

# THE HERMENEUTICS OF FAITH AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION

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Ricoeur distinguishes between two forms of hermeneutics: a hermeneutics of faith which aims to restore meaning to a text and a hermeneutics of suspicion which attempts to decode meanings that are disguised. In this paper, his distinction is applied to interpretive stances in narrative research. From the point of view of a hermeneutics of faith, the interpretive effort is to examine the various messages inherent in an interview text, giving “voice” in various ways to the participant(s), while the researcher working from the vantage point of the hermeneutics of suspicion problematizes the participants’ narrative and strives for explanation beyond the text. Examples are offered of narrative research from each point of view and the implications of working from each stance are explored. Each interpretive position also effects both reflexivity and ethics, and these matters are also discussed. Finally, the implications and possibilities of combining these interpretive positions are considered. (*Hermeneutics, Ricoeur, Narrative Analysis, Interpretive Stance, Reflexivity*)

*I do believe you think what now you speak;  
But what we do determine oft we break.  
Purpose is but the slave to memory,  
Of violent birth, but poor validity;  
Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree;  
But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be.  
Most necessary 'tis that we forget  
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt:  
What to ourselves in passion we propose,  
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.*

Hamlet, Act III, Scene 2 – spoken by the Player King

It has by now become an axiom of many fields concerned with human experience that people order their lives through narrative (Bruner, 1987, 1990; Freeman, 1993, 1997; MacIntyre, 1984; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). Hopes, desires, memories, fantasies, intentions, representations of others, and time are all interwoven, through narrative, into a fabric that people experience – and can tell – as a life history. Stories are the linguistic form in which the connectedness of human experience as lived can be expressed (Ricoeur, 1991). “The implicit meaning of life is made explicit in stories (Widdershoven, 1993, p. 2).” Indeed, many scholars go so far as to assert that it is through narrative that people create themselves. The self and identity become that entity which is enacting the particular story under construction (Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000; McAdams, 1999; MacIntyre, 1984).

Jerome Bruner (1990) distinguishes the narrative from the paradigmatic modes of understanding in psychology and explores the ways in which narrative modes of inquiry require analysis of meanings. In his view, the cognitive revolution in psychology was aimed at rejoining psychology with its “sister interpretive disciplines in the humanities and in the social sciences (p. 2),” specifically anthropology, linguistics, philosophy and history. Such a rapprochement reestablishes psychology as an interpretive discipline which means that it requires attention to its hermeneutic enterprise.

The burgeoning field of narrative psychology, which embodies this rapprochement, aims to understand human experience as a form of text construction, relying on the assumption that humans create their lives through an autobiographical process akin to producing a story. It is not just the material “facts” of a life that are of concern here, but the particular meaningful shape that emerges from selected inner and outer experiences. “Facts,” in the naive historical sense, are understood to be created rather than reproduced since the present of the past always shapes the retelling. Meanings of past events change over the lifespan as the beginnings of the story are reshaped to lead to endings that are mutable and in process (Bruner, 1990; Freeman, 1993). Thus, the person always creates the life story in an interpretive and constructive way.

Scholarship and research in this field aim at the interpretation of meanings thus produced, either through analysis of discursive practices, genres, plotlines, thematic structures, symbolization or cultural referents. The data for this enterprise consist of some phenomenological account of experience obtained from the person or persons under investigation, and the epistemo-

logical praxis relies on hermeneutics, a disciplined form of moving from text to meaning. While the person storying his or her life is interpreting experience in constructing the account, the researchers' task is hermeneutic and reconstructive (Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000) in offering a telling at some different level of discourse. While much attention in narrative psychology has been addressed to the various dilemmas of data-gathering in narrative research, relatively less attention has been given to the theoretical concerns that underlie the process of analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Because meanings cannot be grasped directly and all meanings are essentially indeterminate in any unshakeable way, interpretation becomes necessary, and this is the work of the hermeneutic enterprise. Although a term that originally referred to biblical exegesis, hermeneutics has evolved into a science of meanings inherent in texts, broadly construed. Hermeneutics represents a current in philosophy that may be traced through Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Gadamer (Mace, 1999). But hermeneutics is not a unitary pursuit. Ricoeur (1970, 1981) demonstrates that the hermeneutic interpretive stance, in its derivation from philosophy and interpretation of sacred texts, can be positioned in two different ways. The first positioning aims at the *restoration* of a meaning addressed to the interpreter in the form of a message. It is characterized by a willingness to listen, to absorb as much as possible the message in its given form and it respects the symbol, understood as a cultural mechanism for our apprehension of reality, as a place of revelation. This type of hermeneutics is animated by faith. By contrast, hermeneutics may be approached as the *demystification* of meaning presented to the interpreter in the form of a disguise. This type of hermeneutics is characterized by a distrust of the symbol as a dissimulation of the real and is animated by suspicion, by a skepticism towards the given. Ricoeur (1970) suggests that it is the latter type of hermeneutics which is practiced by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. All three of these 'masters of suspicion' look upon the contents of consciousness as in some sense 'false'; all three aim to transcend this falsity through a reductive interpretation and critique.

These traditions cannot however be distinguished by spatial metaphors of surface and depth, nor by temporal ones of multiple and shifting planes of self-experience. Within the hermeneutics of faith, which aims at restoration of meaning, meanings can nevertheless be implicit. They can lie "deeper" than the symbolization apparent on the surface, but symbols are understood as manifestations of the depths. In the hermeneutics of demystification, sym-

bols are viewed as disguised or distorted pointers to other layers of meaning. An example of this contrast appears sharply between the standpoints of Jung and Freud. Where Jung viewed symbols in dreams as efforts on the part of the dreamer to express meaning, Freud regarded them as camouflage to be deciphered. Similarly, whereas Freud regarded earliest memories as concealing important conflicts of early life, Adler viewed them to be revealing of fundamental experiences of current life.

Narrative research traditions can be understood as belonging to one of these two forms of hermeneutics or as attempting to maintain a tension between them. Brockmeier (1997), for example, distinguishes between two ways to explore an individual's life history. One tradition, in many scholarly fields, regards autobiographies and life stories from the point of view of their narrative and discursive modes of construction. The other tradition, according to Brockmeier, is the point of view of psychoanalysis. Indeed, psychoanalysis in its many varieties has formed a dominant paradigm for the hermeneutics of demystification within psychology, but there are others as well: feminist readings, for example, or Hegelian or Foucauldian ones. These, as well as other, conceptual stances may frame a reading of a lifestory text for the deconstruction of disguised meaning.

The specific activity of hermeneutic psychological research depends on which hermeneutic stance one adopts. Ricoeur's analytic distinction allows us to conceptually address the question that most narrative researchers, both neophyte and experienced, inevitably address: Can we read in a text what is "not there?"

In this paper, I explore the implications of Ricoeur's analysis for narrative research, considering how these two forms of interpretive orientation informs the mode of inquiry, the nature of reflexivity and the problems of ethics. While I make a sharp distinction between them for purposes of clarifying the epistemological stance of the researcher, I go on to consider ways in which they can be interlinked in the practice of narrative research. All dualies ultimately break down or merge, but I offer them in the same spirit as Ricouer who believed that opposing these hermeneutic stances allows us to "recognize the contours of the hermeneutic field (1970, p. 9.)"

I will primarily refer to the hermeneutics animated by faith as a hermeneutics of restoration, since the stance of the interpreter is one of trying to unearth and highlight meanings that are present in the informant/participant's communication. Since the word "suspicion" carries pejorative connotations and

“doubt” seems also to be unduly disrespectful of the participant, I will refer to the hermeneutics animated by the effort to decode as the hermeneutics of demystification.

It is a property of all texts to have manifest and latent content, to be phrased in experience-near or experience distant terms. The contrast between the hermeneutics of restoration and the hermeneutics of demystification, however, refers not to a property of texts but to the stance of the interpreter: whether he or she conceives of the interpretative process as being one of distilling, elucidating, and illuminating the intended meanings of the informant or of discovering meanings that lie hidden within a false consciousness.

### THE HERMENEUTICS OF RESTORATION (FAITH)

From the point of view of the hermeneutics of restoration, we, as researchers, believe that the participants are telling us, as best they are able, their sense of their subjective experience and meaning-making. We begin, as does the player King in Hamlet, quoted in the epigraph, with an effort to believe that the person under scrutiny believes what he or she says. We adopt what may be considered to be a humanistic attitude and construe our task as trying to represent to ourselves and the readers of our work, clearly and accurately, the message our participants are trying to convey to us. From a restoration perspective, we assume that the participant is the expert on his or her own experience and is able and willing to share meanings with the researcher. The aim of the hermeneutics of faith is to re-present, explore and/or understand the subjective world of the participant and/or the social and historical world they feel themselves to be living in. The interview thus provides a window on psychological and social realities of the participant; this is a view that is promulgated in most texts on qualitative research (e.g. Kvale, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Riessman, 1993; Silverman, 1993; van Manen, 1990; Wengraf, 2001; see Price, 1999 for a review of these texts). Meanings are taken as relatively transparent although many researchers using this perspective explicitly recognize that interpretation occurs at every stage of the analysis. Putting aside the problems inherent in knowing another and the fact that the eye of the beholder always constructs what is seen, that the person and social location of the researcher influences what is told , that there will always be gaps and partial truths as well as power dynamics, the aim

is nevertheless to try to understand the Other as they understand themselves. "The imprint of this faith is a care or concern for the object and a wish to describe and not to reduce it" (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 28).

Phenomenology is the instrument of the restoration of meaning (Ricoeur, 1970). Thus, the epistemological basis of the hermeneutics of restoration is derived from a Husserlian return to the phenomenology of experience as a basis on which to found an understanding of human existence as well as a privileging, following Dilthey, of the aim of grasping the subjectivity of others. Focus is on the structures of consciousness and the interrelationships of these elements (Hein & Austin, 2000). More recently, the influence of Heidegger and Wittgenstein has enlarged this epistemological frame within psychology to include the study of how language transmits social realities in the construction of individual consciousness (K. Gergen, 1994). Although there are major contradictions between the thinking of Husserl and (his student) Heidegger in the way in which they understand the relation between the individual and the social world, both philosopher's ideas have been recruited into a hermeneutics of restoration within psychology.

Narratives of interest from this point of view tend to take the form of a *Bildungsroman* in which the narrator accounts for a process of self-formation and self-development through experiences of learning and enlightenment and/or through conflict and challenge. As researchers, our effort is to unearth the meanings inherent in the narratives we obtain, remaining faithful to the (multiple and layered) intentions of the narrator (Tappan, 1997b), rather than trying to construct them differently. This approach is of paramount value when our aim is giving "voice" to marginalized or oppressed groups and thus representing their experiences. Meanings may be assigned through consensus between the researcher and the researched and understood to be co-constructed through conversation between them. Such work may be primarily descriptive in its presentation and be useful as a way of demonstrating the limits of theories or paradigms and thereby contesting or extending them. At the level of re-presentation of narrative material, this form of research has influence in testing the utility of theory in light of the phenomenology.

The hermeneutic stance from this position is one of trying to re-collect and reorder meanings inherent in the material, staying close to the *evaluations* (Gwyn, 2000; Labov & Waletzky, 1967) offered by the narrator. In his reading of the life of Karen Horney, for example, Dan McAdams (1994) states, "I am listening for the narrative that Horney may have fashioned as an adult to

make sense of her own reconstructed past, perceived present and anticipated future... In listening for Horney's own self-defining story, I do not wish to assimilate Horney's life to some preconceived pattern or theory. I do not seek to confirm, support or reject a particular hypothesis about Horney ... Rather I focus on Horney's story so that I may pass on a very brief and abstracted version of what I think I hear (p. 158)..."

The hermeneutics of restoration is, however, not a self-evident set of processes, since grasping the multilayered subjective and intersubjective meanings of another person is riddled with potholes of potential misunderstanding. The process of doing this is generally understood as empathy, or as Clifford Geertz (1973) would have it, looking over the participant's shoulder at the text they are reading or writing as a way of trying to understand what the participant thinks he or she is up to. Much of methodological literature in the narrative research field focuses on the dilemmas of understanding well the meanings of the participants (Kvale, 1996) and argues for the importance of taking into account the ways in which meanings thus produced are affected by the context of the interview and the nature of the research relationship. By effectively bracketing these contexts or at least noticing them, a purer distillation of meanings is achieved.

The art of research practice here in part lies in producing a genuine personal encounter between interviewer and interviewee so that the possibilities are maximized that the interviewee will reveal meanings that are central, important and authentic. Scholars and researchers working from this perspective are likely to emphasize the communion and self-revelation inherent in the dialogic aspects of interview-based research (Miller, 1996). Following Buber's call to endeavor to imagine well the experience of the other, the aim is to create an "I-Thou" relationship where the self can be fully expressed and heard by the other. Without such authentic, meaning-laden material, the researcher can have little faith in the raw data which he or she will spend many hours trying to understand.

In the dialogue created in a good interview situation, people "clarify who they are or want to be (Habermas, 1993)" and these meanings are then available to the researcher. In the interview, participants may evolve new levels of understanding and meaning-making about their lives, and interpretation then becomes a shared event. Miller (1996), who researches worldviews, is interested in unearthing "deeper" meanings, but he expects to do such excavation in tandem with his participant. Such a procedure thus moves aspects

of a life story previously unknown to the self into consciousness where the participant and researcher can observe them together. Research findings involve condensing and ordering experience “by explicating an intrinsically meaningful form” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 20).

Taking people at their word through the hermeneutics of faith(restoration) produces a rich field for potential interpretive work, both in terms of personal and social meanings. We can, to cite just a few examples of the thousands of such studies that have been conducted, assess the major themes and structures that scaffold a biographical telling (Gergen & Gergen, 1983; McAdams, 1993); we can note the nature and function of vivid memories (Pillemer, 1998); we can witness the forms of coping people make use of following trauma (Greenspan, 1998) or sexual abuse (Harvey, Mishler, Koenen & Harney, 2000; James, Liem & O’Toole, 1997); we can trace the development of work identity and its discontinuities over time (Mishler, 1999); we can assess the terms with which people construct morality (Gilligan, 1982) or how historical periods influence developmental experience (Franz, 1994). Grounded theory, even if used for paradigmatic rather than narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995), rests on a hermeneutics of restoration since it tries to “build” theory from faithfulness to the words of the participant. Interpretation is not limited to direct, expressed, explicit meanings but may consider implicit meanings that lie beneath or within the structure of the language used to depict experience.

At a less experience-near level, the qualities of lived experience can be analyzed for ways in which discourse conventions both give form to and constrain the activity of writing a life. This form of analysis parses the participant’s meaning-making into its structure or skeleton, but regards the production of the life story as a veridical and intentional, rather than a disguised, set of codes. In thus highlighting tacit, rather than explicit, knowledge , we may investigate underlying assumptions and cultural bedrock. These aspects of taken-for-granted experience that are not directly stated are still part of the hermeneutics of restoration since the process of interpretation involves understanding the person from their own point of view. This form of analysis foregrounds what had been background, enlarges what may have been minimized, but does not change the frame. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) distinguish four different possibilities for reading, interpreting and analyzing life stories which involve distinguishing content from form and treating narratives either holistically or developing categorizations from

them. But all of these aim to better elucidate the standpoint of the teller, albeit from different angles.

The task of a hermeneutics of restoration is to decode the meanings with as little distortion as possible. We work with interview material until Gestalts emerge. The central metaphor from this position is the hermeneutic circle, where meanings derive from a consideration of the whole which is itself created through understanding of the parts. This is a circle of belief and understanding (Ricoeur, 1970). It requires the phenomenological epoché, an effort at presuming as little as possible in order to believe in the manner of the believer. In ethnographic and anthropological projects, the researcher must learn the language of the culture; for more psychological, intraindividual research, one must try to learn to think in the idiosyncratic language and meaning-system of the participant. The researcher tries to experience “from the native’s point of view.”

Gadamer’s (1975) view of the hermeneutic project parallels what occurs in the interview. Good interpretation results from a fusion of horizons, through dialogue, with the text. If the primary goal of interpretation is not the passive reflection of what was in the speaker’s mind but the exegesis of the implicit meanings in the text, then the horizons brought to bear on the interpretation offer a context of understanding which can be enriching to theory. Others have written about interview-based research as a co-construction of a text, with the relationship between interviewee and researcher a paramount and useful, rather than a contaminating, element of the work. Meanings are thus restored and re-presented. Member checks in the form of presenting one’s analysis to the participants, are often encouraged as a demonstration of trustworthiness and authenticity, i.e. showing that one has been faithful to the intent of the informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Erikson’s (1968) re-reading of Freud’s Dora case offers an example of importing a hermeneutics of restoration to an analysis previously conducted from the “suspicion” point of view. Restorying (and restoring) Dora’s life from Dora’s point of view, Erikson tries to empathize with the young girl who has been betrayed by her father, his lover and his lover’s husband and who may have come to Freud in hopes that someone would help her out of the compromised position in which she was placed. Erikson speaks of Dora as someone in search of “fidelity” as he makes a belated effort to hear her story from a position of belief in the infidelities to which she had been subjected.

The hermeneutics of restoration, in the service of research, usually implies going beyond description to an assimilation of meanings restored to some more abstract conceptual context. Re-presentation of findings from this position is likely to rely on thick description (Geertz, 1973) – selected narrative segments from the interview that illustrate the interpretations the researcher has created from the material. The ideal is “a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring both into view simultaneously” (Geertz, 1973, p. 239.) Bruner’s (1990) reading of the meaning of “home” as a way of constructing Self in the Goodhertz family highlights a set of meanings extracted from a series of interviews with multiple members of a single family and epitomizes the way in which a hermeneutics of restoration can work interpretively within a complex set of texts.

There is an infinite horizon of understandings to be gleaned from this approach. The Talmudists, after all, have been involved in the hermeneutics of restoration in the interpretation of the Bible for thousands of years. There is no end to the meanings inherent in any text and the thoughtful researcher recognizes the inevitable partiality of the exegesis of any narrative. In anthropology, researchers have studied the same culture with an aim to present their informants as they see themselves and have nevertheless created very dissimilar portraits (e.g. Mead versus Friedman’s portrayals of the Samoans, Lewis versus Redfield’s characterization of peasant society in Mexico (Brown, 1991)). In psychology, it is less likely that two different researchers study the same participant, but the lessons from anthropology must serve as a caveat to too much certainty that even the most faithful effort at representation is conclusive and final.

### Reflexivity in the hermeneutics of restoration

Through a process of rigorous self-reflection, phenomenological researchers initially aim to “bracket” their presuppositions and biases in order to be as open and receptive as possible to participants’ descriptions of their experiences (Hein & Austin, 2000). Gadamer, however, effectively dispelled the Enlightenment notion that the assumptions and beliefs of the researcher could be sloughed off and closeted. Prejudices, understood to be horizons of understanding constituted by language and culture, are the position from which we live – and interpret others. Thus, the researcher is a constitutive

element of the hermeneutic circle and must speak his or her own positioning in the world.

Reflexivity in research from a position of the hermeneutics of restoration involves the researcher asking himself or herself, and making plain, how he or she is positioned to understand the meanings of the participants. Interpretation of the intended meanings of a text is an inherently relational activity, encapsulating both the desire to understand and the impulse to connect and respond (Tappan, 1997a). Feminists and ethnographers have been at the forefront of the effort to make the positioning and voice of the researcher an integral aspect of the research report. Sandra Harding (1987) asserts that “the beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of research. This evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence.” What are the shared social locations and assumptions? Where are the points of discordance or strangeness? Frequently, writers will argue that having personal familiarity with the experiences in question gives them a privileged position for interpreting such experiences. Issues of over-identification with participants under study may become problematic and researchers then have to be scrupulous that the meanings they “discover” in their interview material are indeed “faithful” to the meanings of their participants and that they haven’t simply substituted their own.

The dilemmas of what of the self of the researcher to include, what aspects are relevant to the discussion, are the subject of much debate in social sciences. Ruth Behar, whose anthropological biographical study (1993) of a Mexican Indian woman led her to deeper understandings of the way her own personal history was intertwined with her participant, offered a paradigmatic way of thinking about the “biography in the shadow” that is a part of all narrative research. Reflecting later on her experience of revealing in print her own part in the biographical story, Behar (1996) says, “It is far from easy to think up interesting ways to locate oneself in one’s own text.... To assert that one is a “white middle-class woman” or a “black gay man” or a “working class Latina” within one’s study of Shakespeare or Santeria is only interesting if one is able to draw deeper connections between one’s personal experience and the subject under study. That doesn’t require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied” (p. 13).

Most readers of narrative research want to know whether the researcher is in some way a member of the group he or she is researching. Similarly, there are dilemmas about whether such membership should be disclosed to the participants before or during the interview. All of these questions bear on the hermeneutics of restoration – as everyone wishes to know whether or not the researcher is “able” to understand the meanings that will be inherent in the text thus produced. Thus, researcher are charged with both demonstrating their orientation with respect to the phenomena under study *and* their capacity to “bracket” their standpoint in order to titrate out what belongs to the participant, what belongs to the researcher and what is part of a shared horizon.

The task of proving one’s capacity to understand another is amorphous and tenuous. Some have advocated the use of collaborative groups who provide checks on the persuasiveness of the researcher’s analyses. Others detail, in their written reports, the actual words of the participants on which interpretations are based, leaving aside the well-known dilemmas of the fact that transcription is itself an act of interpretation.

### Ethics in the hermeneutics of restoration

The ethical dilemmas in this approach involve being faithful to the meanings of the interviewee. The implied contract in the interview situation is that the interviewer is interested in learning about and in some way presenting the lived experience of the participant. The participant is the author of and authority on his or her own experience. Participants who read the published report will therefore be expecting to find their own meanings rendered, if not mirrored. Issues of confidentiality become critical here, since personal detail revealed in the interview situation can have harmful effects on a person’s life if they were to be recognized – and in some small communities, it is nearly impossible to publish an authentic report where the people would not be identifiable (Lieblich, 1996; Stacey, 1988).

Equally likely are researchers to worry about the inadequacy of linear forms of exposition to fully convey meanings and interpretations. This has been especially true among ethnographers from fields of anthropology, sociology, education and nursing, but there has been less attention to these matters in psychology (Josselson & Lieblich, 1996). Seeking alternate modes of re-presentation of their findings, these researchers aim to distill but convey

in full the affective and experiential qualities of the phenomena they have studied (Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Richardson, 2000). Authoring works with participants (Lather & Smithie, 1997), experimenting with literary style (Behar & Gordon, 1995; M. Gergen, 1992; Richardson, 1997; Rinehart, 1998), or offering performances in lieu of or in addition to written reports (McCall, 2000) all become ways of exploring the boundaries of representation that maximize fidelity to the experiential accounts these researchers wish to portray.

### THE HERMENEUTICS OF DEMYSTIFICATION

From Ricoeur's point of view, "...language itself is from the outset and for the most part distorted: it means something other than what it says, it has a double meaning, it is equivocal. The dream and its analogues are set within a region of language that present itself as the locus of complex significations where another meaning is both given and hidden in an immediate meaning. (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 7)" Consciousness, too, is regarded as deceptive. Freud, Marx and Nietzsche offered both a system of recognizing and deciphering what they viewed to be false consciousness. (Ricoeur, 1970)

In this approach to hermeneutics, experience is assumed not to be transparent to itself: surface appearances mask depth realities; a told story conceals an untold one. What may be taken for granted in a hermeneutics of restoration is problematized from this vantage point. "The taken-for-granted is always that particular level of experience which presents itself as not in need of further analysis. Whether a level of experience is thus taken for granted depends on the pragmatic interest of the reflective glance which is directed upon it. ...a change of attention can transform something that is taken for granted into something problematical." (Schutz, 1967, p. 74) The researcher may, for example, be alert to various forms of self-deception that may be operative; feelings and words may not match (Bar-On, 1999). The interpretive effort is to tear away the masks and illusions of consciousness, to move beyond the materiality of a life to the underlying psychic or social processes that are its foundation.

Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992), for example, take a "skeptical attitude" toward personal accounts because of their belief that cultures limit the range of discourse available to the narrator. These "horizons of understanding,"

to use Heidegger's terms, are concealed because they are foundational and constitutive and therefore not (usually) available to conscious experience. (The fish is always the last being to discover water, but as observers, we can see it clearly.)

The hermeneutics of demystification always involves a certain measure of esotericism (Halbertal, 1997) in the sense that signs are read according to some procedure of meaning-making that requires initiation into the mode of reading derived from that particular style of decoding. Biblical hermeneutics has a long history of different approaches to decoding sacred texts, every aspect of which was considered to be meaning-laden, even the crowns of the letters that formed the words. Within psychology, psychoanalysis provides an analogous system. The overdetermination of experience and behavior suffuses all aspects of a text with meaning – and nothing is assumed to be accidental. But only those who accept the fundamental premises of psychoanalytic interpretative strategies and understand this orientation to reading signs will find these interpretations coherent and intelligible. One could make a similar argument for Marxist or Foucauldian or feminist readings.

Analysis from a position of the hermeneutics of demystification may seek pointers to what is unsaid or unsayable (Bar-On, 1999; Rogers et al., 1999). Annie Rogers and her students' project has been to develop a poetics of the unsayable, textual markers of negation, evasion, revision ,denial, hesitation and silence (p. 79) as indicative of important memories or psychological experiences that cannot be expressed. Such distortions serve to block knowledge of what is too dangerous to know or to speak. Especially in cases of trauma or abuse, significant biographical realities may be expunged from the narration but nevertheless cast an interpretable shadow on the text. One could argue, of course, that such a reading is in the service of the hermeneutics of restoration since, as Rogers et al. state, "Tracing this associative logic through a trail of evidence, it is possible to apprehend another's world indirectly, without distorting that world (p. 83)." But all hermeneutics is an effort to interpret to a deeper apprehension of the world of the people under study. It is the process of arriving there that is of concern here.

Many experiences may be both known and not known simultaneously. That which is unconscious may nevertheless be apparent in symbolization processes, such as in dreams and parapraxes, which was the foundation of Freud's discoveries. Attention is directed then to the omissions, disjunctions,

inconsistencies and contradictions in an account. It is what is latent, hidden in an account that is of interest rather than the manifest narrative of the teller.

Another place to look is in the hidden structural grammars of language which reflect social structure as it is encoded in everyday discourse. This is the discourse analysis approach which may analyze texts for markers of social class, authority relations, power dynamics, gendered experience or other bits of social life that may not be consciously recognized by the teller because they are so much a part of the taken-for-granted fabric of life (e.g., Johnson, 1999).

From the vantage point of the hermeneutics of demystification, the effort is one of discovery, but it may be powered as well by the aim of confirmation. Since the message is seen as one in disguise, the researcher must decode using some hypothesized codebook – or create one. From Derrida's perspective, interpretation involves placing a text in a different context . This does not necessarily produce a greater understanding of some original or “deeper” truth of the text, but it does create new relations that may enlarge conceptualization or theory.

Ricoeur's term “suspicion” in this regard may be something of an unfortunate word choice. It is not so much that a hermeneutics of demystification supposes that the participant is consciously dissembling or censoring the disclosure of unacceptable feelings because of institutional or contextual constraints (Bar-On, 1996). Either of these may occur, and frequently do, but they are usually not so interesting to the researcher as those aspects of self-understanding or meaning-making that operate outside of the participant's awareness. The goal is not to challenge or disprove the participants' meanings – in fact, we may well believe that the person believes what he or she says – but to turn our attention elsewhere. Here, we are allied with the second sentence of the epigraph above – “Purpose is but the slave to memory, /Of violent birth, but poor validity.” The hermeneutics of demystification recognizes the relativity of all accounts; it takes as axiomatic that context and time frame a mutable sense of causality and contingency that underpin a currently-told biography. It aims at revelation (Giddens, 1976) – an interpretation toward a more durable truth.

In the developing narrative research traditions, the hermeneutics of demystification is a less favored mode. In going beyond the intended narrative of the participant, many researchers feel uncomfortable with the authority they must take to re-author the meanings of the person who shared their stories

with them. And besides psychoanalysis, there are few recognized frameworks within psychology that offer a separate analytic lens through which to view a text (and psychoanalysis has fallen out of favor in American psychology as a framework within which to think.)

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) work from a psychodynamic foundation as they posit an anxious defended subject and argue for regarding interview material in terms of anxious defended subjectivity. Thus, they ask about how defenses influence people's actions, lives and meaning-making. In their study of the transmission of culture in a three-generational family, they present a verbatim narrative to introduce their analysis. Their aim is "to demonstrate the importance of positing, not rational, unitary subjects whose accounts can be taken at face value, but anxious, defended ones for understanding the complex dynamics – including love, hate, envy, guilt, blame, jealousy and shame – underpinning the 'reproduction of culture' in one family. In doing so, we shall show that what gets unconsciously transmitted, through projection, introjection and identification, is more significant than the conscious component (p. 108)." Their analytic strategy is to look at what has been inserted in the text but is extraneous to the narrative, and they offer a psychodynamic reading of the sequence of events and associations the participant relates.

Following the Freudian metanarrative, researchers may bring questions about originating events to some phenomenon present in a life history. The phenomenon may be clearly narratable, but the interviewee may make no connection between early experiences which the researcher conceives to be primal conflicts and later experience. Or there may be a search for archaic patterns present in a life history, analogous to Freud's excavation of the elements of tragedy and myth in the lives of Moses and Leonardo.

The hermeneutics of demystification is cognizant of the multidetermination of a life and the multivocality of an account. It may seek to explicate the interrelationship of various "voices" or "selves" depicted in a narrative, beyond the connections made by the narrator. In such a framework, the researcher clearly distinguishes his or her own voice from the person whose life is being related and states that the aim is not to re-present but to offer a different reading. Susan Chase (1996) argues that claiming interpretive authority requires a recognition that the researcher has different interests from those of the narrators. Where the narrators are recounting their experiences, researchers may, in Chase's example, be more interested in the conflicting cultural discourses that shape the presentation. In her study of discrimina-

tion among women school superintendents, she demonstrated that although the participants did not speak directly about discrimination, the “disjunction between taken-for-granted, individualistic, gender and race-neutral discourse about professional work and contentious, gendered and racialized discourse about inequality (p. 53)” was a structural constraint shaping these women’s professional lives. Thus, Chase distinguished her report about the narratives from the stories her participants wished to tell; they then have no more privileged or expert status on the validity of her interpretations than would any other reader. In the stance of a hermeneutics of demystification, it is the scholarly audience, not the participants, who judge the merit of our interpretations. “The participant may be unwilling to confirm, or even unable to know, what the researcher concludes (Rogers, p. 81). “The participants themselves have no privileged claim to knowing whether our analysis is right or wrong – much as the author of a text, in a framework of deconstructionism, has no privileged knowledge of the meaning of a text.

Rosenthal (1993, p. 61) states “Our aim is to reconstruct the interactional significance of the subject’s actions, the underlying structure of the subject’s interpretations of his or her own life, which may go beyond the subject’s own intentions.” Considering the ways in which the narrator linguistically positions him or herself in the narrated account treats the narrative explication as a performance that locates the self in particular and perhaps consciously unintended ways (Bamberg, 1997). The burden falls on the researcher to make a persuasive case for why the text illustrates the conceptual or theoretical suggestions at hand. The presentation starts with some question the researcher is putting to the text and then explicates the text in light of that mode of analysis.

Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) reading of the interviews of young adolescent girls begins by taking seriously and reflectively the recurrence of the phrase “I don’t know” in their speech. Rather than overlooking this as a meaningless speech habit, Brown and Gilligan noted its absence in the texts of girls ages 11–13 and its appearance in the speech of girls who were older, and then began to try to decode what it is that these girls were signalling that they did not know. From this “demystifying” reading, these researchers developed a widely-accepted account of the ways in which voice and knowledge go “underground” in adolescent girls as a consequence of social pressures to mask and disown their relational knowledge.

Ochberg (1996) says at the beginning of his paper, “I advocate a way of listening to the stories people tell that systematically refuses to take them at their own word (p. 97).” He argues for the utility of listening to narratives as though they are attempts at persuasion, the rhetoric structured to present a certain view of events rather than another, less palatable one. He analyzes what he considers to be the “ulterior purposes” in an account a middle-aged businessman gives of his career trajectory. Ochberg’s work on mid-life career experience in men led him to conclude that what men said about their careers was linked to their relationship with their fathers, although they were, for the most part, quite unaware of the connection.

To justify the stance of a hermeneutics of demystification, the interpreter must persuade the reader that the narrative does not fully make sense on its own terms and is thus in need of further interpretation. In Ricoeur’s terms, he must argue that the meaning is hidden and in need of deciphering. – i.e. must convert it to a puzzle. Geertz’ classic interpretation of the signification of cockfighting in Balinese culture is an example. Cockfighting is about cockfighting and is experienced as such and described as such by the Balinese. But Geertz shows that it is also something more – much more.

Where a hermeneutics of restoration may regard an interview as a report about life experience, a hermeneutics of demystification regards the account as a construction. It assumes that any given told story refers to an untold one as well. Interpretive work involves paying attention to how the story is construed and how its parts are ordered and juxtaposed, noticing the “negative spaces” of silence and omissions, and focusing on contradictions and inconsistencies. Analysis and interpretation involve reading “between the lines” for indirect reference and for signs of unconscious processes. Further, such a reading may involve analysis of the foundational aspects of the story and the life, unearthing the self-evident assumptions that undergird what the participant experiences as self-awareness or consciousness. A good interpretation must also reflect on the reasons that the participants are unaware of these aspects of what they report (Packer, 1985). Research results from this perspective are offered as insights into experience rather than as replicable procedures.

Lest the hermeneutics of demystification sound arcane, we might remember that we all do such analysis in everyday life. While we sometimes work hard to understand clearly the other’s meaning, other times, perhaps more often, we interpret what we think the other must have meant and proceed on

those assumptions. The extreme form of this is the old joke about two psychoanalysts who meet one morning in the elevator on the way to their offices. One says to the other “Good morning.” The other leaves the elevator thinking, “I wonder what he meant by that.” As Gadamer (1975) argues, “The understanding and the interpretation of texts is not merely a concern of science, but is obviously part of the total human experience of the world” (p. xi).

### Reflexivity in the hermeneutics of demystification

The researcher working from this vantage point is making a claim to privilege, to the capacity to know beyond the text under consideration. Having “a feeling” about a hidden meaning, as many of my students frequently do, is not adequate validation of an interpretive stance. There are canons of psychoanalytic discourse and interpretation that make this a form of hermeneutics that is acceptable in some circles. But other theoretical frameworks may serve the same purpose as long as the researcher makes clear how theory will be used to decode the text. The researcher must make plain the effort to “find” the theoretical constructs in the data.

From the standpoint of a hermeneutics of demystification, the voice of the researcher becomes paramount in the text, for it is the process of the interpreter’s thought that is the subject of the presentation. Here, persuasiveness rests on careful documentation of the interpretive journey from observation (text) to narrative explanation at a theoretical level.

In general, those working from a hermeneutics of restoration position have been more attuned to the complex issues of reflexivity and the problems of representation. Because the interpreter working through the hermeneutics of demystification uses a theory rather than the self as the tool of analysis, the self often is concealed behind the more cognitive analysis.

### Ethics of the hermeneutics of demystification

From the stance of a hermeneutics of demystification, narrative research reports are not co-constructions of meaning between participant and researcher, but points in a conversation between the researcher and a group of colleagues who share interest in a particular conceptual or theoretical frame. Self-deception on the part of the participant (as well as on the part of the researcher), is the focus of the work (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Thus, the

“participant” in such a project becomes more like what used to be called a “subject”: that is, they are subject to an analysis outside their own horizons of understanding.

Ethical problems here abound when people who have participated in narrative studies can recognize that they are the subject of scrutiny in published reports. Interpretations of their material goes beyond what they have told – and while it may be persuasive to the scholarly audience, may feel insulting, intrusive or demeaning to them in their own context. Dora, for example, would have found little of what she deemed to be her own life story in Freud’s presentation of her and would likely have been as horrified to read it as she was to hear Freud’s interpretations of her plight.

Life stories critically examined for the unconscious, cultural or ideological frameworks constraining and sustaining them are, in some sense, no longer either the production or “property” of those who told them. Researchers have not yet discovered a means of explaining to participants that they, the researchers, will be taking interpretive authority in the final analysis; the customary informed consent form asks people to consent to something that they cannot possibly understand or foresee. Adequate concealment of identity protects confidentiality, but does not prevent narcissistic injury (Josselson, 1996).

### COMBINING THE APPROACHES

These two approaches will inevitably lead to different readings of a text as they emanate from different research questions. As Dilthey said, “Our understanding of life is only a constant approximation. That life reveals quite different sides to us according to the point of view from which we consider its course in time is due to the nature of both understanding and life (1961, p. 109).” Gadamer (1984) emphasizes the fluidity of interpretation, which changes over time as the interpreter’s horizon changes. Thus, there is so single valid interpretation or set of interpretations of a text, even within a single interpreter – and whether one adopts a hermeneutics of restoration or of demystification will depend on the motivation for the interrogation of the text and the audience of discourse to which one wishes to address one’s analysis.

While the hermeneutics of restoration takes the theynamics of consciousness – of intentionality, subjectivity and meaning-making – as its object of study; the hermeneutics of demystification dispossesses consciousness,

viewed as a site of self-deception and illusion, as the center of human meaning-making and substitutes interpretation for the lost meanings. Ricoeur begins with the thesis that these hermeneutics are at war with one another. “It is too easily said that symbols carry within themselves, in their overdetermined semantic texture, the possibility of various interpretations, an interpretation that reduces them to their instinctual basis and an interpretation that develops the complete intentionality of their symbolic meaning. (p. 341) “He believes this to be a naive if not an indefensible project”.

But, as Ricoeur develops his reading of Freud, he suggests that there may nevertheless be a defensible dialectic between them. While the hermeneutics of demystification may be grounded in the archeology of the person – the submerged and disguised wellsprings of action, the hermeneutics of restoration may be focused on the teleology of life – the hopes, desires, intentions and beliefs that frame the sense of the future. Demystification thus may serve the analysis of the structuralization of the past while a hermeneutics of restoration captures the representation of the future. Both forms of interpretation tenuously meet in an effort to understand the ever-shifting present.

Texts are multilayered and symbols are overdetermined; thus, there is always an abundance of meaning. “Symbols both disguise and reveal. While they conceal the aims of our instincts, they disclose the process of self-consciousness. Disguise, reveal; conceal, show; these two functions are no longer external to one another; they express the two sides of a single symbolic function” (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 497). As an example, Ricoeur demonstrates that one can read Oedipus Rex as both a drama of incest and parricide which points to the problem of sex as fundamental in human life and as a drama of self-deception which elucidates the tragedy of truth.

Personal life history, expressed narratively, is poised at the intersection of (disguised) desire and the architecture of culture. Both desire and the constraints of culture may be more or less available for subjective reflection, depending on the proclivities of the person and of the researcher.

Most life history research to date has been grounded in realist assumptions about authentic voice and the knowable subject (Cary, 1999). But there is no a priori reason to assume that what is hidden is somehow ‘truer’. Although the attribution is apocryphal (Elms) Freud is mythologized to have declared to an audience while puffing on his everpresent cigar, “Although we all know that this is a phallic symbol, let us remember that it is also a cigar.” Applying this dictum to life history research, revealing the participant’s meanings through

interpretation of the phenomenology of consciousness is of no less value than unearthing hidden symbolic or structural meanings. It depends on the research question the researcher wishes to explore.

Most researchers, in my view, are fundamentally steeped in one or another of these hermeneutic stances. Although educated people tend to respond to dualities with an automatic “Why not do both or combine them?”, I think that a true combination, while possible, is relatively rare and certainly very difficult. Someone who has an interest in “revealing” the multiple meanings within a life history text, who is allied empathically with the speaking subject and conceives of their project as giving voice will be unlikely to be interested in hidden meanings, if not downright hostile toward the project of unearthing them. Similarly, a researcher interested in solving what seems to be a puzzle for hidden structures or references will likely regard the intended subjectivity of the participant as superficial, smokescreen or part of the riddle that needs decoding for the “real” meanings. It is often part of our (academic) cultural horizons and value systems that what is not apparent, indeed, what is camouflaged, is somehow more “true” than that which is visible to the eye. But in life history research, either hermeneutic stance, or some combination of them, can be foundational to the production of knowledge.

Moving between “giving voice” and decoding what (for various reasons) cannot be said, a combined epistemological stance must reflect on its own positionality, recognizing the ways in which narrative strategies (of both researcher and researched) are mediated by historical and cultural locations and influenced by political considerations of identity and community. It must also consider its hermeneutic allegiances: are conscious or unconscious understandings to be privileged and, if combined, how are they to be weighted?

In 1965, Gordon Allport was one of the first psychologists to investigate these interpretive oppositions through analysis of a single case by offering readings of letters from Jenny, a middle-aged “difficult” woman, from several perspectives. Interpreting from existential and structural standpoints, he proposed interpretations through the hermeneutics of restoration of what he considered to be the “surface” of her experience and then contrasted these with Freudian and Jungian “demystifying” interpretations of the “depths” that might explain her eccentric and erratic, if not frankly paranoid, behavior. He finds truth in both approaches, but concludes by wondering “to what extent,

and in what direction, is each approach most valid? (p. 211)<sup>1</sup> Nearly forty years later, we have come to understand that each has its validity in different contexts of understanding; neither is *a priori* more praiseworthy on either ethical or epistemological grounds. Although Allport calls for a “synthesis” of theories, this still eludes us, for one cannot both re-present and demystify at one and the same time.

It is, however, possible to interpret from both positions as long as the researcher makes clear when and how these shifts occur. Ricoeur (1970) speaks of the possibility that hermeneutics can be animated by both the willingness to listen and the willingness to suspect, that we may oscillate between the demystification and the restoration of meaning (p. 27). From this point of view, the interpreter is open to multiple levels of interpretation with focus on both what is said and what is not said, on both what meanings are intended and possible unintended ones.

Such an approach generally requires that meanings be retrieved and restored before being subject to decoding. In other words, we must be clear what the participant actually means before we can consider what meanings lie hidden.

One contemporary example of a combined hermeneutic approach is Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen's multiple readings of an biographical account published by Marianne Gullestad. While she acknowledges Gullestad's reading of this biography for the social and cultural structures embedded in the life history (the hermeneutics of restoration), she decodes from a psychoanalytic perspective to add an analysis of the individual, unconscious motives that intersect with cultural forms. Thus, Oivind who, at age 13, chose to leave school to support his family, can be seen on one level to be embodying cultural tensions in Norwegian society between duty and self-realization as well as, in Nielsen's analysis, to be simultaneously solving personal internal conflicts about masculinity. While Oivind speaks the language of values in discussing his decision, Nielsen demonstrates the way in which gender is implicitly tied to these values and to Oivind's search for masculine identity within the female world in which he was growing up. Oivind speaks of “black holes” in his memories, and Nielsen deconstructs these as sites containing the energy of Oedipal tension. Thus, following Obesekeyere, Nielsen explores the ways

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<sup>1</sup> It is clear that Allport has little conviction in his “depth” interpretations, but he acknowledges that he doesn't have the material that would lend itself to this kind of analysis.

in which unconscious desire and cultural structures interact. To do so means to contain both

Collaborative research groups are often inducted in the effort to read the multiple meanings inherent in a text. Often, in such groups, some people represent the hermeneutics of restoration and others will take a more distant and deconstructing position. Oftentimes, when arguments break out in such groups, it reflects people interpreting from these different frames of analysis – some people attending to the manifest meanings from a position of the hermeneutics of restoration while others are trying to read the latent meanings from a position of the hermeneutics of demystification.

Either stance may on its own achieve Ricoeur's ideal of interpretation which "unfolds, in front of the text, the 'world' which the text opens up and discloses (1981, p. 111)." <sup>2</sup> Creative narrative research requires integrating these shifting stances and images – both unearthing the intended meanings and viewing them from another perspective in which such meanings point to other meanings and thus enlarge our vision of some aspect of human life.

Sass (1988) suggests that hermeneutics offers a middle ground between Cartesian certainty and postmodern relativism. Interpretation of a text ultimately rests on its persuasiveness within an interpretive community (Fish, 1980; Mishler, 1999), its capacity to enlighten those who share the horizons of understanding of the author of the interpretation. Ricoeur ends his philosophical journey with an intersubjective definition of truth, according to which each person continually moves toward self-clarification by unfolding his perception of the world in communication with others. This is perhaps the essence of narrative research, from both hermeneutic stances.

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<sup>2</sup> In the next sentence, Ricoeur goes on to state that "the hermeneutical task is to discern the 'matter' of the text and not the psychology of the author." But unfolding the world of the text may shed a great deal of light on the psychology of the author as well.

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