone calls from all these other managers who are like, "I need this, I need that" and I'm like "I don't know, it's my first day" and there like, "Well, where is the guy who is supposed to be working there. I say "I don't know, he went to lunch, he gave me his phone. They say OK and hang up. Well two hours go by and during the course of those 2 hours I find out that nobody likes this guy because he does this all the time and he's not really a manager he's a department manager. So he comes back and he walks up to me with his hand out like he wants the phone back and so I take the phone and slam it down on his hand and say "don't you ever give me this phone again" Well he gets really, really upset and he like "come with me" and I say, Ok, lets go!" So we walk up to the

front of the store and go into the office and he starts complaining and crying that his hand is all red and he wants to file charges. But everybody is just laughing because no one likes him and that was my first day at work. (Narrative 4)

The previous example, the narrator presented weaker dimensions of other characters to increase probable influence of his character on the development of a sequential progress of events. In narratives displaying an internal locus of sequential control, narrators demonstrated a parallel level of narrative agency through retrospective realizations about their ability to control their surroundings. The following example about the possibility of another outcome had the narrator changed his attitude and trained harder indicates an internal locus of sequential control as well.

that's when I realized that I probably should have worked a little harder over the summer? And that distance running isn't something that you can just go out and do, it takes a lot of preparation. And since then, I have taken no more than a week off of running since I was 11 years old. And it takes a lot of hard work and preparation even in the off season. And it really taught me a lesson that if something is really important to you, you have to work hard. Not just when you're there, not just during the season but in the months leading up to practice. And after that I really got in the habit of training hard over the summer. (Narrative 7)

The narrator's decision to train harder over the summer is an expression of agency and an awareness of his ability to change the course of events. Similarly, in the following example, the narrator chooses a seat based on his self-impression as much more responsible than two little boys playing with action figures.

There were already a few passengers seated. It looked like I wasn't the only kid traveling alone. Two brothers who appeared to be around my age were on the right and an older guy, who looked like he was in his teens was on my left. The two boys were playing with little action figures and the other guy on the left was reading a book. I decided to sit next to him because I felt much more responsible than these two little boys even though they were probably the same age as me. (Narrative 20)

In this example of an internal locus of control, the narrator revels in his determination to succeed.

So happy to be here, by the way, um definitely don't regret that one! But, um, it was interesting. It was a (pause) tremendous growing period in my life and I had never had a first day freak out like that, I (pause) had never made a decision that big and you know that left me so alone to where I was so scared of failing. You know in my mind, I had to succeed, there was no going back, just, oh just move back home so that was scary and my first day story! (Narrative 71)

Defying regulations and cultural norms, the narrator decides to get her license at 19; later than everyone else. She develops a fear of driving and decides to wait until *she* deems herself fit.

But I was like “No, I’m not doing it.” And true to my word I did not step back into a car for about another year and I didn't get my license till I was 19 years old. And years later I look back and I kind of think it was for the best, only because a lot of people get their license when they're way too young and make a lot of really foolish mistakes because they're not mature enough. So I had a very healthy or unhealthy fear of vehicles and the time and patience that I took to get my permit probably has helped me in the long run, and I've been pretty good at driving ever since **knock on wood** So, it is all about time, learning and patience my friends and that was my first time driving. (Narrative 73)

While there were several examples of an external locus of sequential control, most narratives of circumspection demonstrated an internal locus of control where narrators enjoyed their narratively encapsulated realizations of control over sequential development of events in real life and in their narrative representation. Predominantly and collectively, an internal locus of sequential control indicated that as narrators reflect upon experiences of circumspection they came to retrospectively realize a novel agency in representing their experiences in narrative form. Whether external or internal, the locus of sequential control evaluated narrators' perception and utilization of agency both retrospectively and through circumspective enactment in their narratives.

Similar to the locus of control, grounded theory analysis finds that narrative complexity varies across two orders: structural and dynamical (Browning & Morris, 2012). Axial codes emerge as subcategories of structural and dynamical complexity.

Emergent subcategories revealed ways that narrators made sense of inherent complexity in their experiences and in their narrative representation.

Episodes and Layers

In order to understand how control and complexity developed in narratives of circumspection, we should trace it back to the pre-construction phase. Labov (2007) argues that every narrator must accomplish a pre-construction phase before telling his or her story. Although rooted in narratology and structural narrative analysis, this process remains particularly relevant to the grounded theory analysis of this set of narratives.

Normally we think of narrative as it is told, beginning with the orientation and proceeding forward through the complicating action to the most reportable event, the resolution and coda. Narrative pre-construction proceeds backward from the most reportable event and ending with the unexplained event (Labov 2007, p. 49).

Unlike peripeteia or the breach in a steady state, the reversible pattern appeared repeatedly in circumspection narratives where narrators built anticipation in a cautious sequence of narrative episodes. The sequence presented in narratives of circumspection gradually developed a state of cumulative anticipation and eventually lead to a gradual release of tension upon reaching a particular narrative conclusion. This pattern also applied to meaning conveyed in narratives of circumspection. Narratives of circumspection wove structural episodes that further amount to meaning in an interesting narrative sequence. *Episodes and layers* are essential axial codes that have emerged from the analysis of circumspection narratives. Before presenting narrative examples, a brief discussion of narrative episodes is called for.

Narrative Episodes. We perpetually organize our experiences into temporally meaningful episodes (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 1). Episodes are part of a whole and they reside at the surface level of narrative where language encodes meaning to demonstrate our agency in making sense of our lives and representing our actions. Surely, “everything we do, from making the bed to making breakfast to taking a shower (and notice how these combined-in any order- make a multi-episode narrative” (Toolan, 2012, p.5). We give rise to meaning through narrative episodes and the connective substance that weaves them. Whether sequential, causal, hierarchical, the connective substance in between binds boundaries between episodes as they appear through major changes in temporal, spatial, or thematic continuities of narrative discourse (Ji, 2002). It is important to note that episodes are not mere representations of events. Trabasso and Van Den Broek (1985) find that what makes an event more important than others in a narrative sequence is knowledge of an:

event’s relations and the structural role that the event has in the representation of the story relative to those of other events in other episodes...an event may be remembered, summarized, or judged because of its causal and logical relations, and its role in an episodic structure. (p. 628).

Episodes are integral narrative units that remain part of a whole yet possess a life of their own. Some episodes add depth through descriptive details, house an important event, prepare an emotional backdrop for a sudden turn of events, or elude to a hierarchy of important events. Episodes are not necessarily causally connected or developed.

Exemplifying non-causal connections between episodes, Bamberg and Marchman (1990)

propose a hierarchy of episodes where narrative episodes that rank higher within a narrative enjoy clearly marked boundaries such as an abrupt and strong change in space, time, or a general theme.

Parallel to the structural presence of episodes, I propose a synchronic emergence of a *layer* that carries the episodic narrative meaning and related connective substance between episodes. Just like “the connections between events constitute meaning” (Richardson, 1990, p. 115), the connections between episodes contribute to the development of meaningful layers. And similar to the non-reducible nature of narrative reasoning across and within stories to general rules and guidelines, “meaning maintains itself at the level of the specific episode in discourse” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.17). Thus, episodes alone cannot represent both structure and meaning in a narrative sequence. Instead, layers in their cumulative presence can capture the complexity and elusiveness of language and narrativity. In narratives of circumspection, episodes and layers come together to convey meaning, agency, control, and a newly acquired wisdom by the narrators. The following analysis delineates narrative sequences of circumspection into episodes and corresponding layers. In light of the following analysis, layering as a narrative configuration is later discussed in greater detail.

In the following example, the narrator shares a humorous and animated experience of his first day in an art history class. He develops structural complexity at the surface level through numerous episodes of discourse. In the first narrative episode, he voices concern about his inartistically inclined self.

Inartistically inclined

As well as being a Communications major, I'm also an Art history major. The reason why I am an art history major is because I love art, I love studying art, but I am not artistically inclined at all.

The first episode provides an orienting base layer to accommodate multiple emerging layers in support of his voiced concern. In the following episode, the narrator develops a general personal disposition about his love for art and a parallel limitation of his artistic capacities to hold together subsequent layers of meaning that follow in his narrative sequence.

The Stage

I...can't draw or paint or anything. However, part of being an Art History major is that you are required to take a foundations drawing studio class. Uh, where you just learn the basics of drawing and sketching. So reluctantly, about a year ago I signed up for my first studio art class. And I walk in on the first day and its like out of a movie. Like, a giant room with a cement floor with just these huge easels lining the walls. They are all covered in paint splatters and

charcoal and everything. And so I go and sit down on one of the paint splattered stools with the rest of the students, and then a couple minutes later the professor walks in.

Paint splattered stools, cement floors and huge easels lining the walls are linguistic tools projecting strong details to further the narrator's sense of fear and intimidation; adding a layer of meaning to the overall narrative sequence. The following turn of events, while may be viewed as a breach in steady state, is also depicted in episodes as the narrator confronts his fear and discovers a new source of external threat other than his internal limitation. Each episode projects a layer that foregrounds meaning and adds to the richness of narrative structure.

A nightmare

And this is where it gets bad 'cause I already was thinking this was going to be a nightmare and was dreading this class more than any other class that I had dreaded before and I was just nervous out of my mind.

This layer, while easily removed without impeding the flow of narrative sequence, brings the narrator's fear to life and invites others to empathize with an eminent multiplicity of threats.

Admire my greatness

And then the professor walks in, and he...without even saying a word I could tell that he was unbelievably arrogant. He walks in with this attitude like "admire my greatness." You know, and without saying a word I knew like "I'm not going to enjoy this class."

The following is a string of episodes that develop the narrator's sense of threat into a perceived and narratively represented battleground.

Small battles: foes and allies

So, he sits down and starts discussing the class and asks if anyone has any questions. And this one poor girl raises her hand and says " Can you tell us about yourself?" And he just looks at her with this disgusting look and says "Google me." So, whatever, we move on and I'm like "This is only getting better. Obviously." And...um... he then asks "Who has any drawing experience....who in here is a studio art major?" And all but two of us raise our hands. And the other guy that didn't raise his hand, he asks him " What's your major?" And he...the kid says "Oh, I'm and art history major." And I am thinking "Great! I have and ally!" And then he says "Well, what's your drawing experience?" And he says "Oh, well I draw and paint independently." I'm like, "Okay. I have just lost my only ally." And then he looks at me and asks the same questions. And I say " Well, I'm and art history major as well, but I have no experience drawing or painting whatsoever." And he just looks and me and is like " Ugh. Not even in High School of anything?" And I was like "Sorry, no. I mean I took and art class in the fifth grade...ha-ha" Nothing. I was trying to make a joke. Didn't work. Um and then he just kind of rolls his eyes and says something to the affect of " Ugh. This is going to be interesting." or "This is going to be fun."

The previous episodes create multiple layers of meaning as the narrator breaks down his interaction with the art professor into small battles and reflects upon his initial recognition of a soon to be lost ally.

It only gets worse

And you know...so immediately I'm like "W-w-w-what do I do now? This guy already hates me It's the first day." And Basically he continues talking about the class like w-what art supplies we are going to need, and what we are going to be doing, and it's all really basic stuff. Except for when he tells us about how we are going to be having nude models coming in starting next week and every week until the end of the semester. And I think he just told us that to watch the entire class squirm and so like "Ugh. Naked people. What's that?" Um, but basically, it was my worst nightmare. And I left there and immediately went home and dropped the class.

Happy ending

And the happy ending is that I did finally take a studio art class last semester, and I had a wonderful professor. And she was very patient and accepting of me and I now draw all the time. (Narrative 6)

In this example, the narrator provides varied and numerous details about expectations; expectations of himself, class, classmates, and teacher. While they are all violated none of them represent the main event in the narrative. Consequently, from a hierarchical perspective, all episodes are important. Cumulatively, the narrator presents an experience that can only be appreciated when enough details are shared in numerous episodes of

discourse. Unlike explanation and imagination narratives, circumspection narratives do not usually revolve around a certain event and many of the details and structures within such narratives may be omitted without a significant change in the sequence of events. However, each episode represents an integral unit in the value of the overall experience; a layer of meaning.

In narratives of circumspection, a threat, whether perceived by the narrator as external or internal, must first be conceived in the pre-narrative phase and then represented in a narrative sequence. In the previous example, the first threat emerges from the narrator's inherent limitations as well as lack of practical experience of drawing.

A series of actions and details constitute structural episodes and parallel layers of meaning to develop the threat into a narrative of circumspection. Emergence of an external threat in the character of the first art professor and conversations he held with class compounds effects of first internal threat. The narrator constructed a general aura of multi-sourced disappointment to bind layers of meaning that convey a generally prudent experience in a novel context. The glue that binds episodes and layers together is a general inference about overall meaning conveyed by this narrative (Lynch & Van den Broek, 2007).

In the story about Mrs. Smith, the narrator develops narrative meaning in layers expressing her newly discovered appreciation of pawn shop customers who are so "inspiring." The details in every episode may be easily omitted but remain a key component of the overall meaning that the narrator wishes to convey.

Mrs. Smith's rings

Mrs. Smith had come in because she wanted to make a payment on two pieces of jewelry. She had her graduation--her high school graduation ring and her wedding ring. Obviously the wedding ring was pretty sentimental, but her high school graduation ring meant the world to her because she was the first girl ever in her family to graduate high school. And because of her good education, she was the main provider for her family and she was able to get a good job.

One of our best customers

Anyway, so I was pulling her ticket, my dad was still showing me how to work the system and I noticed that just based on like the carat count, the diamond carat count, and the gold penny weight, I mean even at 15 I knew that the value of those two rings was so much smaller than the loan that we had given her. And anyway, I like did the payment for her, and she paid like maybe \$40-\$50 dollars, whatever the minimum was like not very much. Um, and then she went on her way, and my dad explained to me after she left that she has always been like one of our best customers and probably will always be. So reliable. And because of that fact, my dad wouldn't care at all if she came in with absolute junk, he would loan her whatever she needed for the month or whatever.

Character

And it was just because her character was so good. And it wasn't just her, most of my dad's customers were like her. Super reliable, super dependable, all they wanted to do was just provide for their families. And sorry, I really wasn't expecting that at all. I was expecting the majority of the customers to be like the funny stories I had heard. Um, and it took that first day of me actually working there and not just hearing about it because I wouldn't have seen it any other way, for me to just realize that there are so many inspiring people out there. (Narrative 32)

In this narrative, the narrator reconstructs a wealth of details in every episode about her own expectations of pawn shop customers and then again through a vivid reconstruction of Mrs. Smith's character in subsequent episodes. While there are multiple layers in the story about Mrs. Smith and other pawn shop customers, there is a significant episode where the narrator moves from the pawn shop and her reflections about characters of pawn shop customers to an undisclosed space to share internal remorse and an unexpected realization about the value of pawn shop customers' characters.

In another narrative, the intern's first day at work and the premonitions that came true weave in multiple episodes and corresponding layers of meanings to show how she "muddled through it all."

Don't be that intern

It's your first day on a new job at a big company great corporation and you hear the horror story of, okay, be careful now-don't be that intern. And you're like "what does that mean?"

The first episode sets the stage and builds anticipation to be followed by a series of expectations with probable violations.

First day horrors

Well let me tell you what that means: that means that you are the intern that makes a stupid mistake and a fool of themselves on the first day. Whether that be spilling coffee, making copies wrong, or-falling down the staircase. Now as you can probably assume, I fell down a staircase as my first day of an intern.

My dream job

I began work at the state Capitol in January of last year and so I was so excited. It was my dream job right in college everything was set, and I heard the horror stories of every year on the first day of session an intern falls down the marble staircase.

Precautious measures

And I was like you know what, I'm not going to wear my heels today because I don't want to be that person: knowing how clumsy I am and knowing how prone to accidents I can be. So I was all ready, gung-ho, you've never seen anyone more prepared than I was. I picked, I bought a brand new outfit, perfectly conservative, everything was great I loved it; I brought all my materials read all the bills and

even got there 30 minutes before I was supposed to, to insure that I wouldn't be late.

The previous paragraph contains multiple episodes and corresponding layers to demonstrate the narrator's efforts against first day horrors. She prepares herself well but even the best precautions cannot prevent fate.

No big deal

And the day started off pretty well, you know nothing really too terrible happened it was just a normal day starting off session. And then my boss was like "Erika I need you to do a favor for me." And I was like okay cool I get to run around the capitol and see kind of what's going on. Stoked, and she handed me a cake and I was like, "okay what do I do with a cake?" And she's like "I need you to take it to representative Hughes' office." I said okay easy, no big deal. And I was in my flats so I was like, okay perfect, this is my opportunity to prove myself I'm not going to be "that intern.

Cake on the marble staircase

And so I had my flats, had everything, ready, walked down to the extension-and if you've never been to the state capitol the staircase that everybody talks about is the marble staircase leading down from the main building into the extension, and it's just famous for being really difficult walk up and down and every year someone falls. And so I get there, I get to the top, and I make sure I have a firm grip on my cake, looked down at my shoes and like, okay just one foot in front of the other, you'll be fine. Don't be nervous. So I was you know, putting down, one

foot in front of the other as I was saying to myself and I get about halfway there and what do you know? My feet just fly out from underneath me and I go boom boom boom boom right down the staircase.

Aftermath

It was pretty much the most embarrassing moment of my life because my cake, was not a cake anymore: it was on my face, it was on my clothes, it was on the staircase, and it was on the person next to me. That was really great, nice introduction to being a staffer for the next few months together. And it was literally in front of tours, people, staffers, security, everyone you can think of. It was literally a scene from a horror movie like “that girl” that just fell down the stairs in front of everybody, on her first day of work.

Muddling through

So, regardless of the fact that I was so prepared and so ready and thought I was just in control everything, you can ever be in control of your first day of the unknown, because there's just so many things that are unpredictable. So many things that you can't possibly be prepared for. So I learned that it's OK to mess up sometimes even though now I'm “the intern” that fell down the stairs this year. It's okay because I muddled through and I'm still working there and I still love it, and it ended up being Okay; regardless of the first day crisis. (Narrative 74)

Looking back at her first day, the narrator creates layers of meaning through episodes of discourse as she reflects upon fictional and real horrors. By adding substantive layers prior to “dropping the cake”, the cake becomes the most important episode and the most

meaningful layer. Black and Bower (1979) find that just as “story statements cluster into episodes, memory representations of statements also cluster into separate episode chunks in memory” (p. 310). The boundaries of the episode where the narrator drops the cake are clearly marked in space and time and represent a strong reflection of the narrator’s memory of the “cake dropping” incident as the most significant episodic chunk. In the previous examples, narrators strung together episodes of cautious steps in the face of internal and external threats.

While the previous examples display causal and linear connections between episodes emphasizing some episodes more than others, the following example places an equal emphasis on all episodes and parallel emerging layers of meaning. Recounting memories of his first tailgating experience, the narrator builds a sequence of expectations and violations in episodes of surface discourse and associated meaning emerging from each layer.

Sadly mistaken

Today I am going to be telling you about my first ever SC Football experience. All right so for a football game you wouldn't exactly think of that as a situation where you're going to feel nervous or awkward in any way. Ya, sadly mistaken.

As the first layer in this narrative, the narrator develops a collective set of expectations about tailgating in general to prepare a wide base for developing supportive layers.

“Sadly mistaken” initiates a sequence of layers that explicates the narrator’s multidimensional circumspection.

Don't know much

So I'm starting SC and don't really know many people and I am living in Jordan North. I go around a recruit a few guys and say lets go tailgate. I don't really know anything about it but I mean I went to a big high school I know what to do.

An internal threat emerges in the previous layer from the narrator's set of expectations about tailgating; ones not from a similar experience but from the narrator's personal experience at a "big high school."

At the stadium

So we go down to the stadium and you show up at the stadium. Well tailgating doesn't take place at the stadium its in the parking lot so Bob Red and just all around that general area. So we showed up in the wrong spot and already feel like idiots. We kind of talk to a few people and find out where we are supposed to go and then head over there.

Always a struggle

Well right away when you don't know anyone, people are drinking, so it not as big of a deal but you don't want to just walk up and take beer. It's a can I? Can I not? Are you going to care? So that's always a struggle and you don't feel very welcome at any tailgates because you don't know anyone. So we go to one and sneak over to the cooler and grab a beer and then drink it and just walk away and then just do the same thing over and over again.

Amazing food

Well one thing that we kind of stumbled upon early freshman year that I am super grateful for is the alumni tailgate. On my first day tailgating I stumbled upon it and all I can remember where the buses and all the people many of which were older. But their food was amazing. They had brisket sausage, literally the whole nine yards and I just remember being kind of drunk and just throwing in five buck and eating all I could I was so cool.

Layering, unlike traditional narrative sequence benefits from repetition of meaning and variations in episodic reconstructions of experiences.

Shotgun beer

Another thing that I did that I thought was kind of funny was shot gunning beer. So a few of us guys met a few other people and we decided we were going to fit in and shotgun beer. So we all get our beers and they are all cracking it open. Well I don't know how to shotgun a beer. So I get my key and try and mimic what everyone else is doing and I poke a hole in it and it spews all over me. People just start laughing at me but at this point I mean what can you do so I just laughed it off and tried to make the best of it but that was pretty fun.

A beer in my hand

The next big thing that I remember about going to the SC game is heading to the game. Everyone has beer in their hand and there are cops there. So its kind of one of those things where I felt I should not be

doing this but everyone else was so I walked all the way to the stadium with a beer in my hand.

Funneling down

Another thing I thought was pretty interesting was how people get to the stadium. Literally you have 20,000 -30,000 people and they all funnel down San Red just being overwhelmed. Like a sea of red.

Embarrassment

The last thing about my experience that I want to share is when I first got to the game and start off doing songs and I don't know them so I'm sitting there and trying to pretend by throwing my hands up and looking around. Moving my lips but not actually saying anything because I didn't know what to say. It was kind of embarrassing but you know by that point o well. Overall, it was a great experience I wouldn't miss it for the world and I am really glad I got to do it. (Narrative 6)

In this example, the narrator shares their tailgating experience through a series of unrelated and non-sequential events yet they all revolve around a single experience: tailgating. The meaning is created through multiple layers of “memory chunks” of detailed accounts of narrator’s thoughts and emotions about several scenarios and incidents of tailgating. While layers and episodes contribute to both structural and dynamical complexity across many narratives. In another example of episodes and layers, some narrators chose to engage imagined readers and extend an external dialogue to convey meaning.

External Dialogue. External dialogue is a conversation between the narrator and potential readers. It interrupts the sequence of events to engage readers and invite them to a more active role in narrative reception. Stepping out of their narrative context, narrators acknowledge the presence of potential readers.

Example 1

Now if you've ever traveled abroad then I'm sure you'd agree that traveling abroad is a wonderful experience. (Narrative 11)

Example 2

I'm not sure how many of you will be familiar with the story I'm about to tell, or if something similar to it has ever happened to you before, or if you knew what to do when it did happen to you. (Narrative 25)

Example 3

And I don't know if you all remember when you were five years old but you probably didn't lose your baby teeth those don't usually come out till you're about seven or eight so instead of having a big gap in my teeth for two to three years my parents decided it would be best to get me a flapper (Narrative 51)

Episodes of external dialogue convey layers of meaning that support narrators' goals and prospects for narrative development. They reinforce the value of certain episodes and orient readers towards the significance of specific events. Such episodes may be regarded as a pause in the narrative sequence and an externalization of narrators' agency in constructing parallel episodes and corresponding layers that reinforce their subjective

viewpoint. While narrators hold a hypothetical conversation with probable readers through external dialogues, internal dialogues were also common structures that reflected emotional and cognitive states of the narrator.

Internal Dialogue. In narratives of circumspection, narrators frequently shared internal dialogues to reflect upon inner quandaries as they try to comprehend equivocal experiences. Revealing dialogues about cognitive and emotional constructs contributes to the development of dynamical complexity in circumspection narratives. In a way, internal dialogues break the narrative sequence into two parallel planes of potential interaction with readers; first, one that is linear and following a typical narrative sequence and a second one that discloses confidential and privileged information in the narrators' minds bridging the gap between who tells (narrator) and what is retold (narrative). The first one is a narrative representation mode that offers a retrospective version of some events with some level of abstractness and narrative distance. The second one is a window to the narrators' mind granting readers access to goals and vicissitudes residing in deeper levels of narrative meaning.

The concept of narrative orientation or subjective direction towards the narrator's viewpoint in a narrative has been the cause of much debate. "Focalization" as Bal (2009) generally defines it is "the relationship between the 'vision', the agent that sees and that which is seen" (p. 149). In her view, focalization and narration are not the same and cannot be conflated. Similarly, internal dialogues and external dialogues create layers of meaning that are not reducible to the events they narrate. While Genette's (1983) concept of internal and external focalization pertains to psychological access of characters in

literary works, there has been much debate about focalization as performed through the voice of the narrator where agent and narrator are one. As Edmiston (1989) contends “little attention has been paid to the problem (nature) of focalization in texts which the narrator and character are the same individual” (p. 729). The ambiguous bifurcation of internal and external focalization in literary works is not as clearly pronounced in personal narratives because the narrator, focalizer, and often main character are one. In this context of analysis, internal dialogues perform the function of internal focalization where narrators impose their internal states on emergent layers of meaning.

In this example of internal dialogue episodes, the narrator recounts a slight mishap on his first day as a server. He ordered more than 50 dishes of queso and chips by mistake and was expecting an instant let-go.

And then I was walking out about to go home I wasn't feeling too great. I see my manager at the door and I was like "oh no is he going to fire me." I probably deserve it right and then kind of I walk up to him. And he cracks a joke like "Dave I'm so full from all the queso I've been eating all day.(Narrative 12)

If the narrator were to replace “*oh! no is he going to fire me*” by a direct statement about his worry and concern such as “and then I was walking out about to go home I wasn’t feeling too great, *worried about getting fired*”, emergent layers of meaning from this episode would follow the linear sequence and may not have been a source of pronounced concern as it appeared in internal dialogue format.

In another story, the narrator shares a sudden change in their perspective about handling a difficult situation at work but also unveils a parallel dialogue in an illustration of multiplicity and plurivocality of meaning layers embedded in this narrative.

“After a few rather unsuccessful attempts, I stopped and took a step back to look at the bigger picture. What was I really doing here? All it was was taking information and putting it into my own words and ideas and communicating it to someone who was not directly in front of me over the phone. These were things that I had been doing all my life, so why was this so tricky? I look up at the wall, there is a saying by Winston Churchill. "The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." As cliché as that was, I picked up the phone again with a new perspective and a new sense of drive to accomplish the overwhelming task at hand (*Narrative 18*)

In the previous example, internal dialogue opens an outlet for focalizing layers of meaning thereby contributing to dynamical complexity in a non-linear fashion (Browning & Morris, 2012). In this last example of internal dialogue, the narrator builds in two opposing emotional conditions: one where, in her mind, she is calm and cool and another where she struggles with a series of mishaps in retold course of events as she tries to bail out her previous boyfriend against the better judgment of everyone else.

But, stubborn me decides that, you know, I can figure it out, I'm just calm cool and collected, it can't be that hard, I'm a big girl, I'll figure it out. So the next morning I go and get a cab at the concierge, and... got in the cab, and the next

series of events that would happen in my morning were just... completely a series of disasters, and long story short, the morning took roughly three hours.

(Narrative 25)

In the previous analysis, internal and external dialogues are episodes that give rise to focalizing layers of narrative; ones that orient readers towards a certain “vision”; a vision that remains irreducible to the events narrated (Bal 2009). The focalization offered by internal and external dialogues in the previous example is a “filtering of story through” the narrators’ consciousness prior to and/or embedded” within its narrative construction (Horstkotte & Pedri, 2011, p. 330.) Layers that emerge from episodes of internal and external dialogues focalize the narrators’ viewpoint to “color” the story with the narrators’ subjectivity (Bal, 2009, p. 8). In Jahn’s (1996) words, external and internal dialogues are “windows of focalization” and significant layers of meaning that contribute to a narrative’s dynamical complexity through the interaction between events, characters, and forms of dialogue as they orient readers towards narrators’ goals.

Browning and Morris (2012) define dynamical complexity as “the actual process of things nonlinearly in a structurally complex system” (p. 135). Dynamical complexity is enabled through structurally complex narrative structures that manifest themselves in numerous episodes and layers of meaning. Contributing to dynamical complexity in this analysis, is an implicit multiplicity in the goals of the narrator. Emerging first at the surface coding of episodes, multiple goals of narrators develop into elusively intertwined layers of meaning.

Multiplicity of Goals

While it is true that “narrative displays the goals and intentions of human actors” (Richardson, 1990, p. 117) and that “goals are a central feature of narrative” (Laham & Kashima 2012, p. 303), complex narrative structures may shroud some narrators’ goals. In their analysis of the social construction and communication of power, Benford and Hunt (1992) find that as actors and agents under Goffman’s dramaturgical circumspection paradigm (1955), our goals and intentions are not always easily evaluated. While their investigation is primarily focused on interpreting social movements as dramas enabled by dramatic techniques of scripting, staging, performing, and interpreting, they find that goals and outcomes of social movements viewed as dramas hinge on how well activists or agents manage multiplicity of tensions and contingencies within their staged or narrated goals. Likewise, the narrators’ abilities to manage the projection of certain goals hinges on their ability to manage their episodic construction to intentionally develop layers of meaning supporting their goals.

In narratives of circumspection, a multiplicity of goals appeared repeatedly as narrators constantly evaluated their positions against internal and external threats. Presence of internal and external dialogue also created a state of polyphony. The specific narrative feature of “evaluation” in personal narratives as Gwyn (2001) points out is “not a discrete and secondary structure, but rather is embedded in the continuous acts of description that constitute a story as well in the second-order evaluation provided by” the polyphony embedded in objectification of personal experiences. She further argues that narratives are not the static discourse or episodes but

“ dialogically evolving episodes of interaction in which evaluations are frequently co-constructed between speaker and listener (reader)” or in this analysis narrator and reader (p. 313). Dialogic episodes create a polyphony to support layers of meaning maintaining a multiplicity of narrative goals.

Although each narrative responds to the same circumspection prompt, every narrator tells a story with an untold goal or set of narrative goals. The circumspection prompt asks the narrator to tell a story about “a first day” experience; one that reflects the cautious steps one takes in a new environment. To fulfill this requirement, most narrators offered some details to address the internal question of “who am I?” through particular memory recall (Browning & Morris 2012, p. 79). Thus, the primary narrative goal of every narrator in this set was to display dimensions of their identity. Narrative episodes that followed were usually supportive of the initial self-impressions offered by narrators early on in their stories.

Circumspection, as a communicative application of narrative, invites narrators to think about who they are before contrasting their expectations and behaviors in novel settings. In a narrative about traveling abroad, the narrator tells us about her family adventures in Paris for the first time. The first episode is an external dialogue that invites others to participate in the narrator’s appreciation of traveling abroad. She develops two layers of meaning; one where travel is a wonderful experience and another where travel is a source of probable external threat.

A wonderful experience

Now if you’ve ever traveled abroad then I’m sure you’d agree that

traveling abroad is a wonderful experience. However it's not simple experience because if you're unfamiliar with the language the culture, or even worse a mixture of the two things can get complicated quick and this was definitely the case in my situation.

Anticipation

I was 17 years old when I first traveled abroad. My mother, my grandmother, and I traveled to Paris, France and needless to say I was beyond excited. I had been waiting on this trip for about a year so I couldn't wait to get there.

What to eat

Our first full day there I wasn't trying to waste any time so we woke up bright and early, ready to go. However, first thing was first. We had to decide what we were going to eat and where we were going to eat. We had never been to Paris, so obviously we had no idea where we should head.

A stranger's recommendation

So we stood in the lobby discussing a couple of ideas throwing them back and forth when another hotel guest actually approached us and gave us a recommendation. They were raving on and on about some restaurant they had gone to a few days prior and how we just had to go, and we couldn't leave the city without visiting it.

Getting there

Now they told us this restaurant was about 15, maybe 20 minutes by the subway and so we decided to take their suggestion it didn't seem too bad of a trip to us,

and so on we went. Now, when we got to the subway we froze. In front of us was a metro map and if you know what a metro map looks like then you know it's nothing but a bunch of colored lines, scattered dots and stop names throughout.

Complications

So while they're already complicated when you add in the fact that it was written in another language, French, that only adds to the complexity and we were clearly confused. Now ironically, the very map that should have been helping us get to our destination had us more lost than ever at this point and a trip that should have taken us 20 minutes was now taking us an hour and a half to complete.

Outside help

But luckily strangers and bits of advice along the way got us there. Now when we got to the restaurant I just knew our troubles were behind us, you know we sat down ready to eat and I just knew the rest of the day was going to be perfect, but I was wrong.

Clueless

Because upon opening the menu at the restaurant, I realized that of course it was all in French, and we didn't understand a word of it. Now by this point, my grandmother has decided she's going to take control of the situation. She's pulled out her little French to English dictionary and she's flipping through it trying to translate bits and pieces off the menu. However, to be honest, her efforts were to no avail. We weren't making any progress and we were

still as clueless as ever.

Saving grace

Now call it saving grace, call it an intervention, call it whatever you want to call it, but it just so happened that the couple next to us was an American couple...and after watching us struggle for a few awhile they decided to lend a helping hand on our behalf. So essentially it was them who walked us through the menu, the different choices, what to order, what not to order and without them I'm not sure we would have made it through the meal that day. So if this trip taught me nothing else, it taught me that the simple things I take for granted at home, the everyday things: getting from point A to point B, ordering off a restaurant menu, these things aren't quite so simple when you're abroad and learning the language and cultures of the land. (Narrative 11)

External and internal dialogic episodes produce a multiplicity of narrative goals.

Emergent layers of meaning shadow the narrators' cautious steps as she discovers a new value for simple things in a foreign land. Despite numerous details and vivid descriptions in a long series of episodes, the goal of the narrator seems to hesitantly fluctuate between her identity in Paris, relationship with her family, and the bigger lesson about taking simple things for granted all within a greater encompassing narrative attempt to project circumspection in new territories.

Grounded theory analysis of circumspection narratives finds that narrators identify internal and external threats before carefully stepping towards unknown

territories. Through cautious narrative structures and dialogic episodes narrators convey an inherent multiplicity of goals in the representation of their experiences. Layers that emerge from structural episodes cumulatively and residually present the essence of narrators' cautious recounts. Together, episodes and layers can be combined under a core code of "narrative layering". The following section discusses narrative layering as it pertains and accommodates structural and dynamical complexity in narratives of circumspection.

Narrative Layering

Narrative layering, in this context, is an outcome of cautious narrative construction. Narratives of circumspection followed a sequential pattern where episodes, instead of a violation in a steady state, were more prominently presented. Mimicking their careful steps towards novel contexts, narrators developed structural episodes in the form of descriptions, actions, and dialogues to generate corresponding layers of meaning. Binding layers together, they wove a state of cumulative anticipation and tension that was mirrored by a gradual release towards the end of their narratives. Narrative Layering contributes to both structural and dynamical complexity through episodic variations and layers of meaning and the interactions between them.

Narrative layers join and patch our simple and daily experiences like a colorful and vibrant quilt (Menhart, 2004). The concept of layering to convey meaning through structure has been presented across multiple contexts such as music (Hutchinson 2014), conversational jokes (Norrick, 2001), interviews (Frost, 2009), visual design and mediascapes (Baker, 2014; Domingo, 2011; Miskelly & Fleuriot, 2006), film (Duncan,

2008; Kisor, 2010), cultural and historical analysis (Burrell, 2006; Reid 2004), and literature (Brooks, 1979; Newman, 1986; Roberts, 2013; Sandberg, 1991; Wilkie, 1992). In social contexts, the concept of layering has been used to acquire a better understanding of auto-ethnographies of self and family (Johnson, 2006; Rath, 2012), empower children with special needs (Blair, 2013), increase literacy in the classroom (Stavreva & Reed, 2006), and qualitatively assess the relationship between readers and researchers (Connolly, 2007; Nesler, 2007). The concept of layering has also been used to add vertical depth to the meaning of our lives in pursuit of consistent life themes (Biggs, 1999; Ochs, 2004) and texture to an inclusive narrative of children with special needs (Blair, 2013).

Expectedly, layering can take on myriad different forms and functions across each context. In this specific context of analysis, narrative layering is a mode of narrativity that reflects the way we live our lives; one day at a time and one foot in front of the other. It is a way of cautiously recounting our experience in layers to mimic their appearance in “life-as-lived” (Rosenthal & Fischer Rosenthal, 2004). Perhaps important to note, layers are not textual devices that serve or grant main events better definition or form (Barthes, 1975). Narrative layers emerge out of structural episodes and are necessary to the advancement and interpretation of events. They are a reflection of narrators’ complexity in ascribing meaning to their experiences in narrative form in novel contexts. While some layers are necessary to the interpretation of events, some layers only add depth of meaning.

In narratives of circumspection, taking away layers, depletes narrative richness

and depth yet may not affect the sequence of narrative or the ability of the narrator to orient or focalize narrative representation of chosen events. This only applies when each layer is developed autonomously and does not lead to or impede the development of the following or preceding layer such as presented in the tailgating narrative.

Unlike the breach in steady state, narrative layering does not require us to recognize the break in the ordinary. Instead, we bind layers of meaning to appreciate the richness of our ordinary as in the collage of snapshots about the tailgating experience or pictures of pawn shop customers. However, just like we barely recall daily happenings, layering as a form of narrative structure produces meaning that is easily forgotten; one that only lives through the life-span of the story and in the vivid and well developed representations of the ordinary. Richardson (1990) maintains that in everyday life narrative articulates how actors go about their rounds and accomplish their tasks. Narrative layering provides powerful access to this uniquely human experience of “everyday”, the ordinary. Layering through structural episodes proves that daily richness of ordinariness does not require a breach in a steady state but instead demands a retrospective state of mindfulness.

Perhaps, narratives of circumspection as they are exemplified in this set can help us understand more about our abilities to become more mindful as we retrospectively gain a greater appreciation and awareness of our capacities as humans to practice greater receptivity and openness to the present moment. Why some of us are better apt to cautiously approach unknown territories and later develop into parallel narrative episodes and layers is subject to multiple interpretations. Feeney & Noller (1990) define

circumspection as a personal construct that is directly correlated with our perceived abilities to control our environments.

Of relevance to our understanding of circumspection and retrospective mindfulness as a narrative capacity, Chambers (1983) defines circumspection as a personal construct in Kelley's (1955) circumspection-preemption-control (CPC) cycle. The CPC cycle depicts how anxious individuals interpret their environments and anticipate future events. The original appearance of circumspection in Kelley's (1955) cycle is defined as a "loosening of constructs" or expectations about ambivalent and novel events, objects, or characters. Loosening is followed by a tightening in "preemption" as we assimilate a newly acquired personal dimension and capacity to control our environments.

In a more recent interpretation of the CPC cycle, Cipolletta (2013) expands circumspection to include personal assessments of individuals where in every situation, humans as agents measure issues propositionally from a variety of angles. In the following phase of preemption, agents consciously select a critical issue or source of threat to eliminate and weaken the influence of other options. Lastly, in the control phase, we realize our capacity to control our surroundings as a corollary of the power to choose.

Applying the CPC cycle to development of circumspection narratives, we learn that narrators go through a similar cycle but in narrative modality. In addition to traditional cognitive and emotive labor associated with any narrative development, to develop narratives of circumspection, narrators have to practice a retrospective state of mindfulness to recall events, details, and characters that posed a source of threat.

While most circumspection narratives were primarily about simple events, most narrators acquired and appropriated significant knowledge about themselves and their identities through such simple events in a probable reenactment of preemption. Narratives of circumspection, as a communicative application, helped narrators practice mindfulness retrospectively to realize their agency in deciding how to anticipate events. In addition to typical retrospective sensemaking that narrators engage in during the pre-construction phase, some narrators even incorporated their newly found self-knowledge as a manifestation of control into their narratives of circumspection.

And it taught me big lesson of you know just cause you know my cockiness, my pride and looking at what I was doing to get in. I applied a second time and I did get in but it made me really think about the context of what I am doing, how I am doing, what I am going to do to get in and it changed me but it was hard, it was really brutal to get shot down and to be even told it looked good, it looked good but guess what a decision you made really hosed it and that was simply putting yourself in it, simply representing yourself in an application about your self about you isn't the point. It is about the idea, that was what I really learned and I grew from it. (Narrative 91)

The connection between mindfulness and circumspection as it appears in this set of narratives and beyond remains unexplored. And in general there is “much more unknown than known about the concept of mindfulness” (Black, 2011, p. 2). However, if we follow the prudent steps of narrators as they weave narrative layers to convey meaning we can gain a better understanding of the relationship between mindfulness and circumspection.

In a study of intervention to enact greater mindfulness, Shapiro (2009) points to a “potentially overlapping nature of mindfulness and re-perceiving” (p. 559).

This prompt encouraged narrators to “re-perceive” internal states of circumspection, externalize efforts to tighten constructs about themselves and their environment in narrative layers, and lastly exhibit their newly acquired means of control. As a result, one can argue that the personalities of narrators are shaped by the constructs they use in anticipating events (Chambers 1983).

Summary

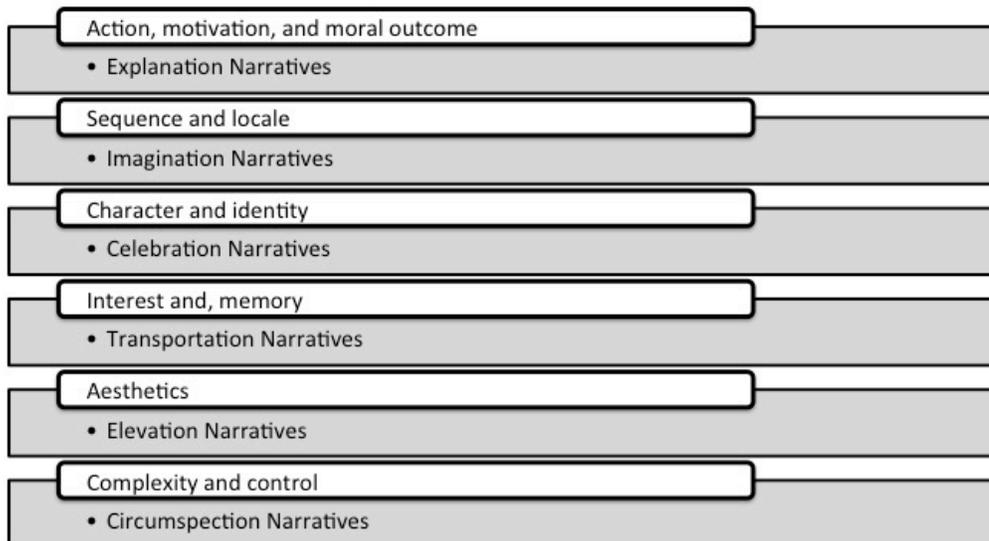
Circumspection, as a communicative application of narrative, has prompted narrators to reflect on their newly acquired wisdom as they exhibited control in weaving complex narratives about “first day at” in novel contexts. Structural episodes of internal and external dialogue project narrators’ multiplicity of narrative goals and compound the effects of structural and dynamical complexity. Emergent layers of meaning convey narrators’ cautious attempts to control their environments as they discover the richness of ordinary experiences when represented in narrative layers. Overall, narratives of circumspection empowered narrators to realize their abilities as focalizers of their worldview and agents in controlling their environment. The prominence of narrative layering in conveying meaning is a reflection of the internal caution practiced by narrators in making sense of threatening environments.

Chapter Ten: Discussion

Communicative Application of Narratives and Appreciation Angles

In the previous chapters, narrative applications and corresponding angles of appreciation as set forth by Browning and Morris (2012) were corresponded to six prompts guiding narrators through their narrative development processes. A classical grounded theory analysis of more than 600 narratives across six narrative applications identifies multiple axial codes as they emerge under each narrative application in relationship to corresponding angles of appreciation. The following diagram summarizes communicative applications of narrative and angles of narrative appreciation ([Browning and Morris, 2012](#)).

Figure 2. Summary of Communicative Applications of Narrative and Angles of Appreciation



While this analysis is not primarily investigating the relationship between communicative applications of narrative and corresponding angles of appreciation, the prompt has been a direct and powerful source of influence in shaping the narrators' development and construction of their narratives. Grounded theory analysis of each data set affirms the presence of a profound relationship between each narrative application and relevant appreciation angles as well as expands the dimensions and elements present in each communicative application. First set of narratives falling under each applications was constantly compared against the second set of narratives to ensure theoretical sensitivity and saturation. Themes appeared recurrently and repeatedly across both sets with minimal differences and variations. Consistency in recurrent themes signifies both collective and individualistic characteristics of narrators' identities as well as their abilities to interpret, respond, and contribute to multiple facets of provided prompts. Throughout all the narratives analyzed, the narrators enacted variant modes of agency to accommodate unique and specific requirements of each prompt. Colored variations of their agency gave rise to specific narrative mechanisms and structures conveying deep meaning and narratively embedded self-constructs.

Much like the narrators, normally, “ we are able to tell more than one story in order to explain, justify, or plan what we or others do or don't do...Interestingly, in doing so we typically are not aware of the 'agentive status' of what we do” (Brockmeier, 2008, p . 226). We do not recognize our ability to choose a specific event or a particular sequence to such an event until we do so; only then do we realize the multiple possible realities that we can represent to others and ourselves. In this study, the prompts provided

set up a unique pre-narrative phase where narrators considered multiple events and multiple representations to narrate within loosely fitting frameworks. Such an opportunity has guided the narrators through a journey of self-discovery and a heightened awareness of their agency in making choices through narratives in a controlled and safe setting. The setting also helped narrators organize the randomness of life and their experiences in six situated contexts. Findings from this analysis are multidimensional and are best understood from a wholesome perspective that integrates context, narrators, narratives, and my own voice as the interpreter of all the aforementioned.

From the beginning, the structure of data collection granted this investigation deep insight and greater control of external influences during the narrative “pre-construction” phase. Every narrator accomplished a pre-construction phase before beginning the narrative itself. The pre-construction phase is a cognitive process that determines a specific event as reportable and “proceeds backward in time to locate events” to develop a narrative sequence (Labov, 2006, p.37) . Although rooted in narratology and structural narrative analysis, this process remains highly applicable to the CGT analysis of narratives. Indeed, the narrators’ agency begins before telling the story. Prompts positioned narrators at a specific and well-defined distance from events within their repertoire of experiences.

In this investigation, during the pre-construction phase of narrative, narrators reflected upon their characters, their lives, and their relationships with others as they subjectively deemed an event “reportable” before developing into narratives corresponding to each communicative application. Upon deciding an event as reportable,

narrators then experienced a wave of personal realizations accomplished through layers of self-reflection on the vicissitudes, goals, motivations, and circumstances that lead to their specific choices. In a way, “reportability” of events becomes a reflection of narrators’ characters and a choice to reveal certain dimensions of their identities. The relationship between event reportability and narrators’ understanding of events in response to commonly shared prompts is indicative of possible value in replicating similar settings to encourage and facilitate the practice of storytelling at both individual and collective levels across educational, therapeutic, or organizational contexts.

Although this analysis has not utilized any structural narrative analysis or other thematic analysis within the larger framework of narratology, providing a unified external stimulus in the form of prompts may contribute to a better understanding of narrative pre-construction phases. The prompts provided cues, keywords, and guidelines to facilitate selection of the “reportable” event and channel consequential narrative efforts towards a specific orientation of time, place, and characters. Variations in narrators’ interpretation of a shared external stimulus offer significant, complex, and uniquely authentic value-laden structures about the narrators’ characters and identities.

For example, in narratives of explanation, narrators “explained” themselves before explaining the event required by the prompt. Their choice of event whether grand or simple as defined according to the magnitude of impact, also related to their construction of a required narrative depth. In narrative representations of simple events, narrators added sequences of smaller events, situating details in multiple layers of narrative construction to create narrative depth and support their choice of reportable

events. Narrative depth is accomplished through layering of meaning through multiple discourse formations or episodes contributing to what structural narratologists distinguish as fabula or story (Abbott, 2008; Bal, 2009). A greater narrative depth is achieved when the storyteller develops a fabula or plot that emerges through multiple layers of discourse and through multiple sequential patterns in a story. Lessons that appear at a greater narrative depth are more profoundly developed and reflect the narrators “circumspection” in reaching the moral outcome of their experience. Narrative depth usually appeared in representations of simple experiences that unexpectedly offered narrators an opportunity to discover something meaningful beyond the surface value of narrated events.

Alternatively, in retelling grand events such as death, terminal illness, or major natural catastrophes, narrators relied on the sui generis nature of such events to support their narrative representations and offer meaning beyond surface level coding of their events. In telling stories about events that others relate to as life-changing or of profound impact, narrators relied on the likelihood of possible audiences to identify with probable consequences and effects of similar experiences.

Similar to variations in the relationship between narrative depth and narrated events, narrators also recurrently relied on comparison to substitute for causality where lacking in their narrative representations. As a literary technique, narrative juxtaposition is achieved through developing two contrasting states or images in narrative that remain contingent on a shared event. Narrative juxtaposition, both a discourse structure and variant of meaning, is accomplished through the narrators’ awareness and reconstruction of *what happened* versus *what could have happened.* The recognition of multiple possible

alternatives to what actually happened provides narrators with a greater sense of agency and a projected ability to control their environments even when such an ability seemed inadequate. Narrative parallels as they follow from the “philosophical idea of a plurality of possible worlds and the contrast between the actual and the possible”(Ryan, 2006, p. 633) offer narrators an opportunity to make sense of unexplained events in their lives. The distinction between narrative juxtaposition and narrative parallels resides in the narrators’ focalization and orientation of meaning and corresponding discourse between the two possible worlds. The recurrent emergence of narrative juxtaposition across both sets of narratives indicates that narrators’ decision of event reportability may not be directly attributed to the strength or mere presence of an underlying causality but of an event that is centrally and integrally indicative of their identity. Substituting for the lack of causality, they still chose to enact some form of rational agency through comparing what happened to what could have happened. As a form of meaning development in explanation narratives, narrative juxtaposition indicated narrators’ awareness of their agency in directing the course of events in their lives and in the development of a narrative sequence that reflects their perception and interpretation of this as well even where causality may not be readily available.

Following the same path, narrators organized their narrative representations of circumspection experiences according to a locus of sequential control manifested across context, characters, and their identity. Relatedly, the degree of complexity also appeared through layering and a persistent dialogue with audiences. Although predominantly applied to complexity in organizational contexts, Snowden (2002) describes the

complexity inherent in possible worlds as a path from the “knowable” to the “known.”

All the possible worlds exist in the “knowable.” Once we develop a possible representation of a chosen event it travels to the “known.” In this context, the known is externalized in the stories we tell. Under conditions of complexity, in traveling from the “knowable” to the “known”, action becomes more valuable (Browning & Boudés, 2005, p.38). The narrators’ choices of reporting specific events among all possible ones is an action that initiates narrative construction and extends their realm of “known” experiences.

Indicative of an overall heightened awareness of their agency, narrators chose events that were not readily explained through traditional causal sequences in narratives of explanation, they attributed to themselves a greater control over their surroundings in narratives of circumspection, and captured the spatial and temporal dimensions of their imagined worlds in elaborately reconstructed objects and characters.

Likewise, narrators challenged the traditional definition of “narrative transportation” (Green, 2004) which attributes a conscious state of complete immersion to the influence of narrative. Instead, most narrators chose to extend the meaning and influence of “transportation” beyond the confines of narratives they may have read or heard to recognize and configure alternate sources and instigators of transportation in their lived experiences.

In “celebration” narratives, narrators celebrated *imperfection*, *resilience*, and *strangeness* in defiance to traditionally and culturally endorsed notions of the familiar, accepted, and complete. True to axial codes that have emerged from CGT analysis of “celebration” narratives, stories in this analysis are far from perfect because they are a

reflection of human nature; messy, unexpected, and uncertain. Narrators willfully celebrated hardships, life's obstacles, illnesses, and weaknesses as self-perceived reasons to realize their inner strength to bounce back. Celebrating resilience, the fascinating human capacity to stand against all odds, narrators praised their awareness of newly constructed "elevated" levels of resilience whether through their own experiences or the experiences of characters that they chose to celebrate.

Examples of "elevation" narratives indicated narrators' ability to develop their representation of moral and material elevation experiences through *affect*, *reason*, and *surrealism*. In their examples of material elevation, or dual moral/material elevation where a tangible improvement in their lives is demonstrated, narrators projected a solid realization of their emotional and cognitive abilities to improve their lives. Yet, across most examples elevation often followed after an unexpected realization of "hitting rock bottom." Similar to hardships and obstacles in celebration narratives, in elevation narratives, "hitting rock bottom" was the "push button" for narrators' enactment and representation of their agency in elevating the meaning of their experiences beyond the surface level of event composition through narrative representation. Cumulatively and across all the communicative applications of narratives, narrators acquired and indicated agency through greater mastery of techniques and tools needed to perform and fulfill requirements set forth by the prompt within the realms of narrative meaning.

Overall, narrators learned to develop significantly more complex, fully developed, and captivating narratives as they progressed from one application to the other. A guided setting that provides an external stimulus enables narrators to organize their storytelling

abilities into nesting boxes where their identity resides at the core of their reflections through narrative structure. As one narrator reflected:

I'm going to tell you a short story about someone whose actions impacted my life. And you know, I have to be honest it probably wasn't until recently, just the fact of having to come up with a story and my current work situation that I realized the full extent of the value of these actions. (Celebration Narrative 44)

Although there is not much that narratologists agree upon when it comes to the nature of narrative, “one truism about narrative is that it is a way we have of knowing ourselves” (Abott, 2008, p.130). In our quest for meaning, narrative seems to be the only universally shared vehicle capable of transcending our uncertainty and vulnerability to control our lives and represent our agency in the form of social action. We can only do so through a temporal and spatial *distance* afforded by our innate affinity towards narrative and a capacity to narrativize our lives. In selective coding, through collapse of axial codes that have emerged from across all communicative applications of narrative in this analysis, two core concepts have emerged: “*Zone of narrative distance*” (*ZND*) and “*Narrative Authenticity*.” I begin with the “Zone of Narrative Distance” because it multifariously precedes and supports narrative authenticity.

Zone of Narrative Distance (ZND)

Across all axial codes, a common theme of “choice” recurrently emerged to reflect an almost unanimous “heightened awareness of agency” in making sense of the narrators’ worlds. In explanation narratives, the core concept of “choice” was supported

by the narrators' perpetual self-reflection throughout their [stories](#). In imagination narratives, narrators translated their agency into fully developed "possible worlds" as they gained greater mastery of their narrative capacity to represent multiple parallel synchronous and asynchronous worlds. Taking it a step further, they developed cues and mechanisms to capture the entrancing effect of narrative to control the complexity embedded in narrative transportation and facilitate recall of effects. They also gained a greater appreciation of their agency as they represented "raised stakes" in moral and material elevation narratives. Similarly, in celebrating resilience, imperfection, and [strangerness](#), narrators domesticated their fear of hardships, uncertainty, unknown threats, and our flawed human nature through enactment of narrative agency. And lastly, they adopted an internal locus of sequential control through circumspection narratives as they reflected upon first day experiences; acknowledging an awareness of greater agency in interpreting and representing their worlds. However, all this occurred from a retrospective distance from the immediacy of reportable events' consequences and effects.

Agency, as an expression of control, [is](#) "humans' specific capacity to actively influence and change their living conditions" (Brockmeier, 2008, p. 220) through some form of societal action. In this study, the constructions of narrative not only used common contextual patterns and prompts but also tackled the narrators' thoughts, feelings, and experiences that have shaped their identities and characters. Harre' (1995) identifies agency, subjectivity, intentions, participation, and action possibilities as "agentive discourse." He further contends that the study of human agency cannot be

separated from the study of “discursive practices in which our agentive powers are manifested or in which we represent ourselves as agents” (p.122). No where do humans as subjective agents and protagonists possess greater power to alter the reality of their worlds than in their narrative mode; the center of human condition (Bruner, 1990). At the center of human condition are two relational dimensions: meaning and agency. For narrators to unveil a potent solution to “the problem of the self” as a problem of meaning construction and self representation, they have to reflect upon the meanings of events from a multidimensional distance. The multidimensionality of such a distance is dependent on our selective recall of events and details relevant, our repertoires of similar human experiences, expectations of an intended or probable audience, and our general ability to narrativize experiences. It is also an epistemic temporal and spatial zone that allows us to develop and weave constructs of our identity into character dimensions for others to recognize. In every story we tell, we simultaneously recognize a zone of narrative distance; a distance between actual events and probable narrative representations of such events. Within the zone of narrative distance, narrators realize meaningful dimensions of their experiences and invite others to acknowledge and reflect upon what they deem as significant and meaningful to their lives.

The zone of narrative distance, is an extended space of our “possibility relationship” to the world and ourselves enabled through narrative as a form of “agentive discourse.” The need to communicate meaning behind our experiences, whether responding to a shared external stimulus in a controlled setting such as this or a random incentive to tell a story, is what supports and mobilizes the zone of narrative distance.

Without an urgent requirement to communicate our perceptions and representations of particular events in our lives to others, most events are likely to live on as dusty memories. However, as homo narrans we are fortunate to enjoy a universally innate predisposition to narrativize our experiences. This setting has offered narrators a controlled and guided setting for recognizing the zone of narrative distance as an epistemic distance. Our recall and reflections upon an event occurs at an epistemic distance protecting us “from the immediacy of psychological threats of the material world and our perception of it” (Brockemeier, 2008, p.221). In the following section, I review extant literature as it relates to the concept of narrative distance from the readers’ perspective and how the “zone of narrative distance” extends this concept to recognize the recognition and enactment of agency experienced by narrators in telling their own stories. Although the following concept is directly attributed and explained from the audiences’ perspective, narrative safety is a facet of narrative distance and may be used to comparatively situate the zone of narrative distance as employed and constructed by findings of this analysis from the narrators’ perspective.

Narrative Distance and Safety. Nell (2003) defines narrative safety as a haven we seek when we listen to stories; stories that we cannot or may not experience for ourselves. Such safety is only enjoyed from a distance between the story and reader. In the eyes and minds of readers, “the delight of narratives is its safety: the story world, unlike dream worlds and the real world is above all safe and nonthreatening” (Nell, 2003, p. 17). Similar to the distance between readers and a story, in this study, narrators recall their chosen event from a safe distance that allows them to deeply reflect upon the value of

such events in their lives and in the construction of their identity. The distance between the immediacy of effects and the requirement to represent an event corresponding to every application helped narrators realize and enact greater agency in controlling and making sense of their lived experiences.

The setting for data collection in this analysis has been ideal for narrators to experience a similar dimension of safety afforded by the distance between the immediacy of effects experienced in the actual or lived happening of the event and their retellings. Narrators were not only in control of their story, they were also in a risk free and safe environment enjoying a unique sovereignty over the development and communication of meaningful events.

Similar to readers of narrative, this grounded theory analysis of personal stories finds that narrators as well rejoice in the safety afforded by a subjective distance from their own experiences. The “*Zone of Narrative Distance*” (ZND) is an emotional, cognitive, and communicative epistemic space where narrators represent and reconstruct their experiences to narrativize what is meaningful and authentic about themselves. The distance that narrators place between themselves and their “agentic” representation of inherently subjective experiences is not measurable and remains a relative temporal and spatial boundary that narrators employ to begin the narrative construction and develop episodes contributing to their narrative identities. It is through that distance that narrators acquire an “*ex post*” position offering an “outside or above” standpoint through the advantage of hindsight (Carr, 1986, p. 123). The distance shrouds narrators’ sense of vulnerability and self-judgment protecting them from fear of judgment or alienation by

others. It is also a distance that enables the communicative construction of explanations, justifications, moral implications, extenuating circumstances, and deep reflections upon hidden vicissitudes of narrators to bestow upon narrators a greater sense of control over representations of their preferred realities to an intended audience (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Across almost all communicative applications of narrative examined by this study, “suspending fear of judgment” emerged as a recurrent subcategory of the core code “zone of narrative distance.” In an attempt to redeem themselves, upon suspending fear of judgment, storytellers reveal events that may not represent them in the best form like lying to get out of a traffic ticket, cheating their way out of an exam, or envy. The demographical composition of participants in this study seems to follow the general premises offered by McAdams (2006a) in the “*Redemptive Self*” about the stories Americans live by.

The following examples from imagination and circumspection reveal experiences of envy, shame, and drug use as they were reconstructed and shared by the narrators as instances of “contamination” and “stagnation”. In the following story, the narrator recounts his feelings of jealousy from his childhood best friend but still wonders how he can make amends with envy and his desire to continue the friendship in an attempt to redeem himself and overcome the contamination of his narrative identity caused by envy of his friend’s wealth.

Envy

So officially, they were declared missing and their assets were divided. But since Jerry was their only child, he got everything. And I was jealous of him. Not only did his family have everything growing up, now he had it all. He had the world on a plate. He had just lost everything that was important to him and I was jealous of him for that somehow.

While the narrators' feelings of jealousy are dominant at first, he later acknowledges that he should have been empathizing with his friend and sharing his loss instead.

I was blind, I couldn't put myself in his shoes. I couldn't imagine that my parents almost went with his and it's possible that I could have lost my family too. I think Jerry realized how I felt, because he started to distance himself from us. Which is sad considering we were pretty much the only thing he had, by way of something close to a family. I have to think about what it was like for him to have to make that decision. To feel that he wasn't welcome anymore by the only people he had left. Which isn't true. (Imagination Narrative 59)

Thinking back about his relationship with Jerry, the narrator realizes that his friend knew how he felt and how he was not a true friend at a time of need. In the following example, the narrator shares a story about an event that most of us would be reluctant to recall.

The narrators' parents were very cautious and waited until he was in fourth grade to have his first sleepover. Going to his best friend's house was the most exciting thing and he was really looking forward to it. Happily, he packed a toothbrush, toothpaste and almost everything he would need. His mother avidly reminded him about the importance

of manners and being respectful. She also gave him some important advice that he regretfully was not paying enough attention to.

Shame

But I really wasn't listening to her because I was just so excited about my first sleepover. Anyways Friday comes around and Friday evening Carl's mom picks us up from the school and we head to his house and I remember right off the bat it was fun some of the neighborhood kids came over and we played outside played a little pick up game of football then carters mom took us to skate town where some of our classmates were and we had fun skating and then we came back and played video games probably until two or three in the morning we were trying to stay up all night but us being so young we just couldn't make it and we ended up falling asleep. But anyways after I fell asleep I remember Carl's dad came and woke us up in the middle of the night and told me to go sleep in their guest bed room so I woke up and went in there and went to sleep. Well anyways the morning came and I woke up kind of early because I guess I was in an unfamiliar place but when I woke up I noticed something was terribly wrong. And at first I was a little confused and I couldn't figure it out I was like why is this bed wet and I kind of felt around and I was like man how did water spill on me and I was just real confused and then I felt the bed and I was like man this is just so weird and then I smelt my hand and I was like man this doesn't smell like water this smells like pee. And I

immediately just got scared and embarrassed and confused and I was like there's no way I could of wet the bed I haven't wet the bed probably since I couldn't remember I was like did I really just pee the bed at my friends house on my first sleepover. And so I just went into panic mode and I hurry and got up and got the clothes I packed Thursday night and hurry and put those on and I tried to cover up the spot with a big blanket so hoping that his parents wouldn't find out and they tell Carl and him tell some of our other friends because that would just ruin my life at the time.

The shame he experienced wetting his friend's bed on his first sleepover is vividly

reconstructed here: *I was just so embarrassed and couldn't believe*

that I had wet the bed something I probably hadn't done since I was a baby and well anyway I went and ate breakfast with them and then I remember I went home and on the way home when my mom came to pick me up she was like Jack is something wrong, you are quiet and I was like yeah I had fun and then I remembered when my mom on Thursday night was trying to tell me all the things to do and be respectful the one thing she said was Jack you are going to be tired from staying up late with your friend make sure you pee before you get in the bed and that is one thing that I forgot to do. And I remember I told my mom that I accidently had wet the bed and I remembered she called Carl's parents and had to tell them and I was just so embarrassed but you know I learned a valuable lesson and from that day forward every time I go to bed no matter where I am I

always pee because I never want that to happen again. (Circumspection Narrative 26)

In the last example, the narrator shares a dramatic experience of drug use; one that does not leave the best possible impression but earned the “reportability” right under the “zone of narrative distance.” The narrator cautiously recounts his random decision to try something other than marijuana.

Drug Use

My best friend came down from school to catch up and we were trying to figure out what we wanted to do that night and somehow we came in agreement that dropping acid was the correct call. This would be the first time I had ever done anything else besides marijuana and I was pretty nervous to say the least. I had thought about it in the past but I always felt like my mind wasn't in the right place and was nervous that I would have a bad trip. At this point though I finally felt like I could enjoy this experience.

The narrator places his experiences with acid as a narrative within narrative; one where distance is clearly projected through an outside position from the external threats posed by drug dealers and how “sketchy” the whole “trip” was.

So first thing we had to do was find some. We probably spent about an hour finding a contact who had a hook up but we finally did. Now I have been in the presence of drug dealers before but this was different. This guy was kind of far and was in our area so he offered to pick us up. We obliged and when he came by he rolled up in an older Mercedes that smelled of nothing but cigarette smoke. I

grimaced as he drove to this frat house a few miles away and when we finally got there he told us to wait in the car. So there we are waiting... talking about what this guy could be doing and how sketchy the situation was but we had come this far. After what seems like an hour finally this guy gets back and when we jumps in the car he pulls out a bag full of drugs. He looked like one of those guys who pulls back his jacket to reveal about 40 different kinds of watches. We explain to him that we only need the LSD and finally complete the deal. After he drives us back we notify the two other people who were going to join us on this journey. This entire time my friend is explaining to me how to get out of a bad trip if I do end up end up in one. I am not sure how much this helped because I am pretty sure it made me even more nervous. Finally our friends get to my apartment and we decide to get straight to it because these trips can last up to 8 hours. We each take our tab, put it under our tongues and wait for it to take effect. Man, this thing tasted terrible. The only word to describe it is chemical. So there we are all letting the paper soak under our tongues for about 15 minutes. I tell you that felt like the longest 15 minutes of my life. It was the come up and I felt like I had no control. I was so nervous that my stomach was starting to cramp. I cant remember the exact time when it finally kicked in but wow, it was an experience.

After the paper soaked under their tongues, the narrator juxtaposed a “beautiful” acquired sensation against a formerly anxious and nervous context.

We were all laughing and admiring the colors and the sounds of music. I had never appreciated them so much before, it was beautiful. I was drawing for the

first time in forever and wow it felt amazing. It was like every stroke of my pencil had its own feeling and I could feel creation at its core. The rest of the night went amazing and there were definitely more parts to this story. (Circumspection Narrative 68)

In the previous examples, envy, shame, and [drug use](#) took on a different mode of representation as a form of narrative redemption against moments of contamination in the narrators' lives. Narrators contemplated their own experiences from a safe and sovereign distance; playing through their actions and lives, unfolding scenarios of complexity that otherwise would not have been fathomable _or readily disclosed in simple statements about previous experiences. When we recall an event to narrate, the distance between knowing what this event means and the narrative representation of such meaning “compels us to familiarize the strange, and move into uncharted terrain” without suffering the consequences (Brockmeier, 2008, p. 230).

This analysis indicates that there is significant value in further exploration of the characteristics, variations, and employability of the “zone of the narrative distance” across multiple contexts. The “zone of narrative distance” is temporary and lasts as long as the process of narrative construction, yet the emotional and cognitive effects as experienced by the narrator, are likely to persist for longer periods of time and are more likely to be recalled later on. Also, important to note as McAdams (2001) contends, narrators are constantly building their narrative identity, by telling more stories, narrators integrate specific events as anchor points in their identity; thereby readily preparing a face for the faces they meet (Bruner, 1986). The key requirement for all these processes

to occur is the construction and sharing of narrative with real or potential audiences. Hence, the “zone of narrative distance” follows from a heightened awareness of the narrators’ control over their world- to choose, explain, circumspect, celebrate, elevate, transport, and imagine possible worlds. Access to the zone of narrative distance is only possible through the narrator’s own interpretation of his or her motivation to tell a story, to deem an event reportable, and to choose a specific plot for reporting such an event.

Despite the relatively neutral undertone of prompts, in this investigation, most narrators willfully integrated the complexity of life, the source of uncertainty, fear, and hope as motivation to rise above adversity, celebrate weaknesses before strengths, explain events that lack traditionally necessary causality, and carefully construct dimensions of identity amidst threatening environments. Narrators practiced their agentic control over representing their worlds through the guided setting and simultaneously familiarized themselves with their presence in the zone of narrative distance as they selectively recalled events to narrate. However, prompts only helped them realize and organize what was already there within a distance from memories of their lived experiences. Through agentic discourse as it appears in narrative, we externalize our agency to make sense of our worlds and present possible worlds to others. The meaning we offer to others reflects the depth and span of distance between narrative construction and memories of selected events.

Multiplicity of meaning in interpreting possible worlds is best represented in narrative form; “the most complex and comprehensive construction site of the human mind” (Brockmeier, 2008, p. 225). “Narrative ‘strives’,” as Bruner (1986) writes, “to put

its timeless miracles into the particularities of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place” (p. 13). We create the safety that readers enjoy in our stories and they are a reflection of the safety we experience in communicating the particularities of our experiences from a distance in narrative form. Hence, the “zone of narrative distance” exists only when we externalize our agency into narrative forms _whether to real or imagined audiences. This remains in need of further investigation and requires in-depth interviews with storytellers about their own perceptions and assessments of what was required to recall and reflect upon meaning of their retold experiences. Yet, this pursuit as well remains subjective to the narrators’ recall and interpretation of the story about telling their stories.

The power of narrative to highlight humans’ capacity for action and choice is central to the human condition. Yet, as agents acting in the world, we are constantly reviewing our stories on a “continuum of repeatedly revised explanations, understandings, and interpretations that is part of life itself” (Brockmeier, 2008, p. 29-30). Thus, there “is no definitive story” (Carr, 2008, p.30). The process of narratively grounding ourselves is subjunctive “(Bruner, 1986, p.25) inviting us to live in more than one reality, in more than one context of meaning, and in more than one order of time. The multiplicity embedded in every narrative complicates our quest for an ultimate truth; narrative truth is at its best an authentic effort to represent a subjective reality. We should not be concerned about narrative truth; instead we should appreciate the authenticity of narrative.

Moving away from traditional requirements of the narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1987), findings from this analysis invite scholars utilizing narratives across multiple contexts to go beyond requirements of coherence and fidelity in order to appreciate what is truly meaningful about personal narratives. While every story serves a particular function and is intended for a specific audience, the narrator's agency is pronounced through unique configurations in each and every story. Such configurations "tell" more about their narrators and the value of their retold events than they do about capacity of individuals to narrativize a sequence of events constituting a plot. As we explain confusing events, imagine possible worlds, celebrate and honor significant characters and traits in our lives, transport ourselves across temporal and spatial boundaries, elevate ordinary experiences into awe-inspiring moments of moral experiences, and carefully construct our identities within and around sources of threat in novel experiences, we are simultaneously communicating a multidimensional position of ourselves from and through an epistemic distance afforded through narrative construction.

Parallel to Polster's (1987) depiction of personal narratives as spotlights from participants lives, recurrent themes and codes are nuggets of meaning and value behind narrators' enactment of multiple forms of agency in the construction of their narratives. What they choose to communicate through subjective selections of events to narratively reconstruct is inherently lacking, valuable, meaningful, and authentic. The following section discusses authenticity and enactment of agency as integral components and dimensions within the zone of narrative distance.

Narrative Authenticity

Acknowledging the influence of my own reflexivity in interpreting this data, as a reader before an analyst, I would like to comment on some of the prominent characteristics of narratives that gave rise to “narrative authenticity” as a secondary core code from this analysis. Extending the mode of “narrative appreciation” that has dominated this analysis, “narrative authenticity” puts less emphasis on narrative credibility, coherence, and probability because the nature of narrative truth is inherently problematic. Carr (1986) summarizes the relationship between narrative and the real world to identify three reasons behind our inability to develop a truthful representation of any event in life. First, for a storyteller to tell a story, unlike life where everything is there, “all the extraneous noise or static is cut out and the narrator *only* tell us what furthers the plot” (p. 123). Second, the narrators’ ability to further the plot is made possible by their access to privileged knowledge, for only they know the plot. They are the voice of authority. But their voice of authority is one of irony because they know the real life scenario and the “intended” or agentic representation posited in their stories. The last reason is also an essential structure in the zone of narrative distance where narrators stand at a safe distance from their experiences. The “ex post” suggested by Carr is a uniquely subjective standpoint that is “outside or above” the immediacy of the events.

Ontologically, we can safely argue that narratives, at their best, are subjective, liminal, and unintentionally deceitful. As Freeman (2002) argues, “the intentionality of narratives is (not) always conscious and deliberate; the ends that are being achieved may be utterly obscure to those whose narratives they are” (p. 9). Thus, our best attempt at

pursuing narrative truth is an appreciation of the inherent authenticity in every narrative form. This assumption may be perceived as a seventh angle of appreciation to aforementioned six angles suggested by Browning and Morris (2012) where we should appreciate narratives for their authentic construction of a subjective representation from the narrators' standpoints. In 1997, Ochs and Capp presented "narrative authenticity" as a concept predominantly concerned about the subjective, faulty, and malleable nature of *memory* alone. However, as has been argued by findings from this analysis, the elusive control we have over our memory and ability to recall events is not the only obstacle in pursuing narrative truth. Our memories, ways of knowing, self-assessments, communicative constructions of the aforementioned, and the narrative configuration of all combined are inherently lacking and contextually bound.

Instead of pursuing naturally unobtainable traits of narrative, we should appreciate narrative as an authentic generative human condition that not only helps us understand our lives and identities but also helps others mimic and build upon what we deem as valuable and meaningful in our own stories. In acknowledging "narrative authenticity", we appreciate the *realness* in communicating our own experiences from a distance necessary to construct narratives.

Narrative authenticity, similar to most narrative constructs, is multivariant and subject to contextual, individual, and collective influences. Unlike requirements of narrative coherence and fidelity, the call for appreciating narrative authenticity liberates narrators from implicit requirements of conforming to hegemonic influences of grand narratives or masterplots circulating our cultures (Abbott 2008a, p. 236). Such narratives

as Lyotard (1984) contends are agonistic; seeking to influence others who are implicitly obliged by a contract that governs rules for narrative reception and transactions in our world. Ubiquity and pervasiveness of narratives in our modern times has, unfortunately, granted such masterplots greater influence in binding others to implicitly oblige to the underlying emplotment of what is collectively agreed upon as plausible, valuable, worth celebrating, and transformative. In pursuing narrative authenticity, social scientists and scholars can identify unheard voices across multiple contexts such as organizations (Gabriel, 2004; Browning & Morris 2012), education (Blair, 2013), political and religious dialogue (Haidt, 2012), and the larger domain of therapeutic practice of narrative within constructivist psychology (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Laham & Kashima 2012; Meichenbaum, 2006).

It is important to note that narrative authenticity is multidimensional and mutually reflexive. In other words, to view the narrative constructions of others as an authentic attempt to communicate meaningful structures constituting the narrators' identity and perceptions of surroundings, scholars must first acknowledge and pursue the potential presence of authenticity in every narrative. Likewise, narrative authenticity runs parallel to enactment of agency in constructing possible representations of the narrators' worlds. Together, narrative authenticity and enactment of agency through narrativity are enabled through an epistemic distance between the event and its narrative representation. Recognition of authenticity in every narrative is also an acknowledgment that narratives glaze a preferred reality or subjectively constructed worldview. Underneath the glaze is a wealth of untapped narrative knowledge. However, this knowledge is multilayered and

multidimensional accounting for the complexity of the relationship between storytellers, their stories, and their possible audiences. In exploring the composition, configuration, and constituting dimensions of the zone of narrative distance, we gain access to privileged pre-construction phases of narrative. The zone of narrative distance offers rich epistemic grounds for both scholars and practitioners. Further investigations of the zone of narrative distance and elements residing within the communicatively constructed zone may help scholars and practitioners realize what makes us more resilient, inspires us to transform and lead others, transports us to alternate worlds, and encourages us to change.

One of the many possible applications of narrative authenticity has been related to authentic leadership. Extending the authenticity of the narrative experience to the development of an equally authentic narrative identity, many scholars have advocated the central and significant role of a consistent and authentic narrative identity to leaders and their followers (Erikson, 2009; Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008; Sparrowe, 2005). Shamir and Eliahu (2005) describe authentic leaders as individuals possessing self-knowledge and a worldview that reflects deep convictions and values who acquire such characteristics by “constructing, developing, and revising” their life stories (p. 395). More importantly, in further implication about the multidimensionality of authenticity, Sparrowe (2005) finds that the development of an authentic narrative identity for leadership, “is not only achieved by self-awareness of one's inner values or purpose, but instead is emergent from the narrative process in which others play a constitutive role in the self” (p. 419). However, extant literature on authentic leadership and its relationship to the development of an authentic narrative identity does not adequately explain what is

required to deem a narrative identity as authentic beyond the surface assessment of the relationship between a leader's character and the story he or she shares with others about themselves. Consistency between shared stories and our subjective external judgments of a leader's character are requirements of coherence and fidelity that suggest an intolerance towards the likelihood of deviance from implicit influences of culturally and collectively prized grand narratives.

Similar to the gap in literature about authentic leadership, our dispersed knowledge of narrative impact runs across multiple disciplines and remains fragmented and underdeveloped if applied outside its situated contexts. However, every narrator retells his or her experiences from a universally shared distance indicative of critical and central constructs in the development of corresponding meaning. It is within further explorations of composition and configuration of this epistemic distance that we can recognize pitfalls and promises for growth, development, and opportunities of change across multiple contexts.

Thus, under the general mode of narrative appreciation, we should appreciate any and all narratives for their inherent value and genuine efforts of narrators to represent their worldviews even when not fully coherent or in congruence with audience's expectations. To confine our appreciation of narratives within limitations that are intrinsic to our minds and not the narrative composition itself is to limit our realm of knowledge about ourselves and others. This invitation also resonates with the larger "*Open Architecture of Narratology*" metaphor where an increased tolerance towards varying narrative structures softens the effects of positivist modes of narrative inquiry such as

structural narrative analysis as well as confining viewpoints of deductive reasoning. Indeed, much value lies in the recognition of “authenticity” in meaning embedded in every narrative. The social value of narratives is not only a reflection of their narrative fidelity, coherence, or structure but also in the emergent meaning that is more empowering to both narrators and others alike. So instead of asking “is it valid?” “is it reliable?”, we should ask, “is it interesting? Is it relevant? Is it beautiful?” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 137) and how can we use the answers to such questions to appreciate the authenticity present in every personal story?

Conclusion

Good stories are like life: complicated, unexpected, contingent, and ironic. The closer the narrative to life, the more likely we are to be affected by it (Bruner, 2006) yet we are also constantly in pursuit of novel experiences in unfamiliar territories. As stories mimic patterns of life, they resonate with a natural rhythm in each and every one of us (Green et. al, 2002). A good story is layered, creates and illustrates a state of narrative contrast, encapsulates experiences in cues and simple objects to facilitate memory recall, encourages resilience, inspires others, and evokes a generative tendency to share the narrators' intentionality in representing their experiences.

Stories are unintentionally deceptive, ultimately reflecting only a fragment of subjective reality. Our experiences are polyvocal, with multiple agents, and hence afford and project infinite interpretations. So is a good story. The multiplicity and plurivocality embedded in every narrative is essential in relating to varying members of audiences and an integral underlying premise of narrative authenticity.

“We are natural ontologists, but reluctant epistemologists” (Bruner 1986, p. 155). However, this is overcome by our intrinsic attraction to the qualities of narrative as we story our lives and live our stories. Narrative complexity is a reflection of our own and our expectations in any narrative form. Yet, paradoxically, we also strive to simplify our lives; encapsulating the richest and most profound moments and inspiring people in pictures, symbols, trophies, songs, and feelings. This is what a good story is; a complex depiction of our identities in a bottle.

Storytelling is an art that can be mastered through compassion, empathy, genuineness, and mindful recognition of narrators' efforts in authentically representing their worldviews. Such a state of mindfulness demolishes "ordinariness" in our daily lives to discover an always present peripeteia or the richness of the ordinary. We celebrate qualities that bring us closer to nature: kindness, authenticity, and most of all resilience. Although resilience started out as a buzz word, it is now a concept that we are increasingly aware of and appreciative of our ability and ability of others to demonstrate. Hardships will come and obstacles will stand in our way but we are built to overcome. And stories inspire us to emulate the abilities of others in the pursuit to discover our own. They are "also a powerful way of teaching us not only about the subtleties of story but about the possible forms that life takes, particularly about life's dilemmas" (Bruner, 2006, p. 61). All the possible worlds and the richness of human experience occur at the safety of narrative and we learn the value of such experiences from a "distance". In telling stories, we first construct the "zone of narrative distance" where we learn about ourselves, our experiences, and our relationships to others. From a distance, we learn about ourselves as we interpret our weaknesses, imperfections, and failures to turn them into powerful narratives.

This analysis followed narrators' empowerment to represent their experiences using one of the most powerful and influential communicative and persuasive weapons of our modern times (Salmon, 2010). They further developed a narrative identity (McAdams, 2001, 2006); one that is built and integrated through the stories they shared. Every narrative in this analysis projects unique dimensions of narrators' characters and

identities. Beginning with “choice” in narratives of explanation and leading up to multiple forms of narrative complexity in narratives of circumspection, storytellers learned how to ward off a narrators’ most dreaded question: “so what?” (Labov, 1972, p.366) as they practiced authentic reflection upon what truly mattered to them.

Guided by the six angles of appreciation, the development of personal narratives followed structural implications offered by the mode of narrative appreciation where narrators utilized the angles to build complex, layered, deep, juxtaposed, resilient and surreal representations of their worlds. Through this analysis, I, much like the narrators, learned a lot about myself and what I value most in life. For to interpret stories is to interpret ourselves; “how we interpret event sequences is pretty much how we interpret event sequences every day of our lives” (Abbott, 2008b, p. 329). In this analysis, recurrent themes that gave rise to key categories and core concepts mirror my own perceptions and representations of a preferred reality. Similar to Dutton (2003), in this analysis “ I serve as a carrier of other people’s stories and my joy is to weave them together” while still permitting their voices, perspectives, and wisdom to shine through (p.8). The collective wisdom acquired by this study has empowered me to realize a world of possibilities through greater appreciation of resilience, imperfection, and the infinite capacity to self-reflect. The inductive approach of a grounded theory analysis as it applies to such a vast wealth of personal narratives has also helped me realize the quintessential and powerful effects of context-bound interpretation.

We cannot truly and deeply understand the power of personal narratives without first appreciating the narrators’ sense of self, identity, and character. Personal narratives,

unlike fiction or literature, are culture-centric and subservient to goals of their narrators. They are windows to particularities of personal realms and means to access cultures. Nevertheless, we still identify with personal narratives at a deeper level; one that recognizes an inner rhythm that we all share while overlooking surface noise in narrative structure. Indeed, the majority of narratives recounted experiences where narrators pursued a deeper meaning of their experiences and confessed to acquiring valuable lessons along the way.

Thus, this analysis acknowledges the significant value of context and a guided setting in the development of personal narratives and a parallel narrative identity.

“Selfhood is a task to be performed, not a given that awaits passive reception by the subject” (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 4) and we readily have a powerful device; one that “creates identity at all levels of human social life” (Loseke, 2007, p. 661).

Affirming our need to tell more stories and appreciate all stories, Henry James once claimed that, “stories happen to people who know how to tell them” (as cited in Bruner, 2004, p.691). We can learn to become better storytellers and better audiences through an extended appreciation of narratives and their authenticity. And “with the greater availability of stories comes a greater opportunity for narrative appreciation” (Browning & Morris, 2012, p. 5). As Schank and Berman also contend, “people remember stories that are well told, and that are centered on ideas that listeners either know well or want to know well. And, a good storyteller makes listeners become part of an experience. ...we are our favorite stories.” (2007, p. 265). We move through our lives

in a fog and it is through the sheer power of narrative that we individually and collectively gain some clarity (Kundera, 1995).

Limitations

There is still more to learn about the immense value in personal small stories; uniquely multiform yet uniform in the rhythm that reverberates to the monomyth (Campbell, 1991; Nell, 2002). In addressing limitations of this analysis, I believe this study could benefit from interviewing narrators for their perceptions and assessments of the experience as well as their self-evaluation as narrators to further explicate and identify the constitution of the zone of narrative distance. Also, further investigation is needed to explore various modes of narrative transportation and the perhaps limiting scope of Green and Brock's (2000) narrative and imagery-based model.

The demographic composition of narrators is likely to have resulted in pronounced traits and recurrent themes such as the redemptive form in examples of "suspending disbelief" following from the evangelical influence of their upbringing and probable religious affiliation. Replicating this analysis on narratives of participants from a different demographic profile may yield different results. Therefore in telling a story about their stories, limitations inherent in the demographic composition of narrators may affect the generalizability of findings about recurrent themes and codes and their employability across other contexts.

It is important to note that this analysis, exemplifies a call for a "second" narrative turn that stems from burgeoning appreciation of personal narratives and their abilities to transform individuals and communities but also acknowledges the critical and inseparable

nature between narrative and its context (Georgakopoulou, 2006). The distinction between the first and second narrative turns, as Bamberg (2006) explains, brings about a much needed context for modes of narrative inquiry. Like this analysis, the second narrative turn, recognizes that narratives are best understood as they are bound and grounded in their contexts. It is time as Clegg (1993) insists to “take the narratives of everyday life as serious objects of analysis and not simply treat them as reflexes” (p.17). But to take them seriously we have to acknowledge their complex and dynamic nature; one that brings about some inherent challenges to accumulating knowledge (Josselson, 2006). Against the hegemonic threats of master-narratives (Lyotard, 19984) and abstractness of several modes of scientific inquiry, personal stories are our window into the human condition as it naturally appears and emerges in its own context. Only then can we truly appreciate and acquire knowledge of the human condition in its most authentic form.

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