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Abstract

Identity is a reflection of how people view themselves within the social structure (Campbell, 2010; Hill & Thomas, 2000). Too often these identities are mirror images of normalized labels and affiliations defined by, and through, social norms and values. Introspective of social constructs and teachings of normalcy, often times one's identity and status is never questioned (Ramsey, 2004). Juxtaposing systemic thinking with personal knowledge, this article offers insights into the uses and contributions of critical autobiographical research as a both paradigm of research and practice. This article seeks to link the application of critical autobiography with educational practice and theory to promote social justice, identity development, and lifelong learning.

Keywords

Autobiographical Research, Narrative Inquiry, Identity Development

Critical Autobiography as Research

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Identity is a reflection of how people view themselves within the social structure (Campbell, 2010; Hill & Thomas, 2000). Too often these identities are mirror images of normalized labels and affiliations defined by, and through, social norms and values. Introspective of social constructs and teachings of normalcy, often times one's identity and status is never questioned (Ramsey, 2004). Juxtaposing systemic thinking with personal knowledge, this article offers insights into the uses and contributions of critical autobiographical research as a both paradigm of research and practice. This article seeks to link the application of critical autobiography with educational practice and theory to promote social justice, identity development, and lifelong learning. Keywords: Autobiographical Research, Narrative Inquiry, Identity Development

Autobiographical stories are more than personal narratives. Stories reflect a set of values, rules, and norms that govern a person's learning and sense of logic (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). When viewed as a source of data, autobiographical narratives situate reflexivity within contexts of cultural settings (DeGloma, 2010) that offer researchers an important set of social and individualized contexts to study (Brockmeier, 2012). This article is situated within the framework of Polkinghorne's (1988) principle that storytelling is a natural component of life that all individuals engage in. It is within this framework that the aims of this article were established.

The first aim is to make an argument for autobiography as a viable methodology of research. The article draws on tenets of narrative inquiry and the paradigm of critical research to discuss autobiography as a meaningful and important contributor to research. The first section situates the discussion and frames autobiographical research within the context of narrative inquiry. Then, using narrative inquiry as the base, the discussion transitions to focus on autobiography and critical autobiographical reflection as research. Concerns about the ethical dilemmas associated with autobiographical research are also addressed before concluding the argument for critical autobiography as a research methodology.

The second goal is to demonstrate the potential of autobiographical research. The article includes excerpts from a dissertation study in which the author used critical autobiographical research to unpack the development of their racial identity. Having completed the study, this article draws from his study to personalize the process and utilize snippets of his autobiographical narrative to demonstrate the scholar-practitioner model. The use of research and theoretical frameworks, combined with the reflective analyses provide the platform to implement data-informed decision making into practice for the purpose of improving personal practice and impacting change.

Narrative Inquiry

Situated within the dominions of human as participant and qualitative research, narrative inquiry continues to become a noteworthy paradigm of social science research (Smythe & Murray, 2000). The narrative study of lives is an emerging, multidisciplinary tradition of research based on in-depth autobiographical interviewing of research participants (p. 318). Gay, Mills, and Airsian (2009), defined narrative inquiry as "the study of how different humans experience the world around them, and . . . allows people to tell the stories of

their storied lives" (p. 384). Richardson (1994) identified writing as a process of discovery and way of knowing (pp. 516, 523). Narrative, represented through any form of written or spoken discourse (Polkinghorne, 1988) is diverse in design; however, even with its flexibility, narrative research shares links to six core elements: (1) storytelling, (2) process and movement, (3) interrelations within contexts, (4) engagement and decision making from participant(s), (5) cohesiveness in a central theme, and (6) chronology of events represented in narratives (Neuman, 2006)

A natural component to life, all individuals – at some point in life – engage in the art of telling stories as a means to express an opinion, highlight a life experience, or utilize a teachable moment (Creswell, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1988). Also, as Neuman (2006) and Polkinghorne (1995) added, through narrative discourse, experiences are tied together and given meaning and purpose. Evidence of such connections and meaning making are demonstrated through Walker's (2013) reflections:

> The third grade hit and suddenly I found myself liking Mandy and wanting her to be my girlfriend. I wanted to ask her to be my girlfriend but I knew I couldn't, or at least I shouldn't…Why couldn't I ask Mandy to be my girlfriend? Well, the short answer is because she was black…To be honest, I'm not really sure why, or how, I knew that Mandy and I weren't supposed to mix. Going to school with someone like Mandy and having a fondness for her were different things. I wasn't ever told, at least blatantly, to not like black girls. However, although I was not taught such a lesson, I was…somehow, someway, I associated black with negative. I knew, for whatever reason that I needed to keep my liking of Mandy, or any other black girl to myself. Guided not by an understanding but instead by an unexplored knowing, I skillfully mastered practices of silence that I remember as an eight year old in the third grade the next fifteen years of my life; until my senior year in college. (p. 91)

The use of storytelling, such as the one above, provides narrative research its niche as an effective, viable form of data collection and research (Creswell, 2009) that, as Ellingson (2009) pointed out, offers qualitative researcher's the ability to "show, rather than tell" about their data and findings (p. 65). Further, Vogt (2005) described narrative inquiry as the qualitative analysis and contextualization of common themes prevalent throughout a structured story (p. 203).

Structured through themes and stories, life may be considered as a series of experiences that occur in a narrative format (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). Clandinin and Connelly (1994) considered narrative inquiry as a viable starting point for all social science research (p. 414). Therefore, as Clandinin and Huber (2002) posited, it makes sense to study life experiences narratively (p. 162). Fittingly, narrative storytelling has traces that date back throughout history. Artifacts discovered through hieroglyphics and stories told in various texts offer a few examples of the use of narratives to express life stories and experiences. While the art of storytelling can be traced back to centuries long past, when compared to other lenses of research, narrative inquiry's tenure of being considered a viable paradigm of educational research has a contemporary nature and lens.

Discussing its contemporaneous status, Connelly, Phillion, and He (2003) highlighted narrative inquiry's nonexistence in research that was unheard of just thirty years ago (p. 364). A new paradigm in the world of research, the use of stories and personal recollections did not become considered a viable form of comprehending the meaning of human experiences until the early 1990's (Merriam, 2009). Educators Clandinin and Connelly recognized the potential influence of narrative analysis and offered the first effective critiques and overviews of

narrative research for the field of education (Creswell, 2007). As the need for effective, comprehensive assessments became paramount to the success educators and education alike, narrative inquiry continued to utilize people's natural form of communication and become a formidable, recognized method of research data collection and analysis.

Designed to capture data through lenses of real life occurrences in an intimate, relational manner, narrative inquiry allows researchers to analyze specific topics within a controlled, yet authentic setting (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). As with critical research, narrative inquiry places strategic, intentional emphasis on participant voice and the processes involved in making meaning of the experiences discussed by participants (pp. 385-386). Accordingly, narrative inquiry extends the parameters of traditional research by following what Polkinghorne (2006) described as a shift from designing methods concerned with epistemological foundations to designs that engage researchers in examinations of cognitive processes to produce informed, meaningful outcomes.

Critical Theory

Established at the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, the origins of Critical Theory (CT) can be traced to individuals such as Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adomo, and Herbert Marcuse (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). With a foundation of thinkers and scholars connected to Communism, independent critics, and Marx's critiques of capitalism, CT has a lineage of critical design (Poster, 1979). Further, as Kincheloe (2007) discussed, critical theory is "especially concerned with how domination takes place, the way human relations are shaped in the workplace, the schools and everyday life" (p. 878).

Zack (2005) posited requirements of critical theory to include (1) an understanding of social contexts that make connections between practical interests and beliefs, or myths that mask beliefs evident; (2) links between beliefs and situations of social oppression and marginalization are addressed by the theorist; (3) the theorist being a stakeholder in, or having the ability to address issues of oppression adequately from the perspective of the oppressed; (4) an acceptance that difference in perspectives offered by findings from research and beliefs held by the theorists exists; and (5) the presence of adaptability to meet the changes of social conditions. Framed under such requirements and the values of question and critique, CT has a long history of challenging normative values built to sustain a status quo. Jehangir (2009) described practices wrapped in theory and practice of criticality as igniters of question and critique that connect audience, voice, and evaluation with considerations of power, privilege, and authority (p. 36). Neuman (2006) also emphasized, the fundamentals of critical research include the "combating surface level distortions, multiple levels of reality, and value-based activism" (p. 94). Normed in activism and advocacy, research guided by CT seeks to contest acts that allow for the maintenance of systemic oppression while working to initiate transformational, revolutionary change (Foster, 1994).

Postmodern in philosophy and practice, CT focuses its attention to issues of power and its impacts on society. As Bess and Dee (2008) highlighted, critical research is guided by tenets that seek to "examine how the more powerful actions in an organization are able to shape the values and priorities of . . . and, hence, determine the overall value system of the organization" (p. 385). Prefaced in candid, honest critiques of systemic privilege, CT seeks to flush out attributes of inequity and injustice and replace oppression with empowerment. Moreover, with its formative approach to evoking sought after transformation, critical theory is prevalent in many aspects of social science and change.

Focused on transformational change, research connected with CT is generally qualitative in design. Intentional in its focus on emancipation of the disenfranchised, emphasis is place on using CT to establish sustainable, cultural reform through empowerment and

education. As Merriam (2009) discussed, objectives of critical research include the critique and challenge of the status quo as a means to transform and empower (p. 34). Research guided by CT allows for the crossing of boundaries and parameters, therefore eliminating traditional barriers such as race, sex and gender, social class, and other constructs often used to create bias within research paradigms. Inquiry that is examined through a lens of CT focuses Instead, critical research's focus on social justice and equity philosophically serves as a framework to conduct necessary investigations for populations and subcultures that are victims of oppression, marginalization, and historical acts of discrimination (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2004). Founded for the purpose of challenging ideologies and hegemony, CT offers researchers a model to utilize when critiquing obstructions that impede upon the pursuit of social justice. Attentive to issues of equity, the focus of critical theory offers an approach to research that purposely allows for critical examinations of ideological philosophies of dominant, privileged, cultures.

Kincheloe and McLaren (2002), in their discussions of the power and presence of privilege, highlighted how the installment of institutionalized, norm-based values become natural, unquestioned practices that allow dominant cultures to maintain statuses of elitism, entitlement, and unearned advantages (p. 93). Framed within a social architecture that emphasizes questioning and critique, CT connects two marginalized attributes of society, knowledge and disenfranchised populations, to ignite emancipatory reforms that are transformational, sustainable, and just.

Critical research relies on the involvement, experiences, and reasoning of disenfranchised populations (Capper, 1998). Participation from a constituency of primarily silenced individuals and groups creates opportunities to offer the historically silenced a voice. In turn, CT affords researchers innate opportunities to examine constructs of oppression and discrimination through lenses of criticality. Regardless of the lens, critical research embodies ideals and values of hope for an establishment and coming of a more just and equitable society (Merriam, 2009). As evidences of racism, sexism, and other discriminations continue to occur, investments in research intent on challenging the status quo remain. As the U.S. continues to evolve, so will the need for critical research. With research, theory, and practice critically examining cultural norms and ideologies inherit of privilege and oppression, calls for social justice and equity will expand in topic and influence.

Autobiographical Reflection

With origins dating back prior to 1800 the establishment of the term autobiography created a single research methodology designed to include various accounts purported by authors (Berryman, 1999). However, it has only been in the last thirty years that autobiographical research has evolved to bodies of work substantiating its value of connecting lived experience with learning to deconstruct what a person knows and how these paradigms of knowledge have been developed and framed (Anderson, 2001). Further, autobiographical research represents a distinct genre of literary research that is an essential component for examining critical debates and controversies of a range of concepts including "authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction" (p. 1).

Distinguishing between fact and fiction, it is important to note the difference between autobiographical narrative and autobiographical memory. Expounded on by Smorti (2011), "autobiographical narrative transforms autobiographical memory and makes it a cultural artifact" (p. 304). DeGloma (2010) went on to describe autobiographical research as a "broad social arena where individuals construct and deploy autobiographical accounts in mutual relation to one another for strategic purposes (p. 520). Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) advanced the discussion and defined personal narratives as accounts of "evolution of an

individual life over time and in social context" (p. 4). Through the collection and analyses of narratives, autobiographical research offers researchers a multitude of outlets and opportunities to find themselves through research (duPreez, 2008). Illustrating the power of autobiographical narrative and its critical analysis, Walker (2013) provided a testimony of growth in his analysis of narrative:

> My new, developing racial identity, similar to prior years, continued to be molded by the teachings and influences of the same racist ideologies and hegemonies of whiteness that had always been present throughout my life. However, the difference between then and now was that my new identity was aware of whiteness and the privileges that came with a status of a white racial status… I was breaking free from the chains of oppression and becoming able to converge the what of race with the processes of how and why with the conscious formation of my racial identity. (p. 187)

Autobiographical accounts, according to Polkinghorne (2010), empower researches to analyze past events and actions as a means to examine previous outcomes as well as the planning for possible future outcomes (p. 395).

True to its design, and Gay, Mills, and Airasian's (2009) connection between research and researcher, autobiographical research positions the researcher as the instrument of research (p. 113) and the sole participant. Adler and Adler (1987) suggested that traditional research has been inhibited due to the fact that emphases on research have focused on studying others, rather than the researcher themselves. Critical autobiographical research widens the scope of research and allows for, as Creswell (2007) alluded to, data to be collected directly from the study's sole participant. The use of reflective, autobiographical narratives allows the researcher to draw from questions that examine life experiences to analyze the self within the lens of criticality.

Keeping with Adler and Adler (1987) and highlighting the necessity for personal, intense researcher participation, critical autobiographical narratives provide the necessary concentration of involvement between the research study and research participant. As the interpreter of data, the researcher, as Polkinghorne (1988) stated, is responsible for the analysis of data and the construction of meaning, based on personal understanding and connections to the narrative. Also, serving as the instrument of research, it was imperative that researcher's follow Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) and remained engaged, candid, and critical in order to maintain a good fit between the role of the researcher and the purpose of the study.

Equipped with the tools to empower researchers, the uniqueness of autobiographical research also invokes a research methodology steeped in illogical nuances of how to differentiate between fact and fiction (Berryman, 1999). Smorti (2011) described autobiographical narratives as reflective depictions that mirror how an individual recalls memories of life's occurrences. In turn, recollections of self are indeed individualistic in both theory and practice, and therefore, autobiographical reflections, as a source of research are often marred by both criticism and skepticism (Westlund, 2011). At the heart of reproach is autobiographical research's data and results coming from self-directed interpretations and analyses of defining the self and self's life story (p. 392). Also, as Olson (1997) purported, quality narratives, those framed in both censure and worth, offer an arena for multiple interpretations and meanings.

Although criticisms associated with autobiographical research have been identified, evidence of the value and possible contributions of critical autobiographical research to theory and practice are clear. Highlighted by Clandinin and Connelly (1994), autobiographical research offers researchers the opportunity to examine narrative contexts of life in their

entirety. Richardson (1994) furthered the argument for self-narrative as a means to strengthen qualitative research through inquiry that "unmasks complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing" (p. 523).

A strength of autobiographical research is that everyone, regardless of status and experiences, has a past (Polkinghorne, 1988). However, these pasts can be suppressed, and sometimes forgotten, which results in a loss of identity (p. 106). Reflection counters the suppression of identity and instead serves as a catalyst for the exploration and discovery of meaning (Rosenberg, 2010). Consequently, autobiographical accounts of the past create a source of data featuring a social and cultural language constructed through reflection (DeGloma, 2010; Ellingson, 2009). Also, autobiographical inquiry, by placing the "I" as the subject of research (Anderson, 2001), meshes first person memoirs with reflections to create a data source in which the researcher is the voice, interpretation, and analysis of the narrative.

Situated within perspectives of "I," autobiographical narratives create opportunities to express internalized memories (Smorti, 2011). In turn, the externalization of suppressed memories produces cultural artifacts in which narratives of self are outwardly projected in a language that generates new opportunities for learning and transformation (p. 304). Describing his personal growth and sense of awareness, Walker (2013) externalized the connections and meaning making processes involved in the analysis of his personal narrative to describe his personal growth and an increased sense of awareness. He highlighted such growth in a reflective narration that unpacked processes of his identity development:

> I was no longer an unknowing victim to the teachings of racist ideologies…my world and train of thought was being transformed . . . I was finding balance between the disheartening realities of our world and a sense of empowerment that came with my new comprehension of myth, reality, fact, and truth . . . I was introduced to *The Color of Fear*. (pp. 188-189)

While links between narrative inquiry, data, and meaning making are evident, Peshkin (2001) raised caution due to perceptions of the world around us are never free from bias and purpose. Acknowledging the presence of bias and purpose, critical research is intentional in its efforts to assess relationships between power and privilege (Berryman, 1999). Serving as both the participant and researcher, critical autobiographical research critiques attributes systems of privilege and offers counter narratives to deconstruct mainstream testaments of knowledge that influence the development and sustainability of one's identity.

Critical Autobiographical Reflections

> Growing up, I was taught the ideals of meritocracy; those that work hard are rewarded and those that don't aren't…Being reared under these teachings, I came to know my status not from a lens that taught the intersectionalities present within the social structure of the U.S. but instead from a perspective of individualism and purports of democratic ideals. It was not until personal growth, tutelage, experience, and maturation took place that critiques and challenges of a socialization process earmarked by dogmas of personal accountability and meritocracy occurred. (Walker, 2013, pp. 4-5)

Examining how life's occurrences shape the development of one's identity is a critical component of scholar-practitioner leadership and practice (Kupo, 2014). Through the use of language and narrative, critical autobiography provides a methodological framework for which such inquiry is able to occur (Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011). Critical

autobiographical research integrates tenets of narrative inquiry, which include examining life experiences through data designed to reveal meaning using qualitative analyses rather than quantifying findings (Ellingson, 2009). Focused on the story and its meaning, autobiography utilizes experiential learning, experience, and personal voice to establish a framework designed to investigate the workings of systematized norms and social-based ideologies that influence and mold the development of one's identity (Fivush et al., 2011).

Critical autobiographical research, a paradigm within narrative inquiry, allows the researcher to make meaning out of human experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988; duPreez, 2008). With a primary focus on deconstructing the development of one's identity, critical autobiographical research engages the researcher in candid, personal examinations of key moments that teach the self about life. These examinations, as highlighted by Walker (2013), offer the opportunity for individuals to candidly deconstruct productions of teaching and learning that have molded their identity and sense of knowing:

> I have unknowingly reinforced ideals of racism, sexism, and other isms for the majority of my life. Growing up, ideals that a hard work ethic, doing well in school, and earning what you received were staples to my way of life. I was taught under the age-old value system of the "American Dream" where hard work equates to success…[However], Little did I know then that I was blind to the realities of a social system marred by discrimination, exploitation, ideological underpinnings and falsities hidden by teachings of the American Dream of what I now characterize as the myth of meritocracy. Little did I know that I also benefited from a set of unearned advantages gained from certain statuses I inherited by being born both white and male in the United States. (pp. 80-81)

The intent of such research is not to highlight various events through one's life but instead is to, as Rosenberg (2010) highlighted, use reflection to examine life, specifically uncomfortable and challenging attributes of learning for the purpose of transformation (p. 11). Using critical autobiographical reflective narrative as a means of inquiry, investigators deconstruct how various social statuses have made themselves present throughout life, the processes involved in becoming aware of their multiple statuses, and finally, how to use the knowledge of identity development to move forward.

Ethical Dilemmas of Autobiographical Research

Roy Pascal's (1960) publication *Design and Trust in Autobiography* incited a trend by both scholars and critics to consider methodological and theoretical concerns associated with autobiographical research (Jay, 1987). In general, qualitative research is stained by ethical concerns due to researcher's intimate connectedness to their work (St. Pierre, 2002). Critical autobiographical research, although its sole source of data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings derives solely from the researcher, also carries the burden of much concern and debate regarding its ethical use as a research methodology. Using critical inquiry to analyze the narrative data allows researchers to communicate findings through illustrations of events and key moments rather than telling (Creswell, 2007; Ellingson, 2009). Within such a paradigm of research, data includes both personal and social contexts; connections to the past, present and future; and situations linking various places, physical and non-physical, represented in the storyteller's space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Considering the quandaries associated with autobiographical and critically-oriented research, below are discussions of three ethical dilemmas (subjectivity, trustworthiness, and source) associated with using a critical lens and first-person data as a paradigm of research.

Subjectivity

Bias is an inherent attribute present in all thought and perceptions (Peshkin, 2001). Biased by rationalization and beliefs, memories reflect recollections used to justify truths (Brewer, 1996). However, analyses of reflective memories and narrative are also biased. Underscored by Janesick (2000), the personal thoughts and perspectives of the researcher drive the analyses process, however, "no one can interpret your data but you" (p. 390). In turn, as Godfrey (2003) indicated, autobiographers must acknowledge that their thoughts and writings are never free from influence but are, at all times, explanatory in nature.

Similar to other methodological approaches, critical autobiographical research, while reflective of a single researcher's thoughts and perspectives, are not free from bias. DeGloma (2010) denoted connections between narrative accounts and various cultural contexts, both social and historical, as influences that mark testimonies of truth. Further, autobiographical research is inherently biased as it is driven by a universal culture and modes of subjectivity (Anderson, 2001). Adding to the potential for partisan research, Smythe and Murray (2000) highlighted the active engagement of the researcher in interpreting and formulating meanings of collected narratives. Given the role of researcher as participant, autobiographical research is subject to bias due to the various statuses, influences, and teachings of the researcher (Anderson, 2001).

Furthering the discussion of subjectivity, Merriam (2009) highlighted that all research requires certain levels of trust in the researcher. As she discussed, ". . . policies, guidelines, and codes of ethics have been developed"; however, "actual ethical practice comes down to the individual researcher's own values and ethics" (p. 230). Moreover, as a methodology, autobiographical research is void of an established standard of safeguards that assist in assuring that ethical practices are followed (Mercer, 2007). Although a lack of institutionalized guidelines lessens standardization it also heightens concerns of subjectivity in autobiographical research. In turn, as Conway (1996) implied, exactness in both content and context of memory will vary and assumptions can be made that, even amongst tightly organized autobiographical studies, numerous paths of truth and perspective will exist. Therefore, it is impossible that autobiographical narratives of lived experiences are free from bias and subjectivity (Usher, 1996).

Trustworthiness

Narrative research itself is not ethically neutral. As Mercer (2007) pointed out, with almost all forms of research, data and theory can be critiqued while remaining disconnected from the research. However, with autobiography, intimate relationships with the research are a necessity (p. 573). Krathwohl (1998) described trustworthiness as the judgment of research credibility, for both qualitative and quantitative designs, that examines the appropriateness of data collection, analysis, and reporting processes of research (p. 337). Qualitative researchers address issues of trustworthiness by tending to issues of "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of their studies and findings" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 375). For qualitative researchers, the focus is not on establishing conclusions of truth but on conducting research that is trustworthy and meaningful. As Blumenfield-Jones (1995) suggested, "reality does not carry meaning with it. Meaning is derived from reality" (p. 29).

Studies using narrative inquiry establish trustworthiness through the details associated with the research process and procedures (Polkinghorne, 1988). The researcher holds the responsibilities of communicating the methodological patterns used throughout the study and report what, and how, ethical considerations guided the process (Riessman, 2008).

Source

Critics of narrative inquiry question the trustworthiness of narrative as a research methodology due to stories not always seeming to reflect reality. Reported by McAdams (2001), autobiographical narratives reflect the values and norms present in an individuals' life. And, although situated within similar cultural frames, memories and meaning may differ from person to person (p. 101). However, as Blumenfield-Jones (1995) affirmed, evidence of truth and reality are situational. Further, ideals of truth and reality are also influenced by various social statuses and constructs (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). Additionally, all aspects of understanding, including self-understanding, reflect language and experiences that, when put into autobiographical form produce narratives in place of self-knowledge (Anderson, 2001).

Autobiographical narratives reflect statuses and norms and are textual constructions of culture, language and lived experiences (Usher, 1996). Similarly, analyses of narrative data are influenced by social, historical, and cultural experiences (p. 21). In turn, narrative data is subject to possible bias and distortion in its interpretation and representation (Gass, 1994). With the possibility of fragmented data, narrative research could result in confusion and disconnectedness from the reader (Stretch, 1998).

Although influenced by external cultures, narrative accounts allow data to be interpreted with a focus on the single individual in context (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). Reliant upon the individual to retell and interpret memory, autobiographical research also serves as the source for such accounts and recollections (Freeman, 2008). Truth and accuracy for narrative research occurs through our interpretation derived from personal meaning and experiences (Stretch, 1998). With interpretations subjective to the reader, Savin-Baden and Niekerk (2007) asserted that the location, context, and place of the researcher must be considered. However, while interpretations of narrative are linked to the subjectivity of the researcher, narrative texts are research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Ethical Dilemmas of Critical Autobiographical Research

Critical autobiographical research shares the same general concerns with ethical dilemmas as autobiographical research and narrative inquiry. However, in addition to the concerns with subjectivity, trustworthiness, and source outlined above, critical autobiographical research posits additional dilemmas. Clements (1999) highlighted additional concerns for critical autobiographical research in his appraisal of critical autobiography as a research methodology. According to Clement, research drawing on a critical lens pursues more than a recollection of memories and events. Critical autobiographical research seeks to recall thoughts, feelings, and emotions connected to the experience (p. 24). However, such processes highlight concerns for ethical dilemmas due to, as Clement noted, the autobiographer's self-schemata may cause the researcher to remember an event in ways that are congruent with their present identity and in terms consistent with their personal perceptions and self-memory (p. 25). Further, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) highlighted that autobiographical research linked with a critical lens is considered quality research if the content and context align appropriately, includes more than positive perspective and beliefs, and is situated within a purpose of examining systemic practices for the purpose of promoting change.

Conclusion

For qualitative research, words, pictures, and objects represent forms of data (Neuman, 2006). Autobiographical research connects processes of learning with ways of knowing while simultaneously referring to social and cultural influences (Neuman, 2006; Richardson, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1988). Unlike other paradigms of research that, as Emihovich (1995) highlighted, are often rhetorical and marginalizing when examining issues that challenge normative values and status quo of the dominant culture, critical autobiographical research emancipates researcher's from the strongholds of traditional forms of research. Focused less on a state of being and more on the processes of learning and becoming, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the task for autobiographical researchers as

> Not so much to say that people, places, and things are this way or that way but they have a narrative history and are moving forward. The narrative research text is fundamentally a temporal text – about what has been, what is now, and what is becoming. (p. 146)

Autobiographical accounts are rooted in a purpose of deconstruct life's experiences, that according to Polkinghorne (2010), empower researches to analyze past events and actions as a means to examine previous outcomes as well as the planning for possible future outcomes.

As demonstrated through the telling and analyses of Walker's (2013) narrative, autobiographical research is designed to empower individuals, regardless of their background and profession. Thus, autobiographical research represents more than a paradigm of research. Offering more than sets of data to be analyzed for research purposes, autobiographical inquiry provides opportunities to situate one's self within the frame of systemic teachings while providing all individuals with opportunities to have their voice heard. And, by connecting personal life stories with inquiry, autobiographical research has the potential to transform the learning, values, and identities of individuals, institutions, and greater society.

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