

Alasuutari, Pertti (1997) The Discursive Construction of Personality. In: Amia Lieblich and Ruthellen Josselson (eds.): *The Narrative Study of Lives* Vol. 5. Newbury Park, California: Sage 1997, 1-20.

The Discursive Construction of Personality

Pertti Alasuutari

*I*n the social sciences, life stories have traditionally been approached from two alternative but often combined perspectives. Either they have been used as material in studying lives in their social contexts (Bertaux & Bertaux-Wiame, 1981; Roos, 1985), or they have been viewed as texts that reflect individuals' personality or identity construction (Alasuutari, 1986; Burgos, 1988; Gubrium, 1993; Gubrium & Holstein, 1994; Linde, 1987, 1993; Weintraub, 1978). Bertaux and Kohli (1984) have named these two viewpoints the *sociostructural* and the *sociolinguistic* approaches.

A wide unanimity about a proper definition of a life story also reflects and supports the idea that there are basically only two ways of approaching life stories. According to Lejeune (1989), autobiography is "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his [sic] own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (p. 4). Linde (1987, p. 344) broadens the definition by saying that a life story is all the stories told by an individual during his or her lifetime that (a) make a point about the speaker, not about the way the world is, and (b) "have extended reportability"—that is, they are tellable over the course of a long period of time. In other words, these definitions distinguish two main components in a proper life story: In it, a person tells about his or her life, and the focus is on the individual's character, as it is reflected in and substantiated by the life events told.

This view of two alternative approaches to a life story in social sciences and humanities is limited in one respect. The studies about the role and meaning of *biographical work* (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995a, 1995b; Gubrium, Holstein, & Buckholdt, 1994) or *biographical reasoning* (Alasuutari, 1986, 1992) as a phenomenon that takes place in everyday life cannot really be applied to either of the two approaches. Although the sociolinguistic trend emphasizes that life-story narration has a function in constructing self and identity, it approaches the phenomenon from the perspective of an already available story, using it as evidence about self-construction. By discussing recent developments in life-story research, this chapter points to life-story narration as seen from the other end of the chain. What can be learned by analyzing the everyday life situations in which individuals give accounts about aspects of their personal past? What are the functions of life-story narration? Because it is obvious that life stories can be seen as a means of personality or identity construction, what are the particular situations in which the "personality" or "disposition" of an individual is invoked? What is the social function of personality in social interaction?

In the following sections, I first discuss the two older approaches to life stories and then show how developments, especially in the sociolinguistic approach, already point in the direction of the third, discursive approach. Then I give an outline and a case example of the new approach, where personality is seen as an accounting strategy for maintaining continuity and saving face. Finally, I discuss the new agenda this approach sets for sociological research.

Sociostructural and Sociolinguistic Approaches

Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame's (1981) study of life stories in the Parisian bakers' trade is an example of the sociostructural trend. On the basis of the life stories and other data they gathered, Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame constructed a picture of the set of sociostructural relationships that form the institution of artisanal bakery in France. By drawing primarily upon life stories as evidence, they could explain why, in France, more than 90% of the bread is still produced by small

bakers, whereas in most other industrial countries, artisanal bakery disappeared long ago, bread being manufactured in large factories and delivered by trucks all over the land. The answer lay in a continuous flow of bakery workers from the countryside and in the particular way in which the young apprentices organized their and their wives' lives around the family business of the bakery and bakery shop.

In this approach, the life stories are simply considered pictures of the lives the interviewees have led. The data are approached from what I have elsewhere (Alasuutari, 1995) called the *mechanistic variant of the factist* perspective; they are seen as consisting of statements that give us information about the reality outside the data.¹ If this kind of reading of the life stories adds up to a picture of the personality traits of the narrators, it is based on inferences of the facts we get from their lives and behavior, not on the way they tell their stories or what they tell about their experiences.

The sociolinguistic approach is more interested in the subjectivity of the narrators. Bertaux and Kohli (1984) use Burgos's approach to life stories as an example of this trend. In her analysis of oral life stories as narratives, as a genre, she has employed Bakhtin's distinction between *epic* and *romanesque* forms of narration. In the epic form, the world and personages are taken as given, whereas in the romanesque form—whose ideal type is the *Bildungsroman*—the world is problematic, the self is unstable, and life (and the life story) takes the shape of a search for meaning and identity. In her view, the usefulness of the life story in sociological or historical research is in the fact that—through the narrative form it takes—it reflects the individual's self-image. As Burgos (1988) puts it, "Thus, autobiography is a valuable method of investigation which yields information about life experiences, subjectivity, individual choices, the rational and conscious motives for actions, etc., but it is nonetheless a means, rather than a finished statement of the truth" (p. 12).

The sociolinguistic trend acknowledges and makes use of the linguistic and narrative form taken by autobiography in order to make inferences about the personality of the subject. This has implications for data collection. To be valid as autobiographical testimonies, the analyzed life stories must not be too much affected by the characteristics of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee

—or by later use of the original material. Burgos (1988), for instance, discusses the trickery of commercially produced life stories, which are not “authentic” (p. 17). They, for instance, find their inspiration “in the training in essay-writing given in schools.” Furthermore, the final products have been “coauthored” by editors. “The reader is led to believe that he has bought a genuine local product (usually the life story of a peasant or an artisan); whereas what he has really got is a counterfeit which has practically nothing to do with the original.”

In this approach, one assumes that every person has a genuine personality that can be grasped by studying the person’s life story. This, of course, requires that the story be also genuine, unaffected by the data collection situation or by the storyteller’s or researcher’s literary influences.²

Historians of the autobiography describe much the same approach. A number of scholars have studied the rise and history of autobiographies as a reflection or indicator of the rise of individualism. For instance, Delany (1969) notes that the emergence of autobiographies in Italy was preceded by family histories. And the same goes for Britain: “In early British autobiographies we often find similar transitions from genealogy to autobiography; by placing his own story in the context of family tradition the writer could avoid giving the appearance of an unseemly egotism” (Delany, 1969, p. 12). The histories of autobiography also suggest that individuality is a specifically modern form of self-conception, which began in the Renaissance and reached full blossom in the time of Goethe (Misch, 1969; Weintraub, 1975, 1978). Weintraub (1975) points out that autobiography is inseparably linked to the problem of self-conception: “The manner in which men conceive of the nature of the self largely determines the form and process of autobiographic writing” (p. 834). Autobiographies reveal the gradual emergence of that form of self-conception called individuality. From the Hellenic and the Roman times onward, there has been, according to Weintraub (1975), an ever sharper turn toward an inner-directed personality. Then, since the time of the Renaissance, “Western man has by a series of complex and gradual developments formed a particular attachment to the ideal of personality we call individuality. This ideal is characterized by its very

rejection of a valid model for the individual” (Weintraub, 1975, p. 838).

In the historians’ approach, one also assumes that there is an object—personality or self-concept—whose historical transformation the autobiographies reflect. The changes in the genre of autobiographic writing are perceived from this viewpoint: as changing ways of expressing the self and, in that sense, reflecting the changing self-concept.

To sum up, one can say that in the sociolinguistic trend, the textual and literary aspects of the life story are given more attention. Yet, this trend also approaches the data from the factist perspective. Whereas the sociostructural trend conceives of the life story as a picture of a life, the sociolinguistic trend perceives it as a picture of a personality.

Toward a Discursive View

Life stories have also been studied from the other end of the chain: Instead of analyzing the frames or narrative structures evident in the end products of life-story narrating, some researchers have studied life-story narrating as an everyday life phenomenon in its own right. For instance, folklorists have paid attention to oral life stories and life-story narrating as a form of oral tradition, which is of interest as such. These new considerations have meant a gradual move away from the assumption, discussed in the previous section, that each person possesses an authentic self that could be captured in a text where the person honestly tells his or her life story. Instead, it is increasingly emphasized that life-story narrating is always situational and serves a function.

As a discipline, folklore has, of course, always been keen on forms of oral tradition, such as proverbs, jokes, and folktales. However, an increased interest in narrating and in the actual situations where oral tradition is transmitted (Georges, 1969, 1976; Hoppál, 1980) paved the way for paying attention to the personal elements and points of view of orally communicated history (Agar, 1980; Allen, 1979; Robinson, 1981) and to considering life stories as a folklore genre (Pentikäinen, 1980; Stahl, 1977; Titon, 1980).³ These developments,

cross-fertilized with advances in, for instance, narratology and discourse analysis, have established life-story narrating as an independent object of research. Labov and Waletzky's (1973) ethnography of speech approach to oral accounts of personal experience is an early example.

Along with these changes, many researchers began to see life-story narrating as an everyday life phenomenon that obviously serves certain functions. Individuals do not have their readily narrated life stories in their back pockets or the back of their minds, waiting for a researcher to collect them. Any account of one's personal past (also when told to a researcher in a *life-story interview*) makes a point and serves a function. A particular case of life-story narration must be related to its local setting in order to see what it is needed or used for.

Studies following this line of thought show that accounts of a personal past often justify a change of perspective by reconstructing continuity over time. This is illustrated in, for instance, Early's (1982) study of therapeutic narratives in Cairo, Egypt. In the worldview of the *baladi* women she studied, there is a clear-cut dichotomy: *baladi* versus *afrangi*, or honorable, religious, and nationalistic, as opposed to dishonorable, nonreligious, and foreign. The *baladi* curative system replicates this inside/outside dichotomy: There are "domestic" and "foreign" causes for illnesses, such as benevolent spirits (*baladi asyat*) and malevolent spirits (*afrangi afarit*). Correspondingly, the native healing system and Western medicine live side by side: If the local healers' methods do not seem to work, the patient is taken to see a doctor. However, and this is the point, first the illness narrative has to be changed.

A similar kind of reconstructive work seems to be needed in descriptions of individuals' personal characteristics. The claim of a personality often justifies one's present behavior, but the claim itself is justified by biographical work. For instance, Gergen and Gergen (1984) considered the way people's daily accounts of themselves require a biographical interpretation and, if needed, long-standing story of self: "Suddenly and momentarily to see oneself as 'aggressive,' 'poetic,' or 'male,' for example, might seem mere whimsy unless such concepts could be secured to a series of earlier events" (p. 173). Thus, life stories consist of retrospective accounts of the past, accounts that

are given for particular reasons and in particular situations, such as an onset of chronic illness (Williams, 1984).

Although life-story narrating may also take place as an individual's "inner speech" needed for creating a sense of continuity of self in changing conditions and situations, the concepts, discourses, explanatory systems (Linde, 1987) or interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, pp. 146-157) used in such accounts are not private language. People always use the interpretive resources available for them, even when it comes to creating a sense of self.

These considerations lead into a discursive theory of self (see Harré & Gillett, 1994). It maintains that to accomplish their plans, projects, and intentions, people have certain linguistic resources or repertoires at their disposal.

The resources people have available in some roughly delineated, cultural system have been called an ". . . -ology." So an emotionology is a representation of the linguistic and other discursive resources people have available for describing emotional phenomena. (Harré & Gillett, 1994, p. 98)

The Cultural Premises of Self

Let me now further pursue the implications of the discursive turn in life-story research by introducing an ethnomethodological aspect to the discussion. It is obvious that individuals use life-story narration and autobiographical accounting to construct their individuality, a continuity over time. That is how a sense of self is discursively accomplished.

This leads to the question of what are the cultural premises on which members' understanding of a life story as a story about an individual life, a story of a personality, is based. If self and personality are discursively constructed, how is it done? What implicit frames or cultural premises are required of a reader of a "life story"? I suggest that we can identify two kinds of intertwined premises for the understanding of a life story: the *narrative implicature* and the concept of *face*.

By the narrative implicature, I refer to Grice's (1975, 1978) idea of *conversational implicature*, which means that in ordinary conversations everyone assumes that participants follow the cooperative principle, which is realized in certain maxims of conversations. Geis (1982) lists six such maxims. It is not necessary to go through all these maxims here; let me just say that these maxims we automatically follow require us to avoid unfamiliar language, to be truthful and relevant, and to say no less or no more than is necessary. The point of these maxims is not their being regulative rules; it is rather that people use them in interpreting each other's utterances in conversation (Nofsinger, 1991, p. 40).

Similarly, when a person is telling a long story, we assume that there is a logical and thematic link that connects different sentences of a story together. Van Dijk (1980) actually makes the same point by showing that in addition to semantic macrostructures, we assume that texts have a thematic coherence. He gives an example:

John was ill, so he called the doctor. But the doctor could not come, because his wife wanted to go to the theater with him. They were playing *Othello*, which she thought they could not miss because Shakespeare is one of the few dramatical authors who. . . . (p. 40)

Each fact is a condition for a next one; participants are also kept identical for a while; but still this fragment has no coherence because a uniting theme is missing. We expect to find a theme or topic in a story, and if we fail to find it, we will soon ask what the point of the story is. In storytelling and listening to stories, we do accept irrelevant details up to a point, but because we follow the cooperative principle, we also try to make sense of the details of, for instance, a life story. Consider the following sentences:

I was never a good liar. When Paula asked me if I knew how to swim, I said yes.

Formally there is no link between the two sentences, but by following the cooperative principle, we automatically read them as a way

of saying or emphasizing the point that the speaker told the truth. However, in addition to such a narrative implicature, the example above also illustrates another, related self-evident frame. We automatically assume, upon hearing that the person was “never a good liar,” that he continues to be that way.

This leads us to the concept of face, the expectation that a person should be self-consistent. Although the concept has initially been applied to human interaction, we can assume that it also holds in the telling of longer stories. In the act of storytelling, participants to human interaction are supposed to give a consistent picture of themselves as characters. We are supposed to maintain our face: to successfully and consistently play the role we chose to take when entering the situation. Goffman (1967) argues that a sacred principle prevails in conversation situations whereby the parties to the conversation have a reciprocal system of maintaining and defending each others' faces. This means, among other things, that the people involved in the conversation are considerate toward each other and try to sustain each other's self-image. Brown and Levinson (1987) have, in fact, shown that there is a universal principle of politeness based on avoiding face-threatening acts, which can be of two types: they may threaten our negative or positive face. *Negative face* refers to the wish of every competent adult that his or her actions be unimpeded by others. *Positive face*, in turn, refers to the wish of every adult that her or his needs/wishes be desirable at least to some others (p. 62). When we say “You couldn't, by any chance, tell me the time, could you?” rather than “Tell me the time,” we are conforming to conventional expectations of politeness by showing that we are aware of and honor the negative-face wants of the addressee. In face-to-face interaction, maintaining face also means that if I introduce myself as a specialist in a field, it is considered humiliating if my next turn of speech shows that I know very little or nothing about it.

By choosing to tell my life story, I enter an interaction situation by giving a presentation of myself. It may, of course, be that the audience of a written autobiography is unknown to the storyteller, but the story is nonetheless a presentation of self, a character, and as such, the consistency implicature applies.

In a life-story presentation, the consistency principle means that the characteristics by which the storytellers describe themselves are consistent with the life events told in the story. In a sense, this is obvious, because any events included in a life story are there precisely because they make a point about the person. Life-story narrating is usually employed when accounting for possibly face-threatening acts, public acts that might be seen to contradict the public self-image the person has previously claimed for him- or herself.

Consider a job interview or an autobiographical statement required in the application to a vacancy. The events of past life mentioned must be truthful enough not to contradict one's personal records and documents. On the other hand, the story constructed on the basis of these events should convey a long-standing interest in precisely the kind of job for which one is applying. This means that, for instance, previous work in a totally different field should be presented as a mistake finally acknowledged. Another possibility is that one is able to plot an account where the common element between the tasks is pointed out, preferably in such a light that one's personal calling could be better realized in the new job than in the old one.

Are such life-story narratives totally false, and thus useless in trying to get a grasp on an individual's true self? Not really. As job interviewers know, if a person is able to tell a life story in which the new job can be believably presented as the realization of a career development, he or she will probably adjust well to the new task. First, the same account can be given to friends and relatives. Second, biographical reasoning also works as a personal device by which we get a sense of continuity about our own self. If we need to remodel our self-concept in order to better fit the changed role requirements, we can depict our life story anew by these means. Memory and forgetfulness are also both excellent tools in shaping and reshaping the personal self.

Rescuing the Split Character: The "Freudian" Narrative

To sum up what was discussed in the previous section, we can say that the telling and reading of life stories is based on the implicit assumption that there is a coherence in the past actions of the protagon-

nist, that is, that he or she maintains a face. To approach this from the perspective of everyday life interaction, we can say that the function of life-story narrating is to construct a face, or self. Let me now, in this section, argue that the particular conditions of face protection in complex societies result in the modern notion of personality, as it is formulated, for instance, by Freud.

As historical studies have shown, autobiographies are a story genre that developed along with modernization (Delany, 1969; Misch, 1969; Weintraub, 1975, 1978). If we accept the idea that life-story narrating is a means of face protection, it is not that obvious why this should be the case. According to cross-cultural research reported by Brown and Levinson (1987), there seem to be universal rules of politeness based on the notion of face, and thus the requirement of maintaining one's face seems to be a universal phenomenon. So why do autobiographies as a genre emerge along with modernization?

In complex societies, individuals have multiple "roles": one's face changes from one contact to another. As, for instance, Mauss (1979) and Geertz (1973, pp. 360-411; 1983, pp. 62-68) have emphasized, in "premodern" society, people are identified as collective stereotypes, as *personages* rather than persons, or as *dramatis personae* rather than actors:

On the one hand the clan is conceived of as constituted by a *certain number of persons*, actually roles; and, on the other, the purpose of all these roles is really to symbolize, each in its own portion, the pre-figured totality of the clan. (Mauss, 1979, p. 65)

In such a social system, the point that one has maintained face throughout one's life would sound like an obvious point to make in a life story, but that is precisely why biographical work became important along with modernization. The simplicity of the role system does not cause face-threatening tensions to the same extent that modern society does. Life-story narrating makes a point in a situation where role expectations radically vary from one social encounter to another one, but one nevertheless holds on to the moral obligation to maintain face. The impossibility to actually maintain face in the traditional sense

of the word leads to narrative innovations, a changed conception of characters and personhood, and finally the split image of personality canonized as the Freudian personality theory.

In effect, Freud constructed and gave names to parts of a split self, a self—or personality—that was a solution to the difficulty in accounting for the behavior of the modern individual. The modern individual appears in several, often contradictory roles, but the prevalent cultural notion of self still holds on to the idea that one is supposed to maintain and defend a single face. Now, the popular Freudian and other notions of personality are a resource used in accounting for face-threatening situations or personal histories.

From a narratological point of view, modernization has meant ever more complicated figures in popular stories. Consider, for instance, the characters of folktales (Propp, 1975): Each character—a hero or a villain, say—pursues an obvious, simply stated goal with the means of rational action. With modernization, such fictional characters came to be considered and scorned as too “black-and-white,” while modern novels introduced more complex characters with ambivalent views and motives hidden from others and even from themselves.⁴

Narratologically, this *personality structure* is constructed by dividing a self into two or more characters with their separate goals or, to put it another way, by uniting several lines of action into one “self.” As a consequence, the otherwise incoherent account of a face is rescued by inscribing an inner structure on the character in question; a personality that includes contradictory lines of action in a single self.

A Case Example in Personality Construction

How is the Freudian reading of life-story narrating as the reflection of a personality structure actually accomplished? What frames are required of a reader who hears the life story as a reflection of the Freudian paradigm of the personality?⁵ How is such a picture of the supposed object-like construction called personality made and empirically defended? Let us address these questions in the light of a case example.

Consider an individual telling about and reflecting on his past, like the men interviewed in a study of mine (Alasuutari, 1986, 1992, chapter 4). In many of the life-story interviews, the men expressed an ambivalence toward the schooling phase of their lives. For these men, who were all manual workers (half of them were also alcoholic), school had been an ambiguous experience. The men were first asked to draw a continuous line depicting the ups and downs of their life and then to explain them in an unstructured interview. The ambivalence about schooling could often be seen in the fact that school was drawn as a downturn, but when asked about it, it was described as a jolly good time.

Q: I understand you were held back a year. What was it like?

A: Actually there was a lot happening that year. I was 16, and it was the last year of my schooling. I, for example, had an affair with my teacher. It was a wild experience.

Q: Was it an upturn in life?

A: I suppose I was held back as a consequence of all this. So it really can't be perceived as a high point.

The ambivalence about such a phase in life comes from the fact that it can be evaluated from two points of view. If the men pay attention to what they liked and wanted at the time, schooling was boring and ending it was a relief, a liberation from a straitjacket. From this perspective, having fun during the school hours was the positive part of that phase. If, on the other hand, they consider how they got on at school and the usefulness of conscientious schooling for a future life, the values are reversed. In reflecting on and assessing a phase in life, the past moods and inclinations conflict with long-term interests as presently perceived. This often leads to remorse, to second thoughts about what one or others should have done.

I wish I had gone on with my schooling. Not then but now, afterward. I sure would have handled it, even though I wouldn't have liked it then. Father should have forced me, but it was a question of money and the fact that I didn't like school.

The frame within which the narrator reflects upon his past behavior is very close to the Freudian notion of personality, as consisting of a *libido* and an *ego* (Freud, 1978), although he does not use those concepts. However, he does refer to a popular Freudian notion of a tension between desire and self-control.

What are the steps we take to arrive at such a split image of an objectified personality as the character of the narrative? The first step is to abstract different views of personal conduct, to make a typology of them. The lines of action associated with things usually considered pleasures, sins, or socially unacceptable behavior are—as options for future action or as views of past action—named *libido* or *desire*. The views of action usually thought to be in accordance with socially esteemed values, with moral codes, or with an individual's long-term interests are named *superego* or *self-control*. After constructing this typology of separate lines of action into two classes, the next step is to conceive of them as object-like elements in an object-like structure called *personality*.

In the previous extract from a life-story interview, we read the Freudian personality structure from the man's narrative, regardless of his own interpretations. However, often this personality theory is "written into" the life stories themselves as the frame within which narrators interpret their own behavior. Linde's (1987) analysis of explanatory systems in oral life stories is similar. She mentions the "popular Freudian psychology" as one of the explanatory systems people use in accounting for their past life. In a broader perspective, another explanatory system she identifies, *behaviorist psychology*, also falls within the personality structure frame as it is used here. Both of these commonsense theories include a split of the self into parts, which are in conflict.

In perhaps its clearest form, this view of the self as split into contradictory elements can be seen, in everyday usage, in accounts of some socially unacceptable behaviors, such as heavy drinking. Among the alcoholics of the sample of life-story interviews discussed above, drinking often becomes interpreted as an uncontrolled craving, alien from the men themselves: "It was a high point when I got a job and became a sailor, although I drank a lot. Before I went to the army, it got out of control really, I couldn't hold back."⁶

From a narratological point of view, the personality structure solution to a difficulty in preserving face, to maintaining an image of a separate autonomous self pursuing an expressed line of action, is indeed an interesting one. The diverse and often conflicting logics of action identified in one's self are objectified into evidence of parts of an inner structure. In his structural theory of narratives, Greimas (1987) in a sense deconstructed such a notion of character by making a distinction between actors and actants of a story: Actors may consist of several actants.

To return to Freud, who was one of the first to work out a sophisticated theory of such a modern notion of personhood, it is often said that with the invention of the libido and the unconscious, he shattered the self. This is partly true: He did shatter the rational homogeneity of the self by inventing its inner contradictory structure. However, by so doing, he actually rescued the Western object-like notion of the self as distinct from other selves. It was only much later, with the emergence of family-systems theoretical therapeutic models that the conception of the individual self as a center was challenged and surpassed (Gubrium, 1992). It turned out that many families or social networks were best helped, not by treating the identified patient, but by making an intervention to the system (for instance, Haley, 1985; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fish, 1974).

Biographical Narration and Self

In this chapter, I have contrasted the discursive approach with older trends of life-story research and then pursued the implications of the new trend for the notion of the self. I have come to the conclusion that personality can be considered an accounting strategy. It is used in accounting for the behavior of a person who has appeared in more than one role and, in doing so, followed logics that are contradictory, if one assumes that each person only wears one face.

Does this imply that we should forget about the self or personality, argue that it does not really exist? Such sentiments have indeed been raised in some postmodernist discussions around the issue. I suggest that it is premature to announce the death of the subject. Rather, what

we are dealing with is a different view of the ontological status of individual selves—that is, the sense in which we should conceive of the existence of selves. We do have our physical existence, but selves—or personalities—are not objects in the physical world. Rather, they are part of social reality: constructions we live by. For us, selfhood as lived experience is very real, and the discursive view as it is outlined here might seem to be useless philosophical hair-splitting that has no practical value. However, to realize that selves are, after all, constructions we live by enables us, when that is needed, to renew ourselves. It allows us to adopt a view of life and self that better adapts to changed conditions or which, because the conception of oneself is changed, changes the conditions by viewing them in a new light.

Notes

1. In this instance, Silverman (1993) and Holstein and Gubrium (1995) talk about an approach to interviews reflecting Enlightenment sensibilities.

2. I have elsewhere (Alasuutari, 1995, pp. 47-62) discussed this as the *humanistic variant of the factist* perspective. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) refer to it as the *romanticist* view of interviewing. See also Silverman, 1993.

3. The folklorists and anthropologists active in this field have especially been influenced by what became known as a *schema-theoretic* view of producing, reading, and understanding stories (Adams & Collins, 1979; Chafe, 1977a, 1977b, 1980; Kintsch, 1978; Kintsch, Mandel, & Kozminsky, 1977; Rumelhart, 1975; Voss & Bisanz, 1985; for an introduction to the theory, see Mandler, 1984). Later, some of the researchers started to talk about cultural models of language and thought as the object of this line of inquiry (Holland & Quinn, 1987).

4. Elias (1982) links this development with more complex interpersonal relationships, with the outcome that an individual's image of others becomes richer in nuances, freer of spontaneous emotions: It is "psychologized":

Where the structure of social functions allows the individual greater scope for actions under the influence of momentary impulses than is the case at court, it is neither necessary nor possible to consider very deeply the nature of another person's consciousness and affects, or what hidden motives may underlie his behavior. If at court calculation meshes with calculation, in simpler societies affect directly engages affect. (p. 273)

Elias takes it for granted that along with the "civilizing process," the personality structure of the individual changes, without noticing the fact that the same process gives birth to the *notion* of such a structure.

5. We could also put it this way: What did Freud do to the elements of the life-story narrating he heard from his psychiatrist's couch in order to construct his personality theory? By the latter question, I do not mean that we could or should try to reconstruct what Freud actually did; it is rather that as people living in a post-Freudian culture, we do it all the time.

Freud is known for his crucial role in shattering the Enlightenment view of the rational self, the individual in control of her- or himself. By introducing the concepts of libido, id, and the unconscious, Freud pointed out that the individual self is not the agent of even his or her own mind. It must, of course, be remembered that the Western view of the self did not change just because of the genius of Freud. The idea of the possibility that a person is not her or his own master is definitely older than Freud. It is, for instance, reflected in middle-age Christian asceticism, which included the idea that certain behaviors, especially pleasures, represent *nature* in the individual, and that is why they had to be overcome, controlled by *reason*. Originally the term *personality* only referred to those who were able to control their urges and impulses (Weber, 1971, pp. 118-119), thus implying that the opposite could be true as well. In his uncompleted project, Foucault (1980, 1986, 1988) traced the origins of the "genealogy of the desiring man" (Foucault, 1986, p. 12) to ancient Greece.

Then, what is the significance of Freud? Admittedly, he was just one of the people who formulated the changed and changing conception of the self. Yet, the influence of Freud and psychoanalysis probably cannot be overestimated because Freud has provided the Western world with a popular vocabulary with which to talk about the psyche.

6. This interpretation of an individual's action, often named *addiction*, is real lived experience for many individuals. By analyzing the way this Freudian conception of the self is discursively produced, I do not intend to deny the very real nature of the experience (see Alasuutari, 1992).

References

- Adams, M. J., & Collins, A. (1979). A schema-theoretic view of reading. In R. O. Freedle (Ed.), *New directions in discourse processing* (pp. 1-22). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Agar, M. (1980). Stories, background knowledge, and themes: Problems in the analysis of life history narrative. *American Ethnologist*, 7(2), 223-239.
- Alasuutari, P. (1986). Alcoholism in its cultural context: The case of blue-collar men. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 13, 641-686.
- Alasuutari, P. (1992). *Desire and craving: A cultural theory of alcoholism*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Alasuutari, P. (1995). *Researching culture: Qualitative method and cultural studies*. London: Sage.
- Allen, B. (1979). The personal point of view in orally communicated history. *Western Folklore*, 38, 110-118.
- Bertaux, D., & Bertaux-Wiame, I. (1981). Life stories in the bakers' trade. In D. Bertaux (Ed.), *Biography and society: The life history approach in the social sciences* (pp. 169-189). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

- Bertaux, D., & Kohli, M. (1984). The life story approach: A continental view. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10, 215-237.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, C. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burgos, M. (1988). *Life stories, narrativity, and the search for the self*. University of Jyväskylä, Finland: Publications of the Research Unit for Contemporary Culture.
- Chafe, W. L. (1977a). Creativity in verbalization and its implications for the nature of stored knowledge. In R. O. Freedle (Ed.), *Advances in discourse processes* (Vol. 1, pp. 41-55). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Chafe, W. L. (1977b). The recall and verbalization of past experience. In R. W. Cole (Ed.), *Current issues in linguistic theory* (pp. 215-246). Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press.
- Chafe, W. L. (1980). The deployment of consciousness in the production of a narrative. In W. L. Chafe (Ed.), *The pear stories: Cognitive, cultural, and linguistic aspects of narrative production* (pp. 9-50). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Delany, P. (1969). *British autobiography in the seventeenth century*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Early, E. A. (1982). The logic of well-being: Therapeutic narratives in Cairo, Egypt. *Social Science & Medicine*, 16, 1491-1497.
- Elias, N. (1982). *Power & civility: The civilizing process* (Vol. 2). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *The history of sexuality: Vol. 1. An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1986). *The history of sexuality: Vol. 2. The use of pleasure*. New York: Viking.
- Foucault, M. (1988). *The history of sexuality: Vol. 3. Care of the self*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Freud, S. (1978). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. 21. Civilization and its discontents* (pp. 57-146). London: Hogarth.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Geis, M. L. (1982). *The language of television advertising*. New York: Academic Press.
- Georges, R. A. (1969). Toward an understanding of storytelling events. *Journal of American Folklore*, 82, 313-328.
- Georges, R. A. (1976). From folktale research to the study of narrating. *Studia Fennica*, 20, 159-168.
- Gergen, M., & Gergen, K. (1984). The social construction of narrative accounts. In K. J. Gergen & M. M. Gergen (Eds.), *Historical social psychology* (pp. 173-189). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York: Pantheon.
- Greimas, A. J. (1987). *On meaning: Selected writings in semiotic theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Vol. 3. Speech acts* (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.

- Grice, H. P. (1978). Further notes on logic and conversation. In P. Cole (Ed.), *Syntax and semantics: Vol. 9. Pragmatics* (pp. 113-128). New York: Academic Press.
- Gubrium, J. F. (1992). *Out of control: Family therapy and domestic disorder*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Gubrium, J. F. (1993). *Speaking of life: Horizons of meaning for nursing home residents*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1994). Grounding the postmodern self. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 35, 685-703.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1995a). Biographical work and new ethnography. In R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Interpreting experience: The narrative study of lives* (pp. 45-58). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1995b). Life course malleability: Biographical work and deprivatization. *Sociological Inquiry*, 65, 207-223.
- Gubrium, J. F., Holstein, J. A., & Buckholdt, D. R. (1994). *Constructing the life course*. New York: General Hall.
- Haley, J. (1985). *Problem-solving therapy*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Harré, R., & Gillett, G. (1994). *The discursive mind*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Holland, D., & Quinn, N. (Eds.). (1987). *Cultural models in language & thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). *The active interview* (Qualitative Research Methods, Vol. 37). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hoppál, M. (1980). Folk narrative and memory processes. In N. Burlakoff & C. Lindahl (Eds.), *Folklore on two continents: Essays in honor of Linda Dégh* (pp. 293-299). Bloomington, IN: Trickster Press.
- Kintsch, W. (1978). Comprehension and memory of text. In W. K. Estes (Ed.), *Handbook of learning and cognitive processes: Vol. 6. Linguistic functions in cognitive theory* (pp. 57-86). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Kintsch, W., Mandel, T. S., & Kozminsky, E. (1977). Summarizing scrambled stories. *Memory & Cognition*, 5, 547-552.
- Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1973). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In J. Helm (Ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts* (pp. 12-44). San Francisco: American Ethnological Society.
- Lejeune, P. (1989). *On autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Linde, C. (1987). Explanatory systems in oral life stories. In D. Holland & N. Quinn (Eds.), *Cultural models in language & thought* (pp. 343-366). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Linde, C. (1993). *Life stories: The creation of coherence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mandler, J. M. (1984). *Stories, scripts, and scenes: Aspects of schema theory*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Mauss, M. (1979). A category of the human mind: The notion of person, the notion of "self." In M. Mauss (Ed.), *Sociology and psychology: Essays* (pp. 57-94). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Misch, G. (1969). *Geschichte der autobiografie, I-IV*. Frankfurt Am Main: Verlag G. Schulte-Bulmke.
- Nofsinger, R. E. (1991). *Everyday conversation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Pentikäinen, J. Y. (1980). Life history: A neglected folklore genre. In N. Burlakoff & C. Lindahl (Eds.), *Folklore on two continents: Essays in honor of Linda Dégh* (pp. 150-159). Bloomington, IN: Trickster Press.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behavior*. London: Sage.
- Propp, V. (1975). *Morphology of the folktale*. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.
- Robinson, J. A. (1981). Personal narratives reconsidered. *Journal of American Folklore*, 94, 58-85.
- Roos, J. P. (1985). Life stories of social changes: Four generations in Finland. *International Journal of Oral History*, 6, 179-190.
- Rumelhart, D. E. (1975). Notes on a schema for stories. In D. G. Bobrow & A. Collins (Eds.), *Representation and understanding*. New York: Academic Press.
- Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text, and interaction*. London: Sage.
- Stahl, S. K. D. (1977). The personal narrative as folklore. *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 14(1-2), 9-30.
- Titon, J. T. (1980). The life story. *Journal of American Folklore*, 93, 276-292.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1980). *Macrostructures: An interdisciplinary study of global discourse, interaction, and cognition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Voss, J. F., & Bisanz, G. L. (1985). Knowledge and the processing of narrative and expository texts. In B. R. Britton & J. B. Black (Eds.), *Understanding expository text: A theoretical and practical handbook for analyzing explanatory text* (pp. 173-198). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Watzlawick, P., Weakland, J. H., & Fish, R. (1974). *Change: Principles of problem formation and problem resolution*. New York: Norton.
- Weber, M. (1971). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. London: Unwin University Books.
- Weintraub, K. J. (1975). Autobiography and historical consciousness. *Critical Inquiry*, 2, 821-848.
- Weintraub, K. J. (1978). *The value of the individual: Self and circumstance in autobiography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Williams, G. (1984). The genesis of chronic illness: Narrative reconstruction. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 6(2), 175-200.