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Toward an Inquiry of Discomfort

Guiding Transformation in “Emancipatory” Narrative Research

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This article argues for conducting emancipatory narrative research with the explicit intent of transforming participants' lives by opening up new subjective possibilities. Drawing from Megan Boler's pedagogy of discomfort and Gubrium and Holstein's active interviewing, a narrative research method called an inquiry of discomfort is proposed. An inquiry of discomfort emphasizes the proactive and transformative potential of research projects for both researcher and participant. The aim of an inquiry of discomfort is to identify and promote a beneficial shift from dualistic, categorical, and entrenched subjective positionality to a more ambiguous engagement with social reality. The argument is considered in light of preliminary empirical findings from a narrative pilot study of masculine heterosexual subjectivity in graduate education, conducted in the fall of 2003. Based on theoretical and empirical evidence, the general features of an inquiry of discomfort within an emancipatory narrative study are presented.

Keywords: *narrative research; active interviewing; critical theory*

Prologue

It is a typical Colorado Front Range windy day in fall 2003, and I (first author) just finished the last in a series of three pilot interviews for my upcoming dissertation. I am conducting a narrative inquiry of the production and performance of masculinity and heterosexuality in graduate school. On the long drive home, I'm listening to the final interview tape and reflecting. During the past 2 months, I interviewed Mark three times in a parked car

overlooking the city and university below. Each time, we were filled with coffee and nervously eager to talk about his version(s) of “male” and “heterosexual” in a “hard science” PhD program. For a novice interviewer, he was an ideal participant. He’d previously thought about and journaled on the questions I asked: What does it mean to be a man/heterosexual? How are you a man/heterosexual? How are you a man/heterosexual in graduate school? All it seemed I had to do was provide the all-important prompt “Tell me a story about . . .” to elicit his tales of “experience.” But I had wanted more. I hoped Mark and I would emerge from the study with flexible and more complex understandings of our gendered and sexed selves. Instead of allowing Mark’s responses to “stand for themselves,” I engaged him critically, asking hard questions, pointing out paradoxes, highlighting ambiguities, and challenging his and my assumptions. Mark responded and asked critical questions of himself. My goal was not to call out the social oppressiveness of Mark’s maleness and heterosexuality. Rather, I sought transformation: to loosen the nuts and bolts of the sometimes invisible iron chalice constraining Mark and I in our gendered and sexed subjectivities.

But, as I drove home, I wondered about the ethics of my study. What right did I have to challenge Mark’s maleness and heterosexuality, to want him to change? Gubrium and Holstein’s (2003) *Postmodern Interviewing* described active interviewing as a way to “provide an environment conducive to the production of a range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues, and not be confined by predetermined agendas” (p. 75). My interview style was certainly active but also counselor-esque and even journalistic, albeit falling happily short of being adversely confrontational. Disconcertingly, however, it seemed I had a predetermined agenda in consciously researching to loosen Mark’s and my gendered and sexed entrenchments. I desired both a method and a justification for conducting this kind of research. This article is an examination of the reasons, rationales, methods, and ethics for conducting a study with a predetermined agenda to facilitate and guide the personal transformation of the research participant.

Purpose

This article is broadly concerned with the practice and ethics of conducting narrative research that facilitates transformation on social and individual levels. We refer to this type of narrative research as “emancipatory” not to revive modernist discourse but to call direct attention to a kind of subjective “agency” within postmodern research. Here, *emancipatory* stands for the

political aim of this research, characterized by Best and Kellner (1991) as dismantling the “prisons of received identities and discourses of exclusion, and to encourage the proliferation of differences of all kinds” (p. 57). The agency and emancipation we seek to encourage in research participants is also evoked by the work of Judith Butler (1990), for whom agency is created when identity is reconceptualized as “performative” and the possibility of changing or refusing some kinds of performances in favor of new ones emerges: “Cultural configurations of sex and gender . . . might then become articulable within the discourses that establish intelligible cultural life, confounding the very binarism of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness” (p. 149). The transformation sought in this work is emancipatory in its potential to loosen the bonds of given identities, foster the creation of new modes of being, and challenge the rigid connections between bodies and subjectivities.

Herein, we argue for conducting emancipatory narrative research with the explicit intent of transforming participants’ lives by opening up new subjective possibilities. The argument is situated within the theoretical traditions of postmodernism/poststructuralism and feminist and queer theories. Drawing from Megan Boler’s (1999) pedagogy of discomfort and Gubrium and Holstein’s (2003) active interviewing, we propose a narrative research method called an inquiry of discomfort. This mode of inquiry challenges conventional understandings of qualitative research that posit the researcher as a passive recorder of an individual’s experience. Instead, an inquiry of discomfort emphasizes the proactive and transformative potential of research projects for both researcher and participant. This approach to research inquiry fosters a specific kind of transformation: the creation of ambiguous and flexible subjects as touted by a pedagogy of discomfort. The aim of an inquiry of discomfort is to identify and promote an intentional and conscious shift from dualistic, categorical, and entrenched positionality to a more ambiguous engagement with social reality. We argue this shift is beneficial to participants, as Boler (1999) notes, “to question the familiar may lead to greater sense of connection, a fuller sense of meaning, and in the end a greater sense of ‘comfort’ with who we have ‘chosen’ to be and how we act in our lives” (p. 197).

An inquiry of discomfort in narrative inquiry is more explicit than traditional experience-as-recorded research in that the latter obscures or detaches itself from the resultant individual transformation. Furthermore, an inquiry of discomfort is differentiated from other forms of postmodern/poststructural research in that it initially and explicitly seeks to fragment and make ambiguous socially constructed and performed subjectivities. Tierney (1994)

argues that “research is meant to be transformative; we do not merely analyze or study an object to gain greater understanding, but instead struggle to investigate how individuals and groups might be better able to change their situations” (p. 99). Ultimately, by identifying a certain type of subjective transformation—from categorical and entrenched to one of ambiguity—an inquiry of discomfort attempts to foster changes in research participants the overall emancipatory research project seeks in society.

The argument begins by describing the current guide for postmodern interviewing: active interviewing (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). We argue active interviewing is insufficient for emancipatory research because although it provides the necessary dialogic space for engaging alternative ways of knowing, it supplies no guide for research participants to understand and challenge the fixity of those knowledges within themselves. Thus, the active interview process detaches itself from participants’ subjective transformations. Many researchers employing the methods of active interviewing acknowledge its processes can and often do result in individual transformations (Miller, 1996; Wiersma, 1992). The transformative potential of narrative research and the social justice aims of the emancipatory research project provide emancipatory researchers a guideline for ethically fostering and facilitating subjective changes within research participants.

To elucidate a method for challenging researcher and participant subjectivities, we borrow from and advance Boler’s (1999) pedagogy of discomfort. We first describe Boler’s work before considering its position within an emancipatory research project. Narrative inquiry is then established as an ideal and necessary vehicle for employing an inquiry of discomfort. Finally, the argument is considered in light of some preliminary empirical findings from the first author’s study of masculine heterosexual subjectivity in graduate education, conducted in the fall of 2003. Within this emancipatory narrative study, elements of an inquiry of discomfort are identified as potential methodological and ethical improvements. Based on theoretical and empirical evidence, we then present the general features of an inquiry of discomfort within an emancipatory narrative study.

What Is Active Interviewing?

Gubrium and Holstein’s (2003) active interviewing encompasses both the *hows* (the processes that unfold in an interview) and the *whats* (the content of researcher questions and interview responses) of research interviewing. It is an interview strategy informed by postmodern and other

critical stances that argue interviewing is not about asking questions to elicit participant “truths”; it is a method for socially constructing knowledge. In active interviewing, meaning is not located solely in the process of questioning, receiving, and interpreting participant responses, but rather, “it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter” (p. 68). The active interview includes active participants who are the “productive source of knowledge” (p. 74). The active interview process includes narrative incitement, positional shifts, and resource activation. The active researcher creates the space for the telling of complex stories (narrative incitement) from variegated participant positions (positional shifts) with the participants’ full array of knowledge resources (resource activation). The aim of interview questions are “to activate the respondent’s stock of knowledge and bring it to bear on the discussion at hand in ways that are appropriate to the research agenda” (p. 75). Active interviewing is an interview method typical of narrative research.

Why Active Interviewing Is “Not Enough” in Emancipatory Research

Active interviewing successfully creates the space within a narrative interview for obtaining complex stories, adopting a variety of subject positions, and activating repressed or marginalized knowledges. The result is a better or richer story. However, active interviewing does not actively pursue the participant transformations that can and often do result from the telling of new and more complex stories. The respondent is provided no guide for valuing the creation of or engaging with emergent and flexible subjectivities.

The active interview is a necessary, but not sufficient, method for direct participant transformation(s). It is necessary in that it creates a space for telling complex, multiperspectival, and information-rich stories. It is insufficient in that it does not track or guide the research participants’ subjective transformations. In other words, it does not provide a way to explore to what extent research participants engage in or retreat from inhabiting and performing ambiguous subjectivities (Anzaldúa, 1987). How can the emancipatory research project be conducted such that it facilitates what Ellsworth and Miller (1996) refer to as working difference, “the possibility of engaging with and responding to the fluidity and malleability of identities and difference, of refusing fixed and static categories of sameness or otherness” (p. 247)? Given that the emancipatory narrative research project aims to disrupt the fixity of adopted subject positions and open the possibility of

performing new subjectivities, how can the emancipatory narrative researcher rightly make the active interview both an investigation and an intervention?

Before describing this method for fostering participant transformation, we make the point that narrative inquiry is already an intervention. From there, we argue that making the research as intervention explicit and valuable to the participant is more ethical than treating the participants' transformation as either a by-product of research or merely additional data.

Narrative Inquiry as Intervention

Many narrative inquirers, especially from the helping fields of psychology, counseling, and social work, write about the interventional nature of narrative inquiry. A common theme among their contributions is the recognition that narrative research is a potentially transformative process that can deeply change participants' and researchers' ways of viewing and being themselves (Bar-On, 1996; Bloom, 1996; Miller, 1996; Tillmann-Healy, 2001; Wiersma, 1992). Biographical research "is less like a formal research set of a priori rules and more like an intervention without the clear boundaries or a contract that a clinical intervention contains as a given" (Bar-On, 1996, p. 9). When studying an academic woman's self-transformation, Wiersma (1992) found that simply the act of telling and retelling her story facilitated change. Her story

is now better in that it has taken on explanatory power as well as passion and vigor, context, congruence, and control. Her story is now filled with dynamic tension, encompassing the good and the bad, the acceptable and the unacceptable wishes and roles, motivations, and obstacles. It captures the bitter-sweet ambiguity of her life and of all lives. (p. 211)

The narrative interview is also the potential site of a Foucauldian confessional (Foucault, 1978) in which participants, ideally yet dangerously, feel comfortable and safe to tell their stories. The narrative inquiry project is highly interventional.

When the participant opens up to the researcher in ways similar to that of a psychotherapist, revealing deeply personal information, the ethical responsibility of the researcher is called into question. Such testimonials are often an important part of personal transformation. Thus, an ethical dilemma presents itself. How is the researcher responsible for the changes in the participant that inevitably result from the research process? How far should the researcher go in promoting or encouraging such changes? Some recommend

the narrative researcher should have formal clinical training (Miller, 1996). We present this ethical dilemma to make obvious the interventional nature of the narrative inquiry project. We argue that because narrative research is often transformative, the researcher's role in that transformation should be carefully considered and made explicit, whether it is passive and removed or, in our case, active and directional. Although participant transformation in the studies cited above was viewed as an interesting and important by-product of research, we believe narrative researchers can and in many cases should make explicit the features and procedures of research-induced transformation.

In an emancipatory research project, participant transformation will reflect the goal of the research. In this way, the research participants engage with and become the changes the project seeks in social reality. As a capillary locality, the research interview is a trajectory of creationary power, and according to Foucault (1978), it is the local that is the site of revolution: "There is no locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead, there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case" (pp. 95-96). As participants engage in research-supported criticism that is "indispensable for any transformation," they learn that their subjectivities are not as self-evident as they believed (Foucault, 1988). They discover the agency that comes with choosing and adopting subject positions from available discourses and locating those not readily articulable. Just as the emancipatory research project seeks to bring forward to society buried, marginalized, and hidden subjective discourses, the research participant becomes the revolutionary locality in which those subjectivities are embodied.

In the following sections, we elucidate a method for challenging researcher and participant subjectivities, borrowing from and advancing Boler's (1999) pedagogy of discomfort. We first describe Boler's work before considering its position within an emancipatory research project. Narrative inquiry is then established as an ideal and necessary vehicle for employing an inquiry of discomfort.

From Pedagogy to an Inquiry of Discomfort

Pedagogy of discomfort is a teaching practice that encourages students to question "cherished beliefs and assumptions" (Boler, 1999, p. 176) by positioning themselves as witnesses (as opposed to spectators) to social injustices and structurally limiting practices such that they see and act within the world as ambiguous and flexible subjects. Although pedagogy specifically refers to teaching practices and knowledge production in the

classroom, scientific research is a means by which knowledge is created in and by academic disciplines. Especially within the discipline of education, pedagogy and inquiry are often inextricably intertwined. Research informs practice, practice determines research agendas and informs research methods, and practitioners engage in research (action research). Knowledge is complexly conceptualized as the cocreation of a research-practice agenda in which the contribution of one is inseparable from the other. Pedagogy of discomfort is an example of a teaching practice informed by the discourse of research as it critiques individualized critical inquiry and calls for a “collectivized engagement in learning to see differently” (p. 176). Similar to research projects, Boler’s classrooms and their social environments are places to explore, investigate, and ultimately create knowledge that is “shifting and contingent” (p. 177).

Boler’s (1999) work primarily targets the individual student. Emancipatory research targets social structures and disciplines, calling on or providing fodder for political activism. Emancipatory research methods are already similar to those of an inquiry of discomfort in that they potentially cause individuals to view and engage with the world in ambiguous and contradictory ways, thereby transforming their underlying assumptions and beliefs. An inquiry of discomfort furthers this through a clear articulation of its methods and intentions, as well as its integration within narrative inquiry.

Narrative as an Inquiry of Discomfort

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research methodology borrowing ideologically from and cutting across various literary disciplines, anthropology, humanities, and the social sciences. Simultaneously a theory, a phenomenon, and a method, narrative “names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and names the patterns of inquiry for its study,” bringing “theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experiences as lived” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, pp. 2-3). Its methods involve eliciting and interpreting individual and social accounts of lived experience. Theoretically, it aligns with social constructivist and linguistic accounts of existence: Storied individuals live storied lives in narrative contexts. Narrative inquiry often presupposes knowledge to be a dialogic cocreation between participant and researcher. Furthermore, stories and those who tell them are situated and temporal. Narrative accounts therefore can and often do change across contexts and with time. Given the intersubjective nature of knowledge construction and the transforming potential of creating

narrative accounts, narrative research is useful for employing a pedagogy of discomfort in the service of inquiry. As an inquiry of discomfort, narrative challenges the assumptions and beliefs of participants, researchers, and readers. Transformation is further facilitated, tracked, and interpreted, thus providing an invaluable account of the transformations undergone in an emancipatory narrative research project.

An emancipatory narrative inquiry of discomfort takes as its primary goal the transformation of individuals into ambiguous selves. The aim is to help participants recount complicated, contradictory, and ambiguous stories that inevitably emerge from the recognition that ethical, emotional, and value paradoxes coexist. Boler (1999) argues that inhabiting an ambiguous self leads to “a fuller sense of meaning” and “allows a breathing space” where “through the capacity to shift our sense of positionality and modes of seeing, we can allow ourselves to inhabit the ‘old familiar’ spaces and begin our process of inquiry by noticing where we are presently situated” (p. 197). Here, the value of ambiguity is in the service of knowledge and learning, but when applied to an inquiry of discomfort, ambiguity functions more deeply, on the level participant’s self-understanding. Within an emancipatory inquiry of discomfort, we conceptualize action in terms of transformations in the participants’ narratives of their subjectivities. These transformations may very well be accounts of actions, yet they reflect ideological changes in how the participants and researchers view themselves as subjects in the world. In this way, changes in the participants and researchers’ stories are the “data” by which the successes of inquiry of discomfort can be measured. Do the stories become increasingly complex? Do they account for divergent and seemingly contradictory views? Do they reflect the adoption of new subjective positions? By consciously employing an inquiry of discomfort, emancipatory narrative inquirers can seek to actively create such a transformation that helps participants, themselves, and readers become more ambiguous in complex social and political contexts.

A Narrative Study of Masculinity and Heterosexuality: Conducting an Inquiry of Discomfort

In fall 2003, the first author began a pilot study of masculinity and heterosexuality within the context of graduate education. The purpose of this research was to hear and tell the stories of masculinities, sexualities, and learnings of a heterosexual male graduate student; to analyze how and in what structural ways this student’s stories were discursively produced

within graduate education and studies; and to discover and highlight the ways this student's stories align with and counter the discourses of masculinity and heteronormativity. The study focused on stories relating to the masculinity and sexuality of a heterosexual male graduate student in a hard sciences PhD program at a large western research university. He was asked questions about what it means to be male and heterosexual, what it means to be that person in graduate school, and the ways gender and sexuality play out in his education. The study consisted of three 45-minutes to 1-hour-long interviews during the course of 2 months. All transcribed interviews were analyzed using, among others, Labov's narrative analytic techniques described by Riessman (1993).

During the data collection, analysis, and write-up phases of the pilot study, instances emerged suggesting Mark (M) was beginning to transform his views of gendered and sexed identities. At times, he presented a fairly definitive understanding of what it meant to him to be a heterosexual male graduate student, especially when those instances were related to the overt or covert systems of power associated with masculine and heterosexual subjectivities:

M: I've already established myself as the male of all the other males by isolating the female that was the most desired and hooking up with her quickly in the graduate scene. I hooked up with her publicly and I dropped by her office every-day, not on purpose, but perhaps a little bit on purpose, just to put my place; the same thing I did as teenager. I'm up here, I'm on my little perch, a rooster.

But Mark's masculinity and heterosexuality became more ambiguous when his responses were more deeply interrogated. Later in the interview, I (I) asked Mark about the intersection of his sexuality and gender:

I: What does sex have to do with your gender? What does it now mean to be a man?

M: That's interesting and it's changing so it's hard to put my finger on what it means now. I guess I don't know. At one point I sat down and defined myself as simply heterosexual because I was about to leave for [New York] and I knew if I didn't define it that I would end up with another man. Whether I am or not, I am defining myself to be that. . . . So I don't know how black and white it really is to say, 'What does it mean to be a man?' I guess it's pretty blurred for me.

Although not explicitly a goal from the outset, this study sought not only to examine masculinity and heterosexuality but also to challenge their fixity and

stability within this male participant. Questions probing what it meant to be a male heterosexual, how he knew he was a male heterosexual, how he experienced being a male heterosexual, and how he would know if he was female or not heterosexual forced the participant to reflect and challenge his assumptions about gender and sexual identity. The act of examination suggested fragmentation, ambiguity, and a decentered sense of self. During and resulting from this study, the first author sought a practice that would ethically guide the role she had in fostering this participant's transformation(s). An inquiry of discomfort emerged as a theoretical guide for such a research practice. The next section describes the central features of an inquiry of discomfort.

Features of an Inquiry of Discomfort

Before we begin describing the central features of an inquiry of discomfort, it is essential to acknowledge that narrative inquiry is a powerful interview method that requires commitment, responsibility, and compassion from the researcher. Thus, the arguments for conducting an inquiry of discomfort below are applicable only if two research conditions are met. First, the researcher and participant develop an ethical research rapport of trust, empathy, and care. The desires of the participant are always honored. Second, the narrative interview is necessarily, but not sufficiently, active, as described by Gubrium and Holstein (2003).

The following recommendations are drawn from two theoretical sources. The first is Boler's (1999) pedagogy of discomfort. The second is the literature on narrative therapy (Besley, 2002; White & Epston, 1990). Although we certainly do not advocate untrained narrative researchers engage in clinical work with their participants, the ideas and approaches within the field of narrative therapy are helpful in guiding the narrative researcher-participant relationship and the participant's directed transformation.

Ethic of Empathy

Although Boler (1999) eschews what she terms *passive empathy*, essentially a benign state of "feeling sorry for" the oppressed, we believe an inquiry of discomfort must employ an active empathy. Josselson (1995) argues that empathy is both a "tool and goal of . . . research . . . premised on continuity, recognizing that kinship between self and other offers an opportunity for deeper and more articulated understanding" (p. 31). Thus, this active empathy takes on many features of person-centered counseling: active listening,

approaching individuals with unconditional positive regard, and respecting the individual's capacity to determine his or her own growth and limits.

Ethic of Friendship

If empathy is the ethical stance by which inquiry of discomfort researchers approach participants, then friendship is the overriding structure for that stance. In a narrative–ethnographic study of friendship between heterosexuals and homosexuals, Tillmann-Healy (2001) adopts what she terms an *ethic of friendship*. She argues that

most any topic could be investigated with the practices, at the pace, and/or with an ethic of friendship . . . meaning that we treat them [participants] with respect, we honor their stories, and we try to use their stories for humane and just purposes. (p. 212)

Friendship means that researchers must concern themselves with the whole of participants' lives, privileging participants' feelings, experiences, and needs over data and information gathering.

When applied to the inquiry of discomfort, a paradox emerges that comfort is a prerequisite for discomfort. Both participant and researcher must feel comfortable to share their beliefs, assumptions, and vulnerabilities, acknowledging that comfort creates a space for fully experiencing discomfort, ambiguity, and transformation.

Research to Witness

The narrative inquirer is not a spectator to the participants' story, inhabiting "a position of distance and separation," but a witness who "undertakes our historical responsibilities and co-implication" (Boler, 1999, pp. 184, 186). The responsibility of the researcher is first to listen as the participant "testifies." The researcher, overcoming defenses and confronting challenges to his or her own assumptions, then bears witness to the participant's story in a way that acknowledges the complicity and complexities of social injustice. To bear witness is an active process on the part of the researcher that denies "the luxury of seeing a static truth or fixed certainty" (Boler, 1999, p. 184). In terms of an inquiry of discomfort, the researcher witnesses participants' stories, offers alternative interpretations or asks questions that facilitate participants' subjective explorations, and challenges their "socio-politico-cultural assumptions" (Besley, 2002).

Research to Create Participant Ambiguity

Similar to narrative therapy, an inquiry of discomfort is “directive and influential in its use of questioning” (Besley, 2002, p. 129). The inquirer of discomfort asks questions to elicit participants’ beliefs and assumptions, to suggest alternative ways participants could believe, to help participants notice and examine their own inconsistencies, and to challenge the fixity and stability of the participants’ subjectivities.

During the pilot study, for example, the first author asked Mark to describe his ideal relationship, what it meant to be an intellectual, what a man is, and what sex had to do with being a man. All these questions created the space for Mark to examine his beliefs and assumptions about masculinity and heterosexuality. The first author also posed alternative ways for viewing himself:

- I: It’s almost like you talk about sexuality as being this isolated, separate thing from the rest of you. You know, like there’s something called sexual development that’s by itself, that doesn’t have anything to do with the rest of you, and I’m wondering what your thoughts are on that.

Some questions directly highlighted and challenged Mark’s inconsistencies and deeply held beliefs:

- I: I’m curious how the woman taking the aggressive role in the relationship entails [Mark throwing all his energy into a relationship] that. I guess I miss the logic.

And later,

- I: So a relationship prevents you . . . well, it sounds like a paradox. You need a woman in order to think, to provide the foundation, but on the other hand if you have too much then the relationship prevents you.

Finally, there were temporal and contextual subjectivity questions the first author did not ask, questions she felt would have completed this study as an exemplar of an inquiry of discomfort. These questions reflect those a narrative therapist might ask to help her clients “re-author their lives and to find and use their own voice and work on the problem to find their own solutions” (Besley, 2002, p. 129). These questions include the following: How often are you a man/heterosexual? In what contexts do you feel the most and least pressured to be a man/heterosexual? Are you a man/heterosexual

now? How? What effects in others do you see when you are most manly? What are the benefits and privileges of being a man/heterosexual? What are the detriments? What do you like about your definitions of man/heterosexual? What might you like to change? Are there times when you wish you didn't have to be a man/heterosexual? If you weren't a man/heterosexual, what would you be? These questions situate the participant's masculine and heterosexual subjectivities within spaces and times, suggesting their malleability and transcendence. They also foster a capacity and process for self-critique, creating the possibility for conceiving of the self differently.

Research to Create Self and Social Ambiguity

Asking questions intended to help create ambiguity in the participant is not the emancipatory narrative researcher's only discomfort producing task. The narrative inquirer of discomfort also has a personal responsibility to his or her own ambiguity and transformation (via sharing with the participant, self-reflection, and peer dialog) and to that of the research study (via complex analyzing, writing, and reporting).

Research to Create Participant Hope

Participants should understand that they are "getting something out" of the research. It is therefore the inquiry of discomfort researcher's responsibility to explain, advocate for, and support the participant's explorations of alternative and complex subjectivities. In this way, the researcher creates an atmosphere of hope. The researcher does so by explaining the broad social justice aims of the project as well as the intrapersonal transformative aims of the research relationship. In an inquiry of discomfort, the participants are encouraged and "empowered" to restory their lives, to adopt the subjectivities that are more reflective of their lived experiences (White & Epston, 1990). Researchers should have, on hand, referrals to professional personnel and literary resources to assist participants who wish to further explore storytelling as a method for personal transformation.

Conclusion

This article argues for appropriating an inquiry of discomfort in emancipatory narrative inquiry to transform participants and researchers into ambiguous subjects. This aim entails several benefits, including obtaining

more honest and complex narratives, helping participants and individuals become more self-aware, and enhancing the researcher-participant relationship. Furthermore, engaging in an inquiry of discomfort meets specific emancipatory research goals of addressing and challenging assumptions and practices of subordination and transforming individual and social practices that facilitate social oppression. Narrative inquiry is a unique method in which, through the practice of storytelling, the process of transformation can be examined even as it is unfolding. However, engaging in an inquiry of discomfort is not without complications, and the ethics of doing so must be carefully considered. Prior to the study, the participant should be made fully aware of the transformative aims of the research through continuous informed consent procedures.

An ethic of empathy and friendship is necessary to provide a safe place for participants and researchers to examine, challenge, and change their cherished beliefs and assumptions. Participants unwilling to consider subjective change must be respected. The researcher, however, is not afforded this luxury. Not only must the emancipatory narrative researcher be vulnerable, continually challenging his or her own beliefs and sharing this process with the participant, he or she must also be constantly attentive to the research relationship. The researcher must provide empathetic care for the participant and place the participant's needs above the aims of the research project.

An inquiry of discomfort is introduced as a method to ethically facilitate subjective transformation. Yet many questions remain unanswered, many avenues unexplored. We see the "next steps" of an inquiry of discomfort as threefold: empirical, methodological, and political. Empirically, the experiences and outcomes of an inquiry of discomfort need to be captured and evaluated. What are the effects of an inquiry of discomfort? How is this method experienced? What constitutes transformation? What are the quality and duration of its transformations? What makes some participants more open to this type of inquiry than others? These questions encourage the narrative inquirer to assess and think critically about the subjective transformations an inquiry of discomfort is intended to facilitate. Methodologically, the procedures for an inquiry of discomfort bear examination. What strategies work best, with whom and under what circumstances? What methods do not work? What other strategies, methods, and/or theoretical perspectives align with or add to an inquiry of discomfort? These questions examine and further the procedures of an inquiry of discomfort, evaluating and evidencing its strengths and weaknesses and assisting its growth. Finally, future projects may examine the political potential of an inquiry of discomfort. How do changes in individuals, brought about by interviewing,

correspond to changes in social institutions? How do ideological transformations translate to behavioral changes? Who does an inquiry of discomfort benefit? Who is marginalized by an inquiry of discomfort? What would an inquiry of discomfort look like with those whose subjectivities are already ambiguous? These questions shed light on the political effects of an inquiry of discomfort, examining the links between personal transformation and institutional change. They also encourage a reflexive, self-critical examination of the circulation of power within an inquiry of discomfort. There remains much to be learned from and about an inquiry of discomfort.

What we stand to gain from an inquiry of discomfort is a complex, nuanced, and honest knowledge of participants and researchers as they mutually engage in an exploration of values and beliefs. This process can lead to the transformation of the researcher and participant and, consequently, the social structures and institutions that contribute to social oppression.

Epilogue

Almost home after a long drive through the Colorado foothills, I reached the end of the interview tape and turned the volume up to listen closely to Mark's final words:

I've learned what it means to me to be a man, which I've never really put into words before. It's just kind of this weird idea I had floating around and every once in awhile I'd find myself reading Bukowski and trying to do this and I really didn't understand why. Whereas now I have a lot better understanding of what I strive for, be it shameful or not, it's out on the table now and I can't pretend to be altruistic. I can't pretend I'm not trying to aspire to be my idea of a man. And I can't try to trick myself into thinking that I'm just going with the flow and I just want to live life because I've said certainly this is not what I'm doing. So now there's no use in trying to fool myself into thinking I can get away with telling myself that. . . . I didn't see it [the interview] as a confessional. Because I didn't feel that I had done anything wrong. It wasn't like, I do this and I need to work on that, at least I hope not. But it was more of a, this is who I am and then it's ok. I ended up feeling a lot more at ease with myself.

Throughout the interview, Mark considered, faced, and responded to tough questions about his masculinity and heterosexuality. He grappled with understanding himself and self-critically presented himself in positive and negative lights. This process allowed Mark to define subjectivities that until

now had been loosely or incompletely understood. He not only complexly created what it meant to him to be a man, but he also identified the mechanisms, behaviors, and ideas he uses to be that man. He also tentatively questioned whether that was the man he wanted to be but ultimately refrained from committing to any changes. The point is not that Mark didn't identify areas he "wanted to work on" within the context of the interview but rather that he'd fully engaged in a transformative process of understanding, defining, and critiquing his subjectivities. It is perhaps ironic that in the end, he found himself "at ease," even as he'd moved from a passive to an active engagement with his masculine and heterosexual subjectivities. Through the procedures of an inquiry of discomfort, Mark transformed himself into being responsible for his type of male and heterosexual, rendering his subjectivities looser, more malleable, and less rigid.

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