

Using Narrative Analysis Methods to Gain Insight into Living with Brain Injury

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Today

- What is traumatic brain injury (TBI)?
- This study: Photo-elicitation with a long-term TBI survivor
- Brief narrative analysis methods overview
- Three approaches to narrative analysis of my study data: photos and interview text
 - Looking at the details
 - Structuring the discourse
 - Plotting the sequence
- Discussion & Conclusions

TBI Overview

- An injury to the brain caused by an external force (National Institutes of Health (NIH), 1998)
- Major sequelae: loss of memory & executive functioning, personality changes, & depression (NIH, 1998)
- Invisible to patient, family, friends, doctors, and co-workers (Jagoda et al, 2002)
- 1.4 new injuries diagnosed each year in U.S.
- 80 to 90,000 new long-term disabilities each year in US (Langlois et al, 2005; Langlois, 2004)

This Study

- One respondent
- Cognitive level at least 7 out of 10
- We met three times
- She took photographs of living with TBI and facilitators and barriers to recovery
- We spoke for 4.5 hours, the last 2 hours specifically about her photos
- IRB approval from Brandeis University

Research Questions

- What is the lived experience of people who have a traumatic brain injury?
- What are facilitators and barriers to recovery from the perspective of someone who has a TBI?

Narrative Analysis: Overview

- A family of approaches
- Diverse kinds of texts
- A storied form
- Preferred narrative—from “author’s” perspective
- Sequence and consequence
- A particular audience
- Interpreting the world and experience
- Ways of knowing and communicating

(Riessman, 2003)

Using Three NA Methods

- Looking at the details of a photo (Becker, 1986)
- Interpreting the discourse structure of an interview excerpt (Gee, 1991)
- Grouping a series of photos and text excerpts into 3 plot categories: problem, action, and resolution (Mishler, 2004)

Looking at the Details

“Every part of the photographic image carries some information that contributes to its total content” (Becker, 1986, p. 231)

Provides hints of deeper meaning not apparent at first glance

**“Living
without
Connection”**

**What do you
see?**



Structuring the Discourse

“...global organization, like all deeply senseful uses of language, flows from the organization of the discourse system itself (lines and stanzas) and from the lived and earned coherence of a person’s life...” (Gee, 1991, 37)

- Illuminates a structure that reveals themes and perspective of person speaking
- Bonds the analysis closely to the actual words used
- Allows for transparency about co-creation of data

LF: I thought that kind of depicted it, you know, the challenge right there, that photo. um, there's a lot of unsaid things there, but I mean as you look at that, you know, to live your life with that kind of connection, or lack of connection, lack of connection. yup.

LL: when you say lack of connection, do you mean connection to the past? to the person...

LF: oh, I mean lack of connection in terms of my brain. um, that, it was kind of like um, uh, (laughs) when you, you know, have a thought, that you didn't know what it was going to.. latch on to. it was kind of like living in the middle of nowhere, um, there was no sense of connection. um, uh, and uh, to your environment, to other people, um, it was as though you were just born anew, um, uh. yes there were things you knew how to do, it wasn't like you were a newborn, (laughs) but in a sense you were. so um, everything was new, and um, life without connection, um, hard to explain, you know, hard to articulate, and um, and I I basically laughed through every day. There was this laughter that just went on, constantly, uh, you know, just this giddiness, laughter, um, again, living at that crest of the wave, and when you are living at the crest of the wave, to maintain that level of um of uh, that level, ... um.. it was just as though you had lost the connection with reality? um, to some degree? or reality as you knew it? and you know it all had to like be reestablished, or, the connections, over time, is how I see it now, in in hindsight. um, for me I think it was more, you know, the passage of time uh.. and you know, doing, you know, taking small steps, uh... and things were just kind of re-knitting .. themselves, you know, just you know, in the healing...

Part 2: Everything was new

Stanza 3: It was like living in the middle of nowhere

When you say lack of connection, do you mean connection to the past, to the person...

Oh, I mean lack of connection in terms of my brain;
It was kind of like when you have a thought,
That you didn't know what it was going to latch on to;
It was kind of like living in the middle of nowhere.

Stanza 4: It was as though you were just born anew

There was no sense of connection, to your environment, to other people;
It was as though you were just born anew;
Yes there were things you knew how to do, it wasn't like you were a newborn,
But in a sense you were.

Coda: Hard to explain

Everything was new,
And life without connection, hard to explain, hard to articulate.

Stanza 5: I basically laughed through every day

I basically laughed through every day.
There was this laughter that just went on, constantly,
Just this giddiness, laughter, living at that crest of the wave.
And when you are living at the crest of the wave, it was just as though you had lost the
connection with reality? to some degree? Or reality as you knew it?

“Executive Summary”



Living without Connection

Part 1: Why I took this picture

Stanza 1: That's how I felt

Stanza 2: I thought that kind of depicted it

Coda: A lot of unsaid things there

Part 2: Everything was new

Stanza 3: It was like living in the middle of nowhere

Stanza 4: It was as though you were just born anew

Coda: Hard to explain

Stanza 5: I basically laughed through every day

Part 3: How I see it now in hindsight

Stanza 6: It all had to like be reestablished

Stanza 7: I had so many gaps in my brain

Stanza 8: My reaction was this laughter

Coda: A perfect way to sum it all up

Part 4: I couldn't feel really connected, in lots of ways

Stanza 9: Are you really, truly connecting

Stanza 10: That's what I meant

Discussion

- Conveys “unsaid things” that are “hard to explain, hard to articulate”
- This is a visual illness narrative (Rich et al, 2002)
- Is this one image and its interview text perhaps a “narrative excerpt”?

Plotting the Sequence

“The basic story parts are there, in temporal order: an initial problem, action to deal with it, and a resolution” (Mishler, 2004, p 108)

- I removed all duplicate photos and “mistakes”
- I did not include some photos of family members, due to repetitive nature
- We discussed her photos in the sequence in which she took them. The analysis transformed that sequence

Problem



...that's how I felt...right after my accident, that there was no connection and there were so many missing links as I tried to begin living again...it was kind of like living in the middle of nowhere...When I saw that, well, that seemed like a perfect way to sum it all up, you know

Action



My forgetfulness is such that...if I really wanted to remember something, I would have to...place it right in the middle of the floor, and otherwise, it would most likely be forgotten. Lists, you know, lists just wouldn't work....I was trying to remember to take a picture that day.

Resolution



I wanted to take her [Janét's] picture ...where she would be happy and proud. The pride that you can see...as she stands there, is the pride that I feel in my accomplishments. And it's very similar to the pride of a young child as she's growing...she symbolizes for me the hope, for the future.

Plot Categories Discussion

- This analysis shows us “the prologue to a more extended story” (Mishler, 2004, p 108)
- Grouping photos and excerpts into plot categories brings out movement in her healing over time
- Does this analysis reveal a visual healing narrative?
- The plot analysis put greater control and manipulation of the data in researcher’s hands
- Could patient & provider or researcher do this together?

Overall Discussion

- These methods promote informational and interactional justice
- Each of these analyses is a partial telling
- These analyses exemplify “the many facets of any given approach to the social world”
(Janesick, 2005)
- Using 3 approaches we become part of the dialogue and may gain deeper understanding

Conclusions

- This participant teaches us about healing, not recovery
- These data and analyses indicate that healing from TBI continues for years beyond the acute rehabilitation phase
- This finding coincides with current neuroscience research
- This finding “resists” current U.S. rehabilitation coverage/policies

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