

Stories of swimming and the embodied self in a three-dimensional narrative inquiry of transgender swimming experience

Carly Stewart

Bournemouth University

Abstract: Against a backdrop of narrative inquiry that rarely gives attention to the occasion of storytelling in its third-dimension—its narrative environment or place—this article provides an illustration from a recent narrative inquiry into the swimming experiences of a local transgender community group. I demonstrate how stories are at work sequentially in the narrative environment or place, and shine a light on how the embodied biographies of researcher and participants are in constant dialogue with one another, shaped by and shaping research process, its stories, and associated selves and identities over time. I emphasize the way knowledge is subject to social conditions and place, and researcher and participant’s embodied biographies. In listening and attending to the social organisation of the storying process we can create conditions that allow us to shift experiences and change the larger social, cultural and institutional narratives to live by.

Introduction

When narrative inquirers collect and analyse research stories, frequently the storying process itself, that is, the occasion of what is told, how, to whom and where is neglected. Often the focus is upon the telling of personal and social in stories over time via interviews or explored via other auto/biographical documents but rarely on the occasion and practices of storytelling in its narrative environment or place (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008). Exceptions might include reflection upon the interview occasion and of what that tellability means (see Sparkes and Stewart, 2019), however more often than not inquiry is two-dimensional and stripped of social context and consequences in the research moment (Hsieh, 2004). In response, some scholars have highlighted the importance of a three-dimensional inquiry (Clandenin and Connelly 2002; Clandenin, 2006) or

narrative practice (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008) approach that pays attention to the narrative environment or context of stories as they are lived and assembled; the axis of place. Supporting this methodological argument is a sociological one that conceives stories are not simply linguistic narrations, but are very much at work in the material world, performing themselves into bodies, machines, and architectural arrangements amongst other things as if they were living breathing things or social actors (Frank, 2010). Taken together, these scholars call for a narrative inquiry that is contextual, dialogical and pays attention to the practice and occasion of storying that is located in time and place.

In response to these theoretical and methodological points, in this article I turn attention directly to the storying process in an ethnographic project that aimed to explore the embodied experiences of a transgender community group as they go swimming each month. I provide an illustration of how stories are at work sequentially in the narrative environment or place, and shine a light on how autobiographical stories of researcher and participants are in constant dialogue with one another, shaped by and shaping the research process, its stories, and associated selves and identities over time. I was awakened to this process some time into the research where my personal stories of a competitive swimming background resurfaced, altering my research interactions and strategy, so shaping research stories heard and constructed. My early interactions with the group were characterised by a body emplaced and disappeared in the narrative environment of the swimming pool and leisure centre that I paid little-to-no attention to. Over time I realised my swimming body habitus was fundamental to research interactions and needed careful management to build trust and rapport, as I was positioned in the group in complex ways. As a result of this awareness I shifted my position from participant-observer to observer-participant (Sparkes and Smith 2014) that enabled me to shape and be shaped by the landscape in different ways. In what follows I present an illustration of from a narrative inquiry into transgender swimming experience to show what narrative inquirers working in places do. I pay attention to the ways my own experiences are relationally interwoven with the experiences of a local transgender community group in the narrative environment.

Three-dimensional narrative inquiry

In narrative inquiry, scholars refer simultaneously to narrative as phenomenon and method (Clandenin and Connelly, 2000). This is important to ascertain as often views of narrative as phenomenon and method are interlaced meaning the situation of how narrative is studied from different epistemological and ontological differences is complex and varied (e.g. see Smith 2010; Smith and Sparkes, 2006). Clandenin &

Connelly (2000, p. 20) observe that studying experience, however, is a point of constancy among narrative inquirers. They describe experience as:

‘...a (...) collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social.’

The reflexive role of the relational researcher to appreciate external and internal power relations framing research is not new (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). However, more often than not narrative inquiry tends not to employ methods and analytical focus of storytelling in situ, instead paying more attention to the way it is retold and storied in retrospect. For Clendenin (2006) an individual’s experience in the world is storied in the living and telling of it and that could be studied by living alongside another. Narrative inquirers then should not exclude themselves from participant’s experience and the landscape they are relationally inquiring into. As Silko (1997, p. 27) eloquently states, ‘viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on’. Similarly, Gubrium and Holstein (2008) refer to stories lived as *narrative practice*, taking us outside of stories themselves to the real-world actions associated with the construction of stories or the storying process assembled and received in everyday life. For them it is this narrative environment, beyond the transcript of a story, that researchers need direct contact with.

Clendenin (2006) and Clendenin and Connelly (2000) usefully conceptualize such inquiry as a metaphorical three-dimensional space based upon John Dewey’s (1934) writings on experience based upon three dimensions of interaction, continuity and place. *Continuity* refers to the dimension of positioning oneself on a continuum of past present and future (a temporality dimension). *Interaction* acknowledges the way that individuals are understood always in relation to social context (a personal and social dimension). *Situation* or place acknowledges that interactions always occur in specific places (a dimension of place). For Clendenin and Connelly (2000) using this set of terms, any given inquiry is defined by three-dimensional space and helps to represent the wholeness and richness of their own lives as researchers of the participants lives with which they engage.

The three-dimensional metaphor is useful because it has the potential to mobilise narrative inquirers to move towards fieldwork methodologies that capture the storying process manifest in real world actions. Similarly, it might enable others to appreciate misgivings that narrative inquiry is somewhat disembodied and bound within textual representations of

stories themselves, and instead to appreciate that narrative inquirers can attend to experiences as they are lived out. In particular three-dimensional narrative inquiry brings narrative researchers into line with recent calls to seek the senses in an embodied inquiry of the felt and lived immediacy of experience (Sparkes, 2017). Clendenin and Huber (2002) illustrate the ways in which narrative researchers are able to attend to intimate bodily knowledge, inner emotions and aesthetic reactions across time, place and events as they study experience narratively. In their analysis of school teachers they pay attention to the body knowledge that teachers carry with them in the social landscape of the school and of how this linked to storied identities or 'stories to live by'. Clendenin and Huber (2002) make the point that stories to live by (identities) are shaped and lived in places. Places, they illustrate, can give you particular cultural stories to live by; stories which need be written on the body and can result in a struggle for a coherent plotline about where you have come from, how you are and who you might become. Three-dimensional narrative inquiry therefore encompasses Frank's (2010) explanation of the relationship between experience and stories, rejecting a mimetic understanding that experience comes before stories. Instead, experience is an enactment of pre-given stories; that is stories shape actions. It is this practice that we can enter into and observe in the narrative environment (Gubrium and Holstein 2008).

Entering into the midst of stories

'Participants' stories, inquirers' stories, social, cultural and institutional stories are all ongoing as narrative inquiries begin. Being in the field, that is, engaging with participants is walking into the midst of stories.' (Clendenin, 2007, p. 47).

My inquiries began as I came alongside a local transgender group in the living out of their stories in a research project on their swimming experiences. Interestingly, the group had already started the endeavour of swimming and had organised the occasional self-funded private hire of a public swimming pool. I became immediately interested that the group had chosen this activity because as far as stories to live by go, inclusive and trouble-free swimming is a not story I'd heard in the research literature. On the contrary, it testifies physical activity and sport for transgender people can be particularly difficult because of the ways in which it is organised around gendered structures and ideologies, and of the centrality of the body within these. For example, in competitive sport there are gender-based policies and clear (not uncontroversial) examples of 'gender policing', which prevent inclusion (Sykes, 2006). It is perhaps of no surprise the primary barrier to transgender participation in sport and physical activity is a lack of inclusive and comfortable environments. A consistent theme is the literature

is the high level of fear and anxiety experienced by transgender people in relation to the changing rooms where transgender bodies are subject to social stigma (Elling-Machartzki, 2017; Jones et al. 2017; Hargie et al. 2017; Lucas-Carr and Krane, 2012). Public swimming pools arguably exacerbate physical activity landscapes that are framed by and structure plotlines of binary gender where sexed bodies are on display and subject to gaze. The transgender bodies in this research study were in a range of transitional phases, some with scars that became talking point for the group. Echoing previous research findings, many of the participants were fearful of swimming at first and some had not been swimming for at least a decade.

I started to swim with the community transgender group and began the process of rapport building for almost a year before gaining research funding to provide regular swimming sessions over a year. The places of the inquiry included a local leisure centre; specifically, the reception area, the changing rooms and the pool itself. This particular pool was chosen by the group because of its individual cubicle changing area and could be described as a small leisure centre. In addition, other places of inquiry included a room in the centre of town where the group met fortnightly, and other social spaces used for research meetings such as an inclusive cafe in town and a room hired in the library. I also attended public facing local social activities with the group. Data collection methods included sensory reflexive fieldwork and observations, arts-based participant-led drawing, professional drawing, in-depth individual and focus group interviews. Through these means I folded into the lives of a transgender community group over a period of approximately two-years.

Positionality is a central matter for three-dimensional narrative inquiry where the sensory ethnographer shapes lives and research stories (Clandenin and Huber 2002; Clandenin 2006; Sparkes 2017). The complexities of positionality came about almost immediately as I realised that my identity under a collective LGBT+ label was not as relevant as I'd first assumed and I quickly understood my privilege, and naivety, as cis-gendered—that is someone who sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex. Introducing oneself and preferred pronouns is a core part of group activity and I blundered through saying, 'Carly, she/her', despite being at the end of the circle and having plenty of time to prepare my words the first time I attended group. It felt like a level of privilege akin to asking someone who is of 'white' race/ethnicity to comment upon how often they feel their 'whiteness'. I had never thought about it until that point and it reverberated uncomfortably through my being causing me to wince inside. I was not a cultural insider.

Further still my relationship with swimming was unequivocally miles apart from the group. It was like an old love affair; one that feels wearing to think about now, but necessary for self-development and a fulfilling

autobiography. Having been a competitive swimmer, a swimming teacher and swimming coach between the ages of 11-21 years, the swimming pool was a familiar environment or a *lifeworld* (Merleau-Ponty, 1969) for me. McNarry et al (2019) depict this lifeworld well, explaining that swimmers cover anywhere from 25km to 100km per week in the pool, a level of intense training widely accepted as the norm. My routine movements to, in and from changing rooms and swimming pools are characterised by a taken-for-grantedness or a *natural attitude*. I have, for example, a deeply entrenched systematic regime for drying my body with a towel after taking a bath or shower, often noticed by my partner with jest. However, I had been out of the competitive swimming world for 18 years and I rarely swim. I don't feel particularly connected to it in any way, I don't miss it and very few if any of my work colleagues would know I once referred to myself as a swimmer (I even wrote a dissertation on it). Yet when I started the research project, I hadn't given my relationship to swimming any thought. My decision to go swimming with the group was based upon the opportunities I saw to observe the participants in and around the pool, and to build rapport with them whilst living out their stories.

In what follows I draw forward an example to illustrate something of how I engaged in a narrative inquiry into the lives of transgender individuals as they composed their lives in moments of the swimming project. The story I present is partial, as all stories are, carefully composed and selected to show something of the living out of narrative inquiry of how our lives became interwoven in the swimming project landscapes bound with structures and power relations. In doing so I emphasize the way knowledge is subject to social conditions and place, and researcher and participant biographies.

An illustrative three-dimensional narrative inquiry

Engaging with Jake's experience of swimming; water and skin

I began to enter into the lives of particular individuals and their interactions within the research context and places. The story starts with Jake, a 27-year-old trans male, and his picture as it is produced in the context of drawing after swimming in the reception area. There is a café that had always closed for the evening and the public were long gone. I would tentatively lay pens and paper out on the table and ask people to draw their experience of swimming as they came out of the changing rooms. When struggling with a response to this abstract concept, I prompted, how did it feel to swim, how did they feel before and how do they feel now? I wouldn't interrupt or start a conversation. I got the sense they found this activity easier than talking to me at this point. Their embodiment in the leisure centre revealed a certain caution around group

outsiders reflecting the context in which they lived. Jake's personal choice of words shows a sense of how his stories on entering the swimming pool landscape are structured with plotlines of 'fear' and 'dread' for the activity to come. The group often used the word dysphoria in their pictures to describe feeling out of sync with their bodies before swimming via a mode of dissociation or of lacking desire (Frank 2013) and Jake's picture is characteristic of this theme.

However, importantly Jake's picture expresses an aesthetic experience that possesses an emotional quality (Clandenin and Huber 2002). He, like many others in the group, depicts a shift from 'self-loathing' and a body lacking desire to a 'body confidence' and a body producing desire in the moment at least (Frank 2013). The drawing illustrates the three-dimension narrative inquiry. On the personal-social dimension it takes us inwards towards internal aesthetic feelings and reactions, as well as outwards to social conditions that frame interactions. On the dimension of temporality or continuity the experience takes us backwards and forwards pointing to before and after moments. Finally, on place the picture illustrates how personal and social context is storied over time in order to establish coherence and meaning for my evaluation, as the researcher in a specific moment and place.

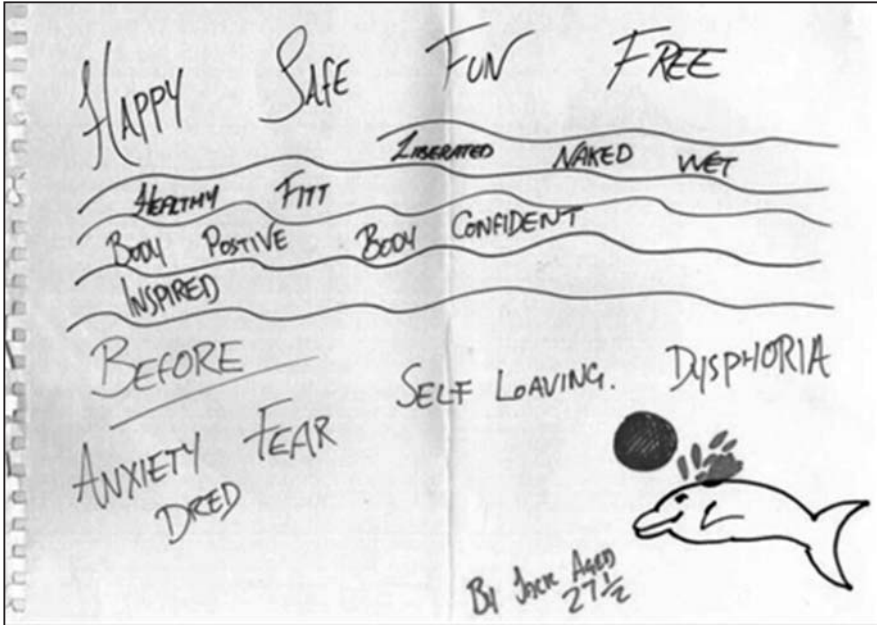


Fig. 1: Jake's picture

Jake's picture entered the narrative inquiry again at a latter point, in the group's safe place; their Friday night group meetings. A locally hired room in a LGBT+ friendly area in town was used for meetings which took place once a month. Here, interviews about the swimming sessions were conducted and I met Jake properly for our first recorded research interview. We were sitting in the circle, having introduced ourselves and pronouns, and the group leader introduced the opportunity to talk about swimming. In a lively way, Jake spoke up immediately: "it has changed my life, honestly I can't say how much...". His storytelling immediately drew me towards his present life that had hope and was undergoing significant change around a personal physical activity and health agenda. I was taken aback; this was the first time anyone had verbalised anything about swimming, so I quickly got my voice recorder and we found a place to continue the conversation. I found that for Jake, along with many others, talking about swimming took individuals backward in time and place to their former (younger) selves' pre-transition as they shared stories of childhood and/or family. For many, this was the last time they had been swimming. Jake recalls:

"I never felt I could go, because I identify as male and obviously to have a chest, um the thought of being in the water and anybody seeing my chest would physically make me feel sick...my friends they'd go to hotels during the summer and they'd want to go swimming and stuff and I wouldn't be allowed to wear a t-shirt or anything like that in the pool so I just stopped going. I couldn't be who I wanted to be."

In the telling, Jake describes a sense of having other cultural and institutional narratives written on his body. The narratives that structure swimming 'places' exclude transgender bodies via health and safety policies that arguably legitimise the policing of gender appropriate bodies in public. For Jake and others swimming places were not for them and left them struggling for a coherent plotline of who they were. Further, stories of Jake's swimming past are laced with storylines of relationships, extended families and of being able to see himself as connected to important people in his life including his young niece.

Jake had learned that he did not have a physical and cultural swimming place and had not fully submerged his body in water for over 12 years. He remembers his first experience of swimming with the group as a vivid sensorium, his body no longer feeling detached but experientially distributed across its environment as he feels the water on his skin. It is recalled as an emplaced and emotional experience and a transcendent one, full of energetic charge in the way he tells me:

“For years I didn’t feel a t-shirt or like the wind on my skin because of the bind, it was so restricting and I would avoid baths because I could see myself in a bath, I’d be so quick in a shower because I hated [my chest]...like to feel water on my skin and to be able to just stand there, and just do you know what I mean? I can’t, I’m not very good at explaining it. The first time jumping into that pool, oh my god...it’s one of the best feelings I’ve ever, ever had...I got into the car and cried”

Since this experience Jake told me of his quest to claim physical activity cultural narratives as his own. He had since been swimming in a public pool and had joined a gym, writing over his memories he might have carried forward from earlier years. His new story was guiding him towards a hopeful future described in the following way:

“Because of these sessions giving me baby steps, like stepping stones I don’t think off my own back I’d have been able to do it...Just getting over that changing room anxiety has helped because I’m going to the gym more...having a safe space for swimming has been the start of something amazing for me, like, it’s got me back in love with fitness and myself and I’ve lost 3 stone...it’s getting a euphoric buzz, like you can do this! You’ve taught me that my body is my own and that, like it doesn’t matter. It’s transformed by life, there is no doubt. You remember the first time we went swimming and we had to do the pictures afterwards?

I’ve got them here...

I reached for Jake’s picture. It had become so much more than a momentary expression of personal swimming experience, which is where the inquiry started. I was profoundly moved by talking to Jake and sharing in his story of where he has come from to who he was now and who he might become. Losing weight was tied to his ability to be able to get the major transitional surgery he wanted, and swimming had awakened him to another possible story of himself as male and a man.

The artistry of Jake’s narrative is strongly visible in this section of the research conversation where through our engagement we experienced a certain quality of attentiveness and emotion (Clandenin and Huber 2002). Jake expressed his emotional response throughout and I came away from this interview profoundly moved. As I walked home that evening my institutional stories came into the research space – impact! This is what real impact feels like. It was at this point I really began to understand how swimming was a current running through lives was as they were being

lived. The research project had created a rupture to the dominant exclusionary story of swimming for transgender people and had allowed them to claim narratives of swimming for the first time in years. For Jake it gave him new stories of his physically active body to live by.

Swimming landscapes

I shift attention to the social, cultural and institutional narrative contexts and the landscape of the swimming pool to see myself not so much as provider of swimming sessions as but part of them. I had not been awake to my own story; it was swimming beneath undetected for some time. In order to understand how I experienced the swimming pool landscape with the group, it needs to be understood in juxtaposition to their experience of the same place as I entered into relationships with them. Alison, a transgender female, describes it perfectly in a research interview:

“OK. Can you remember the first time you walked down a street at night and you were afraid, on your own? Right, I can describe when it happened to me

She describes walking through a dark tunnel alone at night, a group of men on the other side

...that is what a pool feels like. Vulnerable. VERY vulnerable, and you never lose that feeling once you've got it. Every time you walk down the road you're looking for danger, you know, all the time. It's hyper-vigilance that wears you down”

Alison describes a narrative of hyper-vigilance and intense fear. This is the same feeling that the group describe as being intensified in the reception area and changing rooms. The embodiment of fear and anxiety expressed in the pictures is written on their bodies each week. On the other hand, I experience subjectivity in a leisure centre with an exceptional right to be there as I spent most of my childhood and young adult life in them. I move seamlessly from the waiting area, through the barriers to the changing cubicles. As the door opens from reception into the changing rooms, the echoed acoustics, humidity and musky smells of chlorine and cleaning products are familiar and nostalgic. They make me shudder at times, transporting me back to 5.30 am on a cold dark winter morning to train before school. The well-established routine of undressing, swimsuit already on, of feeling cold wet tiles underfoot as I remove my socks and head to the poolside is familiar and deeply engrained. I used to do this routine 12 times a week. My swimsuit now fits differently, I am aware of

that, but otherwise I rarely reflect on my journey from the changing room cubicle to the pool. I am in the mode of aware unawareness.

Entering the water itself I am jolted back to my body. It is a conscious negotiation of place. The water is cold and I have to slide in, something I am not used to and I do not enjoy. As a former swimmer though it may sound incredible, I hated the initial cold and wetness and it is precisely these sensory moments that do not give me entirely fond memories of swimming. I am motivated by getting to feel familiar to the group, to build some trust, connections and hone in on some rich interactions. However, by the end of the first half hour I am already shivering in the pool. Should I swim a little to warm-up? I am never sure. I do on occasions though I am aware of myself not only as one of the only cis-gender people in the pool but as one that glides with ease and confidence through the water. I feel my privilege more intensely than ever in the water. I also learn that I do not know how to play in the swimming pool, only swim. As a child, I rarely swam or played in the pool on holiday, and I rarely swim now. The group play with balls and inflatables and I play with them but it does not come naturally to my disciplined swimming body-self. The balls fly overhead, there are inflatable races and there is the sense that everyone becomes a child again in the pool. However, even my handling of balls flying at my head in the pool is telling (following swimming I played a high-level of volleyball for 12 years). Ball throwing is however my way to connect to the group as eye contact is needed so I join in. In one session I help teach Robbie, then gender non-binary (they/them), how to swim and I was pleased to see they recalled this moment in their interview.

After a few months, due to illness I had to occupy a difference position in the swimming pool landscape as an observer from poolside. I worried I was losing connection with the group and activities but in fact this gave me an entirely different perspective on the environment and my place within it. Standing further back to see the pure joy as they entered the water moved me emotionally. It caused me to reflect. Were they more comfortable and freer to be themselves without me being in the pool? Narratives of 'community' and of bodies journeying together emerged from the interview and drawing data. However, I realised that I was no less a part of the swimming landscape in this new position. One interaction that illustrates my position is captured in my field notes:

April has a long braid in today that goes past her bum. She walks onto the poolside. She is nervous holding her arms over her chest but comes to say hello to me after me got to speak more last session. She says, 'I wish there was no change over with the children, I wish they could all just F**k off'. I think about how is not a nice experience for her but that perhaps it is good for these

children to see a more diverse range of bodies. Still, this should not have to be her responsibility.

The session does not get off with a smooth start. There is a new lifeguard with an Australian accent, white, cis-gendered male, mid 40's. He asks me if there is a party booked and do I need the inflatables. I am annoyed that he doesn't know who the group are who about to come into the pool. I tell him they use inflatables. There are also other exceptions, like clothing that don't apply here. I wonder if anyone has briefed him and he doesn't appear to have an aura of sensitivity about him at all. To add to it "Mr no floaties" is on duty. His embodiment says to me that he is tolerant and will do his job, that's all. Becky comes onto poolside; she is alarmed the lifeguard doesn't know who they are and doesn't know their needs in terms of their safety.

The session starts. Soon some kids leaving the pool walk past the glass windows in a group. They glance in, see April in the shallow pool, walk on, double take and come back. The next few minutes feel long as they dart into view staring, talking, laughing, and dart out of view before reappearing again. I stare at Mr no floaties, he looks blankly at me. I point at the glass. He raises his eyebrows, slowly skulks down from his lifeguard chair and swaggers towards me in a laboured way. He barely makes eye contact and stands beside me looking outwards. I tell him about the kids who are, in his defence, behind him. 'Yeah, we used to have blinds', he says. 'Well', I say, 'can you tell them to move on? I think they will if you tell them to. This is not a nice experience for the group to be stared at'. He picks up his walkie talkie and tells me he will notify the duty manager as he ambles off back to the chair, still no eye contact.

In this moment there are multiple stories intersecting and bumping into one another. I felt incredibly protective of the group and of our shared stories of community and inclusivity that I had entered whole-heartedly into. I recognize my own felt tensions as the lifeguard on duty's stories of swimming bumped against ours and had done in the past, earning him the 'Mr no floaties' title. I dismissed his attitude and embodiment that I saw an expression of his not understanding the group, their needs or the concept of inclusivity and creating a safe space. I pushed to have the group's stories of swimming understood in that moment but to little avail and I wondered how easily their stories of swimming might turn back quickly into conflicting stories with others in in the pool space and stop indefinitely.

Reflections on living alongside stories

This short illustration of research moments and the swimming stories in which lives are entwined helps us to see how narrative inquiry space is three-dimensional. It shows how field texts (drawings, observations, interviews) are composed and shaped in the living alongside stories' and later placed in research texts such as this one. The three-dimensions of narrative inquiry are not just retrospective representations of human experience but in lived immediacy of that experience that narrative researchers can attend to in the world (Clandenin 2006; Frank 2010). This said my own biographical work, done in both the narrative environment (the swimming pool) and narrative occasion (recollection in field notes and research texts such as this one), cannot be separated from the circumstances of the storytelling and mediates the shape of the story told (Gubrium and Holstein 2008). The internal organisation of the research stories and my place within them are reflexively intertwined with my circumstances as a storyteller. My presence in the swimming pool for example, affects what I say about myself and others. This is illustrated in the moment where I realise my competent embodied swimming self may be affecting the stories I get to hear. My swimming story first put to work in the social world for the purpose of building rapport with the group comes to light as I realise that I am not aligning with the representational needs of the occasion. Changing position on the swimming landscape, to poolside, I was given the privilege of observing interactions and listening to discussions I might not otherwise have heard and told. Following Gubrium and Holstein (2008) storytelling and its occasions such as these are as important as the content of what is communicated, illustrated through linking my own swimming story to the complex practices of narrativity.

According to Frank (2010) for narrative analysis to have done its job the quality of companionship between humans and stories will be improved. In terms of my own stories, I am certainly in the habit of trying to attend to my own life as I live and tell it alongside theirs, to slow down and look to see narrative structures that characterise our lives (Clandenin 2006). To this end this the individuals in this research have changed the stories I live by, and in effect they have changed my life as I continue with an agenda to try and change theirs. In listening and attending to the social organisation of the storying process we can create conditions that allow us to shift experiences, to give back stories of swimming and try to change the larger social, cultural and institutional narratives by which they live. This acknowledgement requires engaging in a narrative ethics of negotiation, respect and openness to multiple voices (Frank, 2010; Clandenin 2006) and one thing this illustration points clearly towards is an inquiry that works to understand the lifeguards' stories and to bring them into conversation

with the groups' stories of swimming. Doing so will challenge institutional stories, and open up dialogue between research, practice and policy, shifting the narrative environment and stories to live by for all involved. I live in hope that this narrative inquiry will help physical activity spaces become more inclusive more educative places, even in some small way, for all that use them.

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Biographical note

Carly is Head of Department for Sport and Event Management, Bournemouth University. Her research interests are primarily focused around narrative identities and body-self relationships as they relate to the sociology of storytelling in a variety of sport and physical activity contexts. Email: cstewart@bournemouth.ac.uk

