

PART II

Analyzing Storytelling

5

Narrative Practice and Identity Navigation

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Who-are-you-Dave?

Let me start with a brief description of a scene from the movie *Anger Management* (Segal, 2003). Dave, who was wrongly sentenced to an anger management program, is asked in his first therapy session by the group therapist to introduce himself: “So (.) Dave (.) Tell us about yourself.” Dave follows this invitation with four attempts of self-descriptive detail: He tries to list his hobbies, describes his job, and lists a number of character traits. However, each attempt is immediately stopped; each time, and in a very friendly way, the therapist repeats his request to (simply) “Tell us who you are.” Dave, after four unsuccessful attempts, returns the question: “I don’t know what the hell you want me to say,” whereupon the therapist concludes in a more serious tone of voice: “I think we’re getting a picture, Dave; let’s move on.”

Having used this clip, particularly with audiences outside the United States, who are often less familiar with therapeutic group practices, the question of what Dave should have answered was raised—what a correct answer could have been or what the therapist expected.¹ Of course, an important part of this interactional sequence is how Dave’s responses are contextually embedded.

And the context here consists of stories to which participants have been invited by the therapist—stories in which they report personal anger incidents in which they problematized how they managed these incidents. Interestingly, the stories that went on before the exchange between the therapist and Dave were accounts of transgressions that should admittedly have been avoided or at least handled differently—and when shared in everyday conversation, (i.e., outside of therapy sessions), were likely to cause a high level of embarrassment. Now, Dave, who was uninitiated to the ritual of therapeutic practices, instead of *simply* sharing a personal-anger story, took the *who-are-you* question of the therapist literally (i.e., out of its therapeutic context) and tried to describe or explain who he (*really*) was. Note that he wasn't even telling a story. And although the information he gave about his job and his hobbies was *personal*, it was not the type of disclosure account that was appropriate to the situation.

Although this incident is fictitious, it marvelously captures the abundance and the imperative of story-telling practices—though in this example from the negative angle of how we are sanctioned if we do not perform accordingly. Although admissions of transgressions and embarrassing situations are (still) relatively rare in our everyday interactive practices, the personal story—in contrast to a list of characteristics of the self, given in explanatory or descriptive-genre formats—seems to have become an important resource for relational work between members of communicative practices. Personal stories are said to constitute a prerequisite for answers to the *who-are-you* question (cf. Bamberg 2011b, 2011c). They apparently have moved themselves into the toolkit par excellence for personal identity construction and also for what can be called the establishment of an *enduring sense of self*. In what follows I will present an analytic approach to narratives that follows up and attempts to capitalize on the power of story-telling practices and their potential for identity research. The approach I will present surfaced under the header of *small story research* (Bamberg, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Georgakopoulou, 2006, 2007a, 2007b), but in other contexts it has also been referred to as analysis of *narratives-in-interaction* (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2007a) or, more generally, *story-telling* or *narrative practices* (Bamberg, 2011a, 2011b). In principle, the study of narrative practices attempts to capture and gain insight into the storying process, that is, to understand what speakers tend to accomplish when breaking into narrative and making use of narrative performance features. As such, this approach is close to how Gubrium and Holstein (2008) defined narrative ethnography and narrative reality (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009), and it bears strong resemblances to Hutto's (2009) use of the term *narrative practices*.

Following a brief description of the main characteristics of this approach, I will discuss how the analysis of narrative practices is calibrated to explore three different dimensions along which identity is under construction (*navigated*). Subsequently, I will pick up on the *Who-are-you-Dave* excerpt that I touched on in these introductory paragraphs and apply the narrative practice approach to similar situations in interviews that also pose the *Who-are-you* question—and, similar to Dave’s answer, result in the same outcome: no story told. In a final section, I will summarize and highlight the contributions of the analytic orientation presented in this chapter for identity analysis and narrative studies in general.

Six Premises of the Narrative Practice Perspective

The way I propose to characterize and approach narrative research under the heading of narrative practices has resulted in a number of research questions that can briefly be summarized in the form of the following six premises:

- i. The analyzed narrative practices start from the assumption that narratives are parts of larger interactive activities. Grounded and functioning in vivo and in situ interactive settings, their analysis is closely oriented to the larger context in which narratives are embedded and gain their functional value.
- ii. Often, narratives resemble *texts*, typically of a written format, but the narrative practice approach is particularly committed to orally performed stories that have been recorded (and transcribed)—if possible, with access to visual display features (such as gestures, body posture, facial expression, and gaze) that, beyond and above the stories’ textual features, also give way to the analysis of story-performance features.
- iii. Stories/narratives typically consist of references to a world of actors, places, and events—references to something that happened—typically as having taken place in the past and consisting of more than one event. The referential world presented makes up its content and opens this world for the analysis of the theme, or what the story is about (*its aboutness*).
- iv. The worlds constructed in these stories can be about the speakers themselves or about (third-person) others; that is, they can vary in their content and thematize experiences of all sorts. The structure of these stories most often follows particular culturally preferred principles of formation (*abstract, setting, problem, solution, coda*) and makes these story components available for further scrutiny into the formation of what is commonly called *plot*.
- v. In addition, and equally important, narratives are typically told for a purpose: most generally, to make something inside the story world (i.e., aspects

of the there-and-then of actors, experiences, values or morals) relevant to the here-and-now of the act of speaking. Storytelling functions span the wide territory from entertainment to attributions of blame or accounts for a personal transgression or moral failure. The analysis of story functions within a narrative practice approach is tied closely to the local context of the interactive setting.

- vi. Most relevant, however, and not only for purposes of identity research, speakers, when making events (past, present, or fictitious) relevant for the here-and-now of speaking/listening activities, reveal aspects of who they are—they engage in identity claims with regard to how they would like to come across as well as in terms of potential answers to the who-am-I question. It is at this point where the relational work that is accomplished in storytelling practices is opening up glimpses into how narrators accomplish this type of relationship management and at the same time engage in identity practices that result in what we have called a sense of self—probably even a kind of sense that endures across interactive storytelling practices.

Accordingly, analytic work with narratives can highlight and foreground quite different aspects of narrative structure, its content, or performance, or it can focus more on the interplay of structure, content, and performance. For instance, the analysis can investigate the use of referential devices to establish a world of contents and plot organization, in contrast to how the story was performed—as, for example, by use of prosodic and/or poetic devices. Alternatively, narrative analysis can focus on what a story is supposed to accomplish at *this* point in the interaction (“Why this story here and now?”) or on the effect that the narrative (and its performance) may have had on the audience/recipient and how it is taken up on in the next interactive move.

While all these questions are probably interesting and worth being pursued analytically, only one or two usually form the center of traditional narrative inquiry. The narrative practice approach makes no exception. However, although the analysis of narrative practices originally emerged in contrast to big story (biographic) research, this by no means implies that questions regarding the referential content and aboutness of stories or inquiry into structural features and plot formations of stories are left outside the scope. Rather, starting from an interactional grounding, our focus on narrative practices attempts to connect narratives’ functional purposes, their interactional design, and recipients’ responses (Fish, 1982; Hall, 2002; Jauss, 1982) and works toward a broader framework that does not stop with the analysis of narratives’ structural designs or content features. Identity is navigated as much in the many small stories that are successfully or unsuccessfully prompted in ordinary interaction as it is presented in extended accounts of biographical material.

Narrative Practice and Identity Navigation

With regard to what is special about narratives, it is commonly held that narratives serve the purpose for passing along and handing down culturally shared values, so that individuals learn to position their own values and actions in relationship to established and shared categories and, in doing so, engage in their own formation process as a person. It was this function that inspired a good deal of the narrative turn in the social sciences and humanities because it highlights the relevance of narrative in the identity formation processes of institutional and personal continuities. Functioning to position a sense of self in relation to culturally shared values and existing normative discourses, narrative discourse claims a special status in the business of identity construction. In narratives, speakers typically make claims about characters and make these claims (that are said to have held for a there-and-then) relevant to the here-and-now of the speaking moment. In other words, whenever speakers in their discourse rely on narrative resources, they connect some spatiotemporal coordinates relevant for the construction of a character in the past (or an imagined future) with a different time-space zone (usually one that is relevant to the speaker in the here-and-now).

Mapping out this space and navigating it in terms of what is viewed as changing and remaining the same is what makes narratives one of the cornerstones for the construction of identities—irrespective of whether these are identities of institutions, groups and communities (real or imagined), or individuals (again, real or imagined) (cf. Bamberg, 2011c; Bamberg, De Fina, & Schiffrin, 2011). In contrast to traditional biographical research, the starting question for inquiry into identity and sense-of-self in narrative practice research is not the *who-am-I* question in self-addressed talk by the isolated and self-reflective individual in problem situations. Rather, the starting point is the *who-are-you* question, which is deeply woven into and abundantly present in mundane situations of everyday interactive practices (cf. Bamberg, 2011b).

Constancy and Change Across Time

One dimension along which identity is navigated is constancy and change across time, also referred to as *diachronic identity navigation*. Speakers' accounts of their lives in the form of integrated narratives form the cornerstone of what Erikson (1968) called *ego identity*. Integrated narratives seem to lend themselves as the prime discourse mode for the construction of a diachronic continuity and discontinuity for identity purposes, due to the fact that they require subjects to position a sense of self that balances the two extreme endpoints of this continuum: no change at all,

which would make life utterly boring, and radical change from one moment to the next, which would result in unpredictability and chaos. Speaking subjects are required to navigate this dilemma by positioning who-they-are in terms of *some* form of continuity, constructing their identities in terms of *some* change against the background of *some* constancy (and vice versa). The choice of particular discursive devices, taken from the range of temporality and aspectual markers, contributes to the construction of events as indexing transformations from one location to another, constituting change as discontinuous or as qualitative leaps. Contrastively, other devices can be employed to construe changes as gradual and consistent over time. Consider, for instance, stories that reason about (lay out and explain) one's sexuality. *Coming out stories* of a homosexual identity can give shape to a sense of self in the form of a transformation—maybe even one that occurred as a sudden change. However, they can also be plotted as not consisting of any change, where the speaker may argue that she or he had not been aware of his or her (*real*) sexuality, which all along (continuously) had been there, *hidden* or *dormant*.

The contribution of a narrative practice approach to identity is that it replaces the question of whether a person really *is* the same across a certain span of time, or whether she or he has changed, with the analysis of how people navigate this dilemma *constructively* in their narrative practices, particularly in attempts to weave past and present into some more or less coherent whole. Here it is evident that the question is to a lesser degree what actually happened and to a larger degree how constancy and change are *constructively* navigated. It is at this level where speaking subjects engage in discursive practices of diachronic identity maintenance, as well as in underscoring and bringing off (meaning enacting and communicatively showing) how they have changed. For us, as analysts of narrative practices, these situated, mundane interactive practices form the empirical domain in which identities emerge and can empirically be investigated.

Sameness versus Difference

A second dimension along which identity is navigated is sameness versus difference. What is at stake here is that choices of discursive devices often signal a position of the speaking subject in relation to others—others who are being referred to (in what the talk is about) and who are being talked to (in the speech situation under consideration). More specifically, category ascriptions or attributions to characters that imply identity categories, or even choices of event descriptions as candidates for category-bound

activities, mark affiliations with these categories in terms of proximity or distance. Aligning with (or positioning in contrast to) these categories, speakers draw boundaries around themselves—and others—so that individual identities and group belongings become visible. Thus, it is typically through discursive choices that people define synchronically a sense of (an individual) self as different from others, or they integrate a sense of who they are in terms of belonging to particular communities of others. Although this can be done overtly by marking self as belonging to a social category, most often the membership in a particular category is hinted at by way of covertly positioning self and others in the realm of being talked about. Thus, aligning with the moral values of others requires the navigation of how and to what degree we are the same and simultaneously different from others. And giving descriptions of self and others or trying to explain their behaviors and actions, and whether this is done directly in terms of character attributions or in terms of action descriptions, identifications along the axis of similarity or difference between self and others are the site to practice a sense of self—opening up this territory for the analysis of how these identifications are brought off as narrative practices.

Self–other differentiation and the integration of speaking selves into constellations with others operate against the assumption that other and self can synchronically (i.e., in difference to the diachronic navigation of change and constancy) be viewed as same *and* different. However, which aspect of sameness and difference is picked and made relevant in a particular speech situation is likely to vary from situation to situation and is open to negotiation and revision between conversationalists in local contexts. Some of these aspects fall under the traditional heading of *social identities* and are said to be sorted out in terms of placing others and selves in membership groups, associating with particular groups favorably, comparing us (as the in-group) with other groups, and desiring an identity that is (usually) positively distinct in relation to other groups. However, the contrast or seeming contradiction between what is social and what is personal or individual dissolves in narrative practice perspectives on identity construction: The personal/individual *is* social, and vice versa. Narrative practice perspectives view the person empirically *in interaction* and *under construction*. They do not ask where the personal (individual/private) starts and where it becomes social; nor do they ask where the social (group/cultural/socio-historical) starts and whether or how it impacts the individual. Of course, this is not meant to deny that there are culturally shared senses of what counts as personal, private, and intimate vis-à-vis a space that is communally more open and public.

Agency

A third dimension of identity navigation is agency. Narrative practice perspectives on identity construction view the speaking subject as a bodily agent (i.e., as bodily present in situ and in vivo and interactively involved). It is this site of narrative practices that forms the unit of analysis, in contrast to a disembodied, reflective, and rational mind that, in other narrative approaches, seems to lurk behind what is surfacing in talk.² *Talk*, of course, is more than words connected by the rules of grammar. An analysis that incorporates into its scope that bodies are involved in narrative practices requires that non-linguistic actions be made part of the analysis. Viewing the speaking subject as agentively engaging in narrative practices, and as indexing positions vis-à-vis dominant narratives and ideologies, captures only half of the dilemma faced by subjects who are, arguably, constructing themselves. With their choice of discursive devices from existing repertoires, speaking subjects face what we have termed the *agency dilemma* (Bamberg, 2011c). Indeed, speakers either pick narrative devices that lean toward a person-to-world direction of fit, or they pick devices that construe the direction of fit from world-to-person.

On one end of this continuum, speaking subjects view themselves as recipients: that is, as positioned at the receiving end of a world-to-person direction of fit. Choosing devices from discursive repertoires that result in low-agency marking assists in the construction of a victim role—or at least a position as less influential, powerful, responsible, and, in case the outcome of the depicted action is negatively evaluated, as less blame-worthy. In contrast, picking devices from the other end of the continuum, speaking subjects position themselves as *agentive self-constructors*. Discursive devices that mark the character under construction in terms of high agency lend themselves to the construction of a heroic self—a person who comes across as strong, in control, and self-determined. In either case, depicting events in which a self is involved, and placing this self (as agent or as undergoer) in relation to others, requires a choice of positioning; and the analysis of identity construction in narrative practice research closely attends to these choices as indexing how the agency dilemma is being navigated and a sense of self as actor or as undergoer comes to the surface.

Narrative Practices With No Story

In what follows I will illustrate some of the analytic means outlined previously in a closer examination of what has thus far been called *the narrative practice* approach. While it is commonly assumed that these practices result in stories, and while the analytic procedures have been developed and

refined in examining stories (e.g., as *small stories* in their interactive context), it should be noted that the analytic unit itself has shifted from story to story-in-context and, as such, from the storyteller to the practices that are under joint construction.³ Thus, in contrast to the common strategy of starting with a definition and identification of stories as analytic units, and subsequently situating and more fully explicating them in their interactional context, I want to use the subsequent illustration to show that and how the actual unit of analysis is the practice, not the story. If the assumption is warranted that stories emerge within narrative practices, it ultimately should be possible to analyze narrative practices that “go somewhere else,” in the sense that they actually may *not* result in stories; or as we argued when attempting a working definition of narratives-in-interaction, that “small stories can even be about—colloquially speaking—‘nothing’” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 381). And it can be assumed that the analysis of situations like this, as in our introductory example of *Who-are-you-Dave*, may extrapolate the role of narrative practices in a clearer fashion.

With this in mind, I have chosen three different interviews that target the who-are-you question—that is, they attempt to establish the identity of an interviewee, a man with the name Clark Rockefeller (henceforth CR). The first interview originated from a visit of a team of reporters for the *Boston Globe* who interviewed CR in the Suffolk County Jail in Boston on Wednesday August 20, 2008. The two extracts I will discuss stem from the beginning of their interview. The second interview was conducted by Natalie Morales with her TV-crew for NBC’s *Today*-show. This interview took place on the same day as the *Boston Globe* reporters’ interview and was aired in two segments on August 25th and 26th on NBC’s *Today*. The chosen extract from this interview stems from the end of the interview aired on August 26th. The extracts of the third interview come from an interrogation by two FBI detectives on the day of CR’s capture in Baltimore (August 2nd), taking place in the Baltimore FBI office. All three interviews are available to the public on YouTube, on Miro, as well as on web pages run by NBC and the *Boston Globe*.

Background Information

Let me start with some background information. Since the late seventies, CR had been living in the United States under a number of aliases—and since about 1993 under the name of *Clark Rockefeller*. He was married (under this name) to Sandra Boss from 1995 until 2007, when she filed for divorce, which resulted in a custodian settlement that allowed him to see their daughter once a year. At the first parental visit, on July 27th in Boston, CR abducted his seven-year-old daughter. He was arrested six days later in Baltimore and placed in jail, where the first police interrogation took place.

Then, on August 5th, he was transferred back to Boston, where the other two interviews took place. What appeared to be of interest and newsworthy for the American public was not so much the abduction case, but that CR had apparently been living in the United States with a false identity—and this for more than two decades.⁴

All three interviews share the same result: no story, no self-disclosure. As such, this is nothing unusual because suspects may decide not to engage in self-disclosure of events that could implicate them. However, the interviews are interesting in a number of other ways: First, what seems to be at stake is that there is a whole life, including memories and the principled matter of a personal past, that are kept hidden. And the interesting questions that arise are as follows: How does a person manage to keep not having a past from others? How does a person navigate the kinds of identity challenges that we discussed previously? Can they simply be avoided? And as a consequence, although none of the three interviews was able to establish a portfolio that pointed at CR's *true* identity, the first two interviews nevertheless resulted in report-worthy stories because the reporters were able to document and comment on CR's responses. They were able to build and work toward an interpretation of CR that did not explain who he *really* was, but nevertheless increased an interest in CR's authenticity (or inauthenticity) as a "man with no story." Irrespective of what makes these interviews interesting along the lines of authenticity productions, I will utilize them for a rather different, though related, purpose.

All three interviews, just like the *Who-are-you-Dave* excerpt from the beginning of this chapter, are governed by the who-are-you question—though apparently for different purposes. While it can be assumed that the who-are-you question was instructing Dave to choose the appropriate narrative means to qualify him as a member of the therapy group, the same question in the following interview settings may have slightly different implications: While both reporter teams may have tried to elicit self-disclosure from CR in order to tell a story, the goals may have been different: The reporters for the *Boston Globe* needed segments/episodes (*memories*) that *they* could piece into a story for *their* readers (i.e., they did not need to report these segments in sequence). They could paraphrase what they were told, or they could quote CR in the form of 'reported' or 'constructed speech'; but the final story is *theirs*. In contrast, Natalie Morales, who was *bringing* CR as a speaking subject before her viewers, gave him the full stage to answer her questions. She still could edit the sequence in which the interaction took place, but what CR said is hearable (and seeable) as part of a number of adjacency pairs. In contrast to both of these interviews, CR's interrogation by the two FBI agents primarily serves the function to establish "the facts"

(of CR's basic identity as well as of what happened in the kidnapping case). The goal there was to establish an initial portfolio. In sum, and in contrast to a typical biographic interview, it is not clear to which degree any of these interviews is oriented toward the elicitation of CR's life story or episodes thereof that would be relevant with regard to his personal sense of self. Nevertheless, all interviews start with the same who-are-you question, just the way Dave was approached by the therapist as a newcomer to the anger-management group.

In analyzing the extracts, I will pay special attention to the discursive means used that place the participants in the midst of narrative practices. Since there ultimately is no emerging self-disclosure from CR in the form of a story, we will have to rely on the means the interviewers used that in one way or another might be interpreted as parts of practices that are typically occurring in—and therefore may be qualified *as*—narrative practices. I will summarize these means in the subsequent section.

The Boston Globe Interview

Interview that took place on August 20, 2008 (Wednesday) from 9:45am–10:30am at Nashua Street Jail, Suffolk County Jail, Boston, MA

Participants:

M	Maria Cramer (reporter)	JE	John R. Ellement reporter)
SH	Stephen Hrones (CR's attorney)	CR	Clark Rockefeller
ML	Michael Levenson (reporter)	JT	John Tlumacki (photographer)

Extract A: First question after three rounds of greetings (the *way-question*) (00:09–00:22): Falling ↓ and rising ↑ intonation as well as pauses (.) are indicated to help the reader better understand how speakers performed their contributions.

I	M	who <u>are</u> you ↓
	SH	we're not getting into that
	M	you said
	SH	we're not getting into any aliases or anything

(Continued)

(Continued)

- 5 start 1993
 M right
 I mean (.5 sec) who are you (1 sec) now ↓
 CR Clark Rockefeller↓

Extract B: Questioning later in the interview (1:08–1:36):

- 9 M why can't you remember certain things?
 why is it so difficult to remember?
 CR <pause> I couldn't tell you
 I just don't know
- 13 M have you been trying to remember?
 I mean it must be==
 JE ==does that trouble you?
 not being able to remember?
 CR I'm not quite sure what I'm supposed to remember
- 18 JE well you know most people they can think back to their
 childhood they can think//
 SH //we're not getting into that==
 JE ==no I'm not saying that
- I'm just saying most people (.) that gives them a sense of where they are
 and who they are
- 24 CR mm hm mm hmm not for me
 JE how does that sat sit with you?
 does that worry you?
 what's your feeling about that?
- 28 CR I don't lose much thought over it no
 M I mean that some people are curious about that you know
 wanna know that background

I could imagine that you yourself would be <laugh> really curious about your own background

33 CR well you know I try to look forward
rather than look into the past

JE what are your dreams these days?

CR I very rarely remember dreams

SOURCE: http://www.boston.com/news/specials/rockefeller_interview_audio/

Extracts A and B of this first excerpt come from two reporters (M and JE) interacting with CR (and his attorney, SH) within the jail where CR was held. The who-are-you question was popped as the opening question to the interview (line 1) and redirected by CR's attorney to inquire into his identity starting with 1993 (when he allegedly met his wife under the name CR). Rephrasing the question slightly by adding the temporal qualifier *now* (line 7) still leaves unclear what precisely was intended by the question. However, stating his name does not qualify as an answer, since this information had been shared in a round of greetings just seconds before when CR repeatedly stated his name to those present. Furthermore, as in Dave's case at the opening of this chapter, the who-are-you question typically calls for more than simply a name. And it can further be assumed that the who-are-you question in this particular context may have served to call up a joint frame of reference within which reporters, CR, and CR's attorney were jointly positioning the newsworthiness of information for the readers of the *Boston Globe*.

Shortly after these first turns at the start of the interview, the interviewers more clearly identified CR's memory—or better, his inability to remember (lines 9–10 and 13)—to be “the problem.” Not being able to remember, at least in this situation, seems to require further accounting: It is declared to be *trouble* (lines 15–16) and *worrisome* (lines 25–27). One possible implication is that not having access to childhood memories does not provide possible claims to a diachronic identity—and neither does it enable claims that can ground a self synchronically in terms of kinship or early friendship relations. CR is running the risk of being constructed as someone who does not know where he comes from and who he is (lines 22–23), as potentially unreliable and maybe even as unstable. And since diachronic and synchronic

navigation of identity (i.e., navigating change and constancy across time and differentiating self from other as same or different) are imperatives for a healthy sense of self (lines 22–23), CR is positioned as having to do further identity accounting with regard to why, and how, he is different from others. Not being able to do this is viewed as resulting in (emotional) suffering.

Note that the interviewers' attributions of difference (not having access to memories and not being able to construct a sense of who he was) come as questions that may be heard as revealing an empathic concern about CR's emotional well-being: *Does that trouble you?* (line 15) and *Does that worry you? What's your feeling about that?* (lines 26–27). Whether this strategy is genuine or staged as a cleverly feigned surface agreement is debatable, but it is not necessarily relevant to the outcome of the conversation. CR does not move closer to engaging in self-disclosing information.

Thus far, at no point has anyone suggested (let alone explicitly mentioned) that CR should account for who-he-is in terms of *story* or *narrative*. However, the fact that CR has agreed to be interviewed by newspaper reporters affirms the assumption that all present for this interview are in the business of producing something newsworthy that is of interest to the public/reader. Thus, the terms being used thus far (*remembering* and *background* as referring to past memories) can be assumed to stand in for self-disclosures in the form of narratives or stories. Thus, the fact that CR's stories and their disclosure are at the center of the conversation thus far has served as an unspoken background assumption. And the rhetorical means that have surfaced up to this point predominantly consist of characterizations of the interviewee as interactively uncooperative due to his internal-emotional (identity) trouble and, in addition, not being properly aligned with how others make sense of themselves.

The Today TV Show Interview

Interview took place on August 20, 2008 and aired on the *Today* show, August 26, 2008.

Participants:

NM	Natalie Morales	CR	Clark Rockefeller
SH	CR's attorney: Stephen Hrones		

Extract: Memory gaps (and biography)

- 1 NM do the memory gaps bother you↑
 CR I really only look forward↓
 I very rarely look backward at anything ↓
 I I//
- 5 NM //you never try to piece together what's happened in your life↑
 CR not particularly=
 NM =who you are↑(.)
 where you came from↑
 CR it almost makes no difference to me
- 10 one way or the other

Second interview segment – aired in NBC's *Today* show on August 26, 2008 <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21134540/vp/26388699#26403908> [6:55min]

The brief excerpt chosen here surfaces in the second airing of Natalie Morales' interview, on Tuesday August 26th, about five minutes into the airing (i.e., closer to the overall ending). The sections of the interview that were aired the previous day consisted of repeated attempts to pose the who-are-you question, though to no avail. The question about whether CR's memory gaps bothered him (line 1) came after CR actually had disclosed a number of childhood memories: having been at Mt. Rushmore in a 1968 Ford station wagon, having picked strawberries in Oregon in the sixties, the garbage strike in New York, and a visit to the zoo in Central Park. So it appears that the issue now is not whether CR has any memories or is not able to remember, as in the interview for the *Boston Globe*, but the fact that these memories only consist of unconnected episodic snapshots: They don't pass as event-like sequences (*pieced together*, line 5) that resemble a navigation of diachronic or synchronic identity dilemmas. Thus, in spite of the fact that there is disclosure of memories, this—as in our initial clip from the movie *Anger Management* (Segal, 2003)—does not come off as a sufficient response. However, the reason now is because of the lack of a diachronic connection between a there-and-then and their relevance for the here-and-now of the telling situation.

5 CR uh (.) a researcher-writer not a fiction-writer

SA okay ↑

CR I'm not a XXX of a writer
but a researcher-writer

SA okay. ehm. alright

10 → yeah my husband does research
so this (.) its kind of interesting to me
so I'm just wondering yeah

Extract B: I'm wondering what the going rate is

SA so they were paying you for that ↑

CR oh yeah ↓

15 okay ↑

what were they paying for a paper

→ I'm wondering what the going rate is

<<leaning forward - joking tone - taking bottle, drinking a sip>>

Extract C: I know where I was born

SA where were you born ↓

20 CR well as far as I know in New York ↓

SA okay

can you explain that a little bit to me

→ because I know where I was born you know

25 I'm sure this detective does
and I'm just (.) a little bit curious about that

CR I'm not totally clear on that
at some point I (.) I THINK that I was born in New York

SA okay ↑

(Continued)

(Continued)

30 ehm and why do you say New York
 I mean there's got to be some period of time
 when you remember
 back to your childhood
 an and where you grew up

35 CR I'm not clear
 SA not clear ↓

Extract D: I lost my Mom when I was young

37 SA <ostensibly turns the interview over to DM>
 D did you lose your parents

 can I (.) I just want to slide these aside

40 <both D and CR slide a cup and a bottle to the side of the
 table>

 between you and I (.) you know

 did you lose your parents when you were young Clark

→ I mean I lost my Mom when I grew up

→ so when (.) that was very traumatic

45 → you know I mean I tried to block it out

 can you tell (.) please tell us how

 you have to get the axe at some point with your Mom and
 Dad

 or at least your Mom

 or it [will be bad (.) yo[u'll fall apart=

50 CR [neh [yeah =I forgot a lot of things

 and a lot of things that I just could never really quite recall

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4A0mWp8dIA>

These extracts stem from the first police interrogation, recorded in the evening of August 02nd—the day CR was apprehended after six days on the run. Having read CR his rights, the female special agent (henceforth SA) took the lead in the interview by stating that CR had given the police a difficult time over the last days—for which CR apologizes. This seemingly sets up a personal tone for the interview, aligning the parties with their agenda at hand.

I have selected a number of smaller extracts that I will use to document situated story-telling practices, in spite of the fact that these practices do not result in the telling of a story. Let me start with a brief consideration of two short extracts (A and B), in which SA aligns herself with CR in an interesting way. In line 10, SA self-discloses that her husband (also) does research, and in lines 16 and 17 she displays an interest in the going rate of academic papers that students can buy on line. What we find here is a strategy on the interviewer's part of taking a self-reflective if not emotive stance vis-à-vis what the interviewee had just claimed. With lines 10 and 11, the special agent makes relevant her marital status and her husband's professional orientation and aligns herself with the interviewee's self-description as a researcher. Her question about the price of papers that CR had been selling to students (line 16), and her account for asking this question (*I'm wondering . . .* line 17), can be assumed to establish a similar conciliatory position. Note that none of SA's disclosures were called for; nor did her disclosures contribute in any way to the establishment of CR's portfolio. While not entirely atypical for interviews of this sort (Stokoe, 2009), but potentially detracting and venturing into the personal realms of the interviewer, these moves of disclosing (personal) information seem to be built off of everyday discursive practices (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) that are available to establish interactive relationships and keep a conversation going. In a sense, the special agent is coming across—apart from pursuing her role as a police interrogator—as a person who (also) has a husband and family and shares some interests with the interrogated.

Let us turn next to Extract C. The practices we find at work here resemble some of the practices in the *Boston Globe* and *Today* show interview settings, and they differ from the kinds of alignments we encountered in Extracts A and B. In a much more direct and seemingly disaffiliative move, SA asks for CR's place of birth and challenges him with regard to his inability to remember his birthplace and childhood. She requests an explanation (line 22) and backs it up with an appeal to her own (and her colleague's) ability to account for their birthplaces (lines 23 and 25).

A number of things are going on here: First, the appeal to childhood memories in this context does not bring into effect the same connotations to

dysnarrativa (Bruner, 2002, p.86) or to potential identity defects as in the previous interviews. The issue here is much more factual: CR's place of birth is under scrutiny for the here-and-now of establishing his portfolio. By calling on her own knowledge (and that of her colleague's) with regard to where they were born (lines 23 and 25), SA positions CR as not playing along with everyday narrative processes where it is normal to disclose the most mundane, if not trivial, information. CR is implicitly told that he is not following the procedures necessary to productively pursue this interview. Her use of *a little bit* in lines 22 (positioning herself as in need of *a little bit* more of an explanation) and 26 (as being *a little bit* curious) is most likely hearable as an understatement, if not sarcasm—positioning herself as disaffiliated, though not to a degree that brings the interview to a standstill. Nevertheless, and this counters her alignment strategies in Excerpts A and B, SA questions CR's answer and forcefully insists that *there's got to be some period of time* that simply has to be remembered. In other words, in lines 30 to 34 SA positions herself clearly as non-affiliated or conciliating toward CR—and soon thereafter, she gives up her position of leading the interrogation. Overall, and similar to the practices at play in the *Boston Globe* and *Today* show extracts, CR is positioned as outside the kinds of disclosure techniques that are said to be common and holding for everyday narrative situations. And not only do mundane facts such as our place of birth, the current rates of term papers, or whether we are married and share some basic interests count as sharable items for disclosure, but so do memories of childhood, how we grew up, and the like.

Extract D starts with SA handing over the floor to D, who, after asking twice whether Clark had lost his parents (lines 38 and 42), launches a full self-disclosure about *his* loss of *his* mom and its emotional impact on *him*. It is interesting that this disclosure follows the removal of possible physical obstacles between him and CR, here in the form of a plastic bottle and a small cup that, thus far, had not interfered between him and CR. It also is interesting that CR on three occasions seems to attempt to interrupt D's self-disclosure, but to no avail.

While SA's attempts at relational positioning can be characterized as a mix of affiliating and disaffiliating positions vis-à-vis CR, D positions himself much more personally as a son who was traumatized by the loss of his Mom, but who also was able to overcome this trauma, which elevates him into a position to speak as an advice giver. In so doing, he interactively positions both himself as well as CR as outside (or above) the previous sequence of routinized questions (by SA) and answers (by CR) that are so characteristic of the asymmetry of police interrogations. Note that the previous

interchange (between SA and CR) was not moving forward and apparently had come to a standstill. Thus, D's initiating move is recognizable as one that—after CR had been characterized as unreasonable due to some form of dysnarrativa (Bruner, 2002, p. 86), which resembles an “identity defect”—attempts to normalize the situation. He flattens the difference between himself as FBI agent and CR as the suspect, signaling an affiliative, if not empathetic, stance—one that can be interpreted as further exploring why CR has not been forthcoming with his story, but here from a non-neutral, more empathetic, and presumably *understanding* position.

What Analyzing Narrative Practices Reveals

The three interviews chosen for the illustration of narrative practices consist of question-answer sequences, as is typical for interviews. The focus in our previous work with these sequences was more on the questions than the answers, since the questions did not result in the expected preferred answers, which would have been self-disclosing stories. However, the way the questions were tailored revealed aspects of narrative practices that I will briefly summarize in terms of their identity navigating functions.

First, and repeatedly surfacing, all interviewing teams focused on childhood narratives as a relevant identity navigation reservoir from where accounts of how we have become individual (and social) seem to have to start. Not having access to accounts that implicate mothers, fathers, siblings, or early friends seems to be taken to result in the inability to differentiate self from others—unable to account for how we have been socialized into ways of differentiating and integrating (synchronically) a sense of self into family and early social relationships.

Second, and this assumption surfaced explicitly in the *Today* show and in Extract D of the police interrogation, isolated self-disclosures of past events are not enough: They have to be tied together into a string of disclosures that make past events relevant for a here-and-now—and this from early on so that a diachronic sense of self can be displayed. The inability to narrate how a past self became the self of the present poses a serious threat to identity navigation, and this assumption runs through the string of questions and answers of the interactive work accomplished in the three interviews. It seems to have become a second, bedrock assumption that access to diachronic accounting practices for a sense of self is a separate and important prerequisite for the formation of identity, in addition to having access to childhood memories.

In sum, the “practices at work” in these pursuits of the who-are-you-question rely on as much as they (re)constitute a folk-theory of narrative and identity that is modern and makes use of the basic building blocks delivered by an underlying therapeutic master narrative (Illouz, 2008). The cornerstones of this folk theory are (i) childhood accounts by use of which the modern person is able to differentiate him- or herself from parents and other others; (ii) maneuvering these childhood stories “developmentally,” so that these accounts link up and connect to “transformative” identity claims valid for a here-and-now; and (iii) reclaiming one’s agency by showing how problem-zones (typically in childhood and early adolescence, when the sense of self is more likely to be constructed as vulnerable and one’s agency not as fully developed) have successfully been reflected and mastered by a newly claimed agentic self. Practices that are built around these cornerstones of a narrative formation of identity are geared to arrive at a newly arrived at, but now for real and authentic claim of who-I-am.

Having shifted the unit of analysis from narratives as mono-modal vocal manifestations of form and content to the complex field of focused interactions (that we originally termed *small stories*), we have left unattended the important aspect of the complex interactive orchestration of vocal and visible bodily expressions. Rather than working through the previous data in the form of a more detailed analysis that attends more closely to the poly-modal display of narrative practices, I offer two brief examples that open up the analysis of narrative practices as a poly-modal field of interactive practices.

The first example comes from the start of Extract D, where the male FBI agent takes over the interrogation by asking CR whether he had lost his parents. He moves aside a plastic bottle and a small cup (followed by his comment in line 39: *I just want to slide these aside*) and, with this physical action, contributes to what can be viewed as flattening the power differential and preparing the ground for a more empathetic and understanding position. This physical action of removing obstacles between the FBI agent and the interrogated person does not stand alone and is by no means a simple corollary to the verbal action. Rather, this physical action forms an integral part of an overall spatial and orientational maneuver between the interactants and, as such, another discrete unit in the attempt of reaching an agreement regarding what is to be attended to and what can be disattended. And what becomes the center of attention in this brief excerpt is the FBI agent’s visual display of himself as authentically having reclaimed his agency and being able to move himself into the position to instruct others on how they can accomplish the same. Displaying how he reclaimed agency

and self-responsibility, and *showing* how he identified the cause of his suffering and overcame it (by *taking the ax*), he performs an act of authentic self-transformation: He apparently opens up and self-discloses who he *really* is.

A very similar kind of narrative practice is visibly displayed in the storytelling practices that surrounded Dave's answers to the therapist's who-are-you-questions, which I briefly discussed in the introductory paragraphs: All anger storytellers in this therapeutic setting display and show in the physical performances of their tellings *how* they engage in self-reflection and how this leads them to be able to reclaim some of their agency, and in doing so, they show how they (agentively through their talk) transform themselves from a previous sense of who-they-were (where they "had lost it") to a new sense that displays and claims now "being above it". What seems to be the most integral part in these practices is the actual performance of how this new identity is managed into a visibly new and authentic existence that is recognized and accepted by the surrounding participants—who know perfectly when to nod and visibly show their recognition and acceptance, up to the level of open applause.

Conclusion

This work with the different extracts revealed more clearly what kind of assumptions about narratives and storytelling are at work and how deeply they are woven into the discursive fabric of everyday practices.⁶ Although it is usually assumed that these practices, in order to qualify as narrative practices, go along with and materialize in stories told, it has been my aim to show how narrative practices are at work even in situations that do not result in stories. Learning and generalizing from these instances, we begin to realize how deep-seated culturally shared assumptions about the relationship between storytelling and identity navigation are and how deeply they have penetrated everyday interactions, and even our general sense-making capabilities (Illouz, 2008). Taking these insights back to research practices that attempt to explore the emergence of identities and our sense of self, it may by now be more apparent that the narrative practice approach does not replace the study of narratives.

However, viewing storytelling activities and their outcomes as grounded in interactive work clearly has shifted our focus onto the interactive work that, first of all, is interactive *between* interactants, and only in a secondary and metaphoric fashion can be approached as a monologic

and reflective activity of *dialogically* talking to oneself (see Bamberg, 2011b; Bamberg & Zielke, 2007). As such, the assumption of narratives as deeply embedded in their situated and interactive context is more than a simple addition or complementation to approaches that focus (instead) on narrative form or content. Rather, the narrative practice approach forms one of the cornerstones for analyzing what narratives are about and what form they take, in addition to what speakers do and accomplish with their narrative.

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Endnotes

1. The question “What was the answer the therapist was looking for” is actually the topic of a blog, which can be found at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0305224/board/nest/134850506> and where bloggers continue to grapple with the (correct) answer.
2. It appears that this impression is heavily influenced by an interpretive tradition that relies on written texts as the prototypical narrative.
3. These joint constructions are by no means always cooperative, as the following extracts will document.
4. In a very quick turnaround, the American television network *Lifetime Television* turned the events around the discovery of Clark Rockefeller’s true identity into a movie (*Who is Clark Rockefeller?*). It was first aired publicly (on *Lifetime*) on March 13, 2010.

5. Note that it is not the interview as a whole that is unsuccessful. However, the interview—and thus the interviewer—was not able to bring off the story of the “*real* Clark Rockefeller.”

6. It may be debatable whether interviews that form part of an overgrowing authenticity industry as well as police interrogations can be considered everyday practices. Clearly, they have to be analyzed as interviews taking place in their institutional settings. However, the cultural assumptions that have been shown to be at work in these settings have been routinized in our everyday narrative practices.