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## Three Ethical Issues in Narrative Research of Women Coaches' Lifelong Learning

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## Three Ethical Issues in Narrative Research of Women Coaches' Lifelong Learning

### Abstract

It is important to reflect upon ethical issues in conducting narrative research beyond what may be considered in Research Ethics Board applications. Ethical issues were identified in a dissertation study that utilized a narrative research approach to explore the process of lifelong learning for five women coaches. Using journal reflections and participant and researcher conversations, three ethical issues are discussed. These issues arose during the process of collecting narratives from participants and in creating narrative analyses of the data. While there exists a broad range of views on narratives, all narrative researchers can benefit from reflecting on ethical issues within their research

### Keywords

Ethical Issues, Narrative Research, Co - Creation, Representation, Authorship

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## Three Ethical Issues in Narrative Research of Women Coaches' Lifelong Learning

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*It is important to reflect upon ethical issues in conducting narrative research beyond what may be considered in Research Ethics Board applications. Ethical issues were identified in a dissertation study that utilized a narrative research approach to explore the process of lifelong learning for five women coaches. Using journal reflections and participant and researcher conversations, three ethical issues are discussed. These issues arose during the process of collecting narratives from participants and in creating narrative analyses of the data. While there exists a broad range of views on narratives, all narrative researchers can benefit from reflecting on ethical issues within their research. Keywords: Ethical Issues, Narrative Research, Co-Creation, Representation, Authorship*

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The term “narrative” can take on a variety of meanings (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narratives convey the way that people make sense of their world, themselves, and the relationships they have in the ever-changing world (Murray, 2008). While this identifies narratives within a broad scope, the breadth of meaning can also confuse researchers’ use of narratives. Indeed, despite the common thread of sense making through stories, the open range of views on narratives is marked by disagreements, tensions, and disparity in the field of narrative research (Smith, 2007). One example of the different ways that narratives can be used is described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who noted that “people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p. 2). This differentiates between narratives (stories as data collection) and a methodology of analyzing storied data that is constructed into a narrative. For the purpose of this article, the latter approach was used and will be discussed.

Despite differences in the way researchers may use narratives, Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) identified four themes, or *turns*, that emerged as a result of researchers moving (turning) away from positivism towards narrative inquiry. The turns do not occur in any particular order but evolve throughout the process of embracing narrative research, and include both narrative as data and as methodology.

The four include the following:

1. a change in the relationship between the person conducting the research and the person participating as the subject (the relationship between the researcher and the researched),
2. a move from the use of number toward the use of words as data,
3. a change from a focus on the general and universal toward the local and specific, and finally
4. a widening in acceptance of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing. (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7)

This focus on specific relationships, interpretation of words, and acceptance of alternative ways of knowing all enforce the importance of ethics (Chase, 2011; Pinnegar & Daynes,

2007). Since narratives often convey research participants' personal and meaningful stories and since narrative research is intensely relational, ethical issues abound (Clandinin, 2006; 2007). Researchers must therefore always attend to ethical matters, even after receiving ethical clearance from institutional research ethics boards (REB), in order to work relationally with the research participants and within the cultural environment. Further, "questions of ethics in narrative inquiry are beginning to be explored... we have much to continue to consider" (Clandinin, 2007, p. xvi). For this reason, ethical considerations must be further investigated and reflected upon in research studies and manuscripts.

Advice revolves around the methodological process, including posing questions, being transparent, and member-checking in order to properly capture data and analysis. Indeed, the researcher should acknowledge the co-construction of data in narrative studies. Polkinghorne (2005) noted, "The presence and variety of questions posed by the researcher affect a participant's recall, and thus, the produced account is sometimes referred to as a cocreation" (p. 143). Researchers must be careful to clearly convey the participants' intentions and they need to be sensitive about any alternative interpretations that might be perceived through their writing (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). Indeed, Josselson (2007) noted that the researcher's values will be immersed in the analysis, as will cultural, social, and institutional issues (Clandinin, 2007), as well as the participant's voice and meaning through thorough member checking.

The participants are vulnerable when they divulge their stories, and must develop a sense of trust that the researcher respects them and treats them fairly in the presentation (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). Josselson (2007) noted that the researcher must be transparent about his/her interests to create collaboration about the topic, but this should be general without being too specific on the subject. Narrative researchers aim to understand the meaning people attach to events and not whether their stories are accurate reflections of actual events (Chase, 2011). However, Crossely (2000) noted that participants' experiences are subjectively real, and it is therefore important to properly represent those subjective experiences as told by the participants.

Examining the meaning of data goes further, as Josselson (2007) noted every aspect of the research can have different meaning to the participants, regardless of how careful researchers may be. For example, participants usually agree to the presentation of "facts" (quotes) but may have trouble with the interpretation of the quotes. When the participants tell stories that researchers turn into narratives, questions arise as to who the author is. Clandinin and Connelly (1989) have noted that the narrative exists independently of the person and it is accessible to others' interpretations. Indeed, the truth of ownership is nebulous and further muddled if the participant or the context of the research is close to the researcher. Therefore, as a co-created process, researchers writing narratives must consider the relationships with their participants (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995).

The purpose of this article is to explore three ethical issues that were reflected upon in both the process of collecting narratives from participants and in creating narrative analyses of the data. While there is surely an overabundance of ethical questions worthy of consideration when conducting narrative research studies, I noted, questioned, reflected upon, and discussed these three issues during the process of my dissertation research study. I have chosen to share this process in the hopes that other researchers may ponder these questions and reflections and further contemplate how the questions might inform the ethics of their own studies.

### **Dissertation Research Study**

The following paragraphs delineate narrative research as used in my dissertation study

to set the stage for the questions that ensue. Ethical issues could be considerably different depending on the perspective taken in narrative research. Smith and Sparkes (2008) elaborated on the various ways that narratives may be conceptualized, ranging from psychosocial to performative perspectives that differentiate the lens from which researchers emphasize individual and social selves. Therefore, depending on the perspective taken, different epistemological and ontological approaches may be used that nonetheless allow researchers to construct narratives (Clandinin, 2007; Smith & Sparkes, 2008). My dissertation used a psychosocial perspective as described by Smith and Sparkes (2008), whereby stories told by research participants were constructed through social interactions, but a psychological focus on individuals' experiences was emphasized in data analysis. In this approach, the individuals' experiences throughout life framed the stories that they told. Crossley (2000) has noted that this perspective emphasizes the "real" nature of participants' experiences as subjectively lived.

Polkinghorne (1995) suggested that narratives may configure events "into a temporal unity by means of a plot" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) elaborated that narratives provide insight into individuals' experiences in the world and have a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way. Creswell (2007) suggested that narrative studies may be biographical in nature, whereby the researcher writes about the experiences of the participant's life. Creswell (2007) also suggested that narrative studies may be guided by a theoretical perspective. The purpose of my dissertation was to explore the biographies of five Canadian women coaches using Jarvis' (2006, 2007, 2009) theory of human learning to understand how the multitude of experiences have contributed to their learning and coaching development throughout their lives. In order to do so, I explored the biographies of five Canadian women coaches. While I explored the biographical experiences of the participants' lives, the emphasis was on the learning experiences and development of the individuals as coaches, so that Jarvis' human learning framework was a clear theoretical underpinning. My research was guided by a constructivist paradigm, which takes into account the whole person and adopts,

A more ecological, holistic view of learning that challenges the dualistic division of mind from body, the learner from learned, and subject from object. Implicit within this rejection of the division between mind and body is the importance of the body and its sensations in learning. (Light, 2008, p. 22)

Indeed, in using psychological constructivism researchers believe that investigating how individuals construct their knowledge is based on previous and new experiences, and can be used to explore the individuals' perceptions of social experiences (Light, 2008). However, it is important to note that these perceptions are told by the participants and interpreted by the researcher so that ethical considerations are paramount in such research.

In relation to the constructivist paradigm, Creswell (2007) has noted that there are certain challenges in the methodological process of narrative studies that include the importance of collecting extensive data about the participants and examining the data for particular stories that capture the topics studied. Further, researchers should engage participants in active collaboration (Polkinghorne, 1995); and should analyze the data with care to reflect on the constructive contributions made by both the participants and the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995).

In order to situate the results of this article, I explain the methodology used for my dissertation research study. After receiving ethical clearance from the university's REB, and having consent forms signed by the participants, four semi-structured interviews lasting approximately two hours each were conducted individually with five full-time Canadian

women coaches, for a total of 20 interviews. The coaches have been given pseudonyms throughout this article. Polkinghorne (2005) recommended engaging in several interviews to collect data rich in depth and breadth. The interview guides were created based on Jarvis' (2009) theory of human learning in order to gain a full and in-depth understanding of how the women coaches learned throughout their lives and how this influenced their coaching approach. Questions included "Tell me about yourself," "How did you start coaching," and "Tell me about your current coaching experiences." Probing questions were asked to personalize each interview based on the participants' responses. In line with Patton's (2002) recommendations, the second, third, and fourth interviews were guided by information provided in the previous interview.

I performed a narrative analysis on the data after the first interview was completed with each participant. Based on recommendations by Murray (2008) and Polkinghorne (1995), this analysis that I carried out configured the data from the interview into a narrative in which events of the participant's life were placed in chronological order. I organized the narrative for each participant according to her learning situations to develop an understanding of how previous experiences influenced how the participant learned in subsequent experiences. I then used the narrative as the basis for generating questions for the next interview with the participant. I then expanded the initial narrative with data from the second interview and expanded it again with data from the third interview, always keeping the temporal flow of the narrative. After the third interview with each participant, I reviewed the transcripts from each interview to ensure all relevant data was included in the narrative. Finally, I restructured each narrative to reflect life stages and predominant learning situations for each participant. The final narratives that were created were each approximately 40 pages double-spaced, complete with extensive quotes from the participants. Each narrative was sent to the respective participant for member checking and a fourth interview ensued regarding changes, additions, or deletions to the narrative. Each of the participants suggested a few changes and clarified the order of certain experiences. One participant suggested a number of changes to ensure confidentiality. While participants' recollection of past events could be selective and they could forget, exaggerate or confuse their accounts, proving the past as it actually existed was not the focus of the research. Rather, I sought the participants' interpretations and how their interpretations affected their learning (Polkinghorne, 2005; Riessman, 1993, 2008).

Clandinin (2006) noted that researchers engaged in narrative inquiry need to understand that ethical treatment of the data includes researcher and participant negotiation, respect, mutuality, and openness. As the researcher, I drew on the personal and social aspects of the research, and my framework guided me to understand the continuity of experiences and their flow over time in influencing the participants' learning. In this process, I kept a respectful and open relationship with my participants and negotiated data analysis to create mutual agreement over the research product.

In sum, the women coaches spoke about learning experiences in childhood and adolescence that influenced their approaches to coaching; they spoke about specific meaningful learning experiences that helped them develop and become experienced as coaches; one coach spoke about the development of her values and how those values influenced her coaching actions; and I, as the researcher, explored my own process of learning throughout the PhD degree, and how this learning was influenced by my lifetime of experiences to date. (Callary, Werthner, & Trudel, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Indeed, I learned a great deal throughout this time that was greatly influenced by my biography. Having coached in alpine skiing for over 10 years when I entered the program, I knew that I loved coaching and in fact, my dissertation research spawned from my interest in understanding how women coaches learn, despite and through the many barriers they may

face in their jobs, and remain in coaching. My passion for understanding coach learning intensified through my research but I also learned that I loved the research process (particularly qualitative research) and that I loved leading in a new way aside from coaching – through teaching at the university level. In part due to my sympathies and relatable experiences with my participants, and in part due to my burgeoning interest in delving deeper into qualitative research, I felt it was necessary to engage in a reflection of ethical issues related to my dissertation.

### **Methods for Analysis of Ethical Issues**

Throughout my process of research, as recommended by Louie and colleagues (2003) and Goodson and Sikes (2001), I kept a detailed guide of my narrative methodology and a field journal to track my reflections and learning, to chronicle how I felt about the research process, my perceived relationships with the participants, and my experiences as a coach. The journal helped me to maintain a clear perspective of my role in the research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The journal entries ranged from personal reflections on my coaching experiences and how this related to my research, to musings on the literature, to critical reflections on what I asked my participants, what they answered in response to my questions, and/or how I interpreted their responses. In particular from those latter reflections, I noticed that ethical issues emerged. For example, I questioned how I had interpreted the participants' responses in relation to the narratives I produced, and whose story this had subsequently become. After I had completed all data collection, I read through my journal entries and coded any relevant entry that dealt with an ethical issue. I then grouped together coded entries that dealt with similar issues, so that three main issues emerged. I then found the interview transcript segments that matched the coded entries, which were all quotes in the participants' fourth and final interview in which we discussed my analysis and interpretation of their stories. Finally, I analyzed my reflections against the interview transcripts and then in relation to the literature that I had read regarding conducting ethically-sound qualitative research. Therefore, both interview transcript segments and excerpts of the field journal reflections are described in the results.

Creswell (2007) noted that there are challenges involved in conducting narrative research that should be acknowledged and dealt with appropriately. One challenge is collecting extensive data about the participants in order to get a comprehensive grasp on the topic that is researched (Creswell, 2007). In this study, there were four long and in-depth interviews performed with each participant in order to fully explore each participant's lifelong learning. Another challenge is keeping a "keen eye to identify in the source material gathered the particular stories that capture the individual's experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). In my courses at the master's and doctoral level in qualitative research (including interviewing processes) and counseling, I was able to hone my interviewing skills. I also had previous experiences conducting interviews in my undergraduate and master's research studies, and through my Research Assistant position at the university. Each participant, in her own way, noted, "I am amazed at your ability to pull points from a conversation" (Stella). Finally, a challenge in narrative research includes the active collaboration with the participant. The researcher should analyze and discuss the analysis with the participant while reflecting on the way that the researcher helped to shape the analysis (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995). In this case, the interpretations of the narratives were refined by asking each participant to member check each interview transcript and the narrative analysis. Having the participants' member check the data and analysis and discuss the narrative helped to enhance collaboration and trustworthiness.

In the member checking process (especially emerging in the fourth interview with the participants in which we discussed the narrative that I had written from the analysis of their interview transcripts), the participants addressed specific issues relevant to constructivism and narrative. Creswell (2007) noted that narrative research can be challenging since important questions arise in the data collection and analysis, including “who owns the story?” and “who can change it?” Indeed, researchers must acknowledge the constructive contributions that they make, and note that the narrative is a result of interactions between the researcher and participant (Polkinghorne, 1995). Therefore, the purpose of this article emerged inductively as a result of my belief that I should explain how three ethical questions were considered in collecting and analyzing the data from the five participants in my dissertation study. The questions include: Did I create results? Are the narratives a genuine representation of the participants’ life experiences? Who is the author of the narratives? The quotes provided also make it possible to see the exchange of ideas between the participants and myself, as the researcher, so that my own place in the research is further clarified.

## **Results**

The following results describe my process of working through three ethical questions in the narrative study that I conducted in order to ensure a rigorous and ethically-sound research study. It is possible that other ethical questions in narrative research hold equal weight to the ones described here, but these were of particular importance in my study.

### **Did I Create Results?**

The questions that I asked based on Jarvis’ (2009) framework of human learning may have guided the participants to reflect on their learning experiences throughout life as being interconnected. For example, in the third interview with Celine, I was excited by “perfect” quotes that were in alignment with my own views of coaching and with Jarvis’ framework of human learning. Celine said:

Reading our transcripts has been really good for me to reflect. Last night I sat down to read through our last interview. You think of your life in parts – there’s your family life, there’s your childhood, there’s your coaching. You think of them in sections, but they’re really not. Everything is one whole thing that makes you. Reading through and talking about when I skated, my relationship with my father, my sisters, my kids, my husband, coaching, it just sort of made me realize that it’s all me. All these things that are really separate, they all make up my life. It’s been interesting for me to think about it that way... All these parts are integrated... It’s a pretty good life... You’ve helped me reflect on that, and that’s been really nice. Thank you!

Although I was pleased with her quote, I wanted to ensure I was properly writing someone else’s story, being transparent with my own assumptions and framework, and not imposing them on the participants’ stories. While Celine knew that I was studying lifelong learning, she did not know the theoretical framework I was using. Nonetheless, I started to wonder if I was asking Celine questions that led her to tell me what I wanted to hear (that learning experiences are interconnected). In my journal entry on June 30<sup>th</sup>, I wrote:

The first article for my dissertation that I am working on is about learning situations experienced in childhood and how these experiences affect how

these women coaches coached. Because of my framework, I asked questions about their lives outside of or before they started coaching, and now I am writing that I found that what is learned outside of coaching or before they started coaching affects their coaching approach... Did I “create” this information by asking certain questions? I suppose they always could have said, “No, I did not learn anything applicable from my parents.”

These fears were allayed when I emailed Celine while writing my article to determine why I did not have information about her schooling experiences. She wrote back that no particular schooling experiences stood out as important in helping her to learn to coach. In this case, Celine’s simple response in her email clarified that in our series of four in-depth interviews, the participants and I discussed experiences that the participants’ found relevant, significant, and meaningful to their learning. Therefore, it was the participants who chose what learning experiences to share, and I helped them bring these stories to the forefront based on my questions and probes.

### **Are the Narratives a Genuine Representation of the Participants’ Life Experiences?**

All five participants agreed that the narratives were proper interpretations of their learning experiences throughout life. In my fourth interview with Celine, we discussed whether the narrative analysis was a realistic representation of her learning. She said:

The narrative is very good. It’s interesting to sit and read it. I think you really hit my progressions and how things evolved for me as a coach. It’s pretty accurate. I look back at when I was younger and realize what I was like and how I’ve evolved into a different coach over the years. In some ways I’ve changed, and in other ways I’m the same... I love how you use the terminology and put it back into different parts of my life. It’s really interesting for me to read that... We talked about so many things, and the things that you pulled out really are key points. I think that makes it for me, the fact that you were able to pull those key points out from the many things that we discussed is perceptive on your part.

Likewise, in Stella’s fourth interview, she also said that her narrative was a sound reconstruction of her lifelong learning.

Stella - There are some really interesting pieces now that I look back and see it in print, like some of the pieces about sport and my parents. It is like a diary in a sense – but written in the third person. These interviews were good learning experiences. They were another experience for me to reflect on who I am and what I do.

Me - When you say that it’s like a diary – for me, in presenting this to you and in writing this, I was trying to put myself in your shoes to see what it would be like to read something like this written about me. I want to make sure that I capture it properly and that it’s the way that you learned throughout your life... To be able to connect those dots was really cool and I hope I did it properly.

Stella - Yeah. I think you’ve done a great job in pulling the pieces together to say: “this happened when Stella was five and it impacted these other experiences. This is where Stella told me that it was a learned behaviour, or at

least something that happened that had enough of an impact to talk about it". That's another thing, when I read through the narrative, I thought, "oh wow, that did have an impact". Sometimes I didn't think about it again after we spoke, but then reading it, it really did have an impact.

In Debbie's final interview, she elaborated on some of her experiences that I had written in her narrative. However, she said the narrative was "pretty much bang on. I didn't really find anything wrong".

In my fourth interview with Lisa, she told me that the narrative was realistic of her perceptions and helped her reflect on her coaching.

It was very cool to read about your life in a biography... It was awesome. Sometimes I over-analyze things and I was trying to figure out where they came from and how I became who I am... I reflected with amazement, wondering how I got through all that... I was just thinking about how at any point in time I could have gone in a number of different directions, but I didn't... I've always been aware of myself, but since you've done all these interviews with me, now I'm reflecting even more... That's probably what this exercise (the interviews) has done for me the most, Bettina, is that it's made me think about things more... You know, all those things that we talked about, like coaches reflecting on their practice? I'm good at that, but I noticed I wasn't doing enough of it lately... The reflections made me more aware about how we speak, how we deliver, what we expect, goal setting and how important that is... Now I reflect daily.

In Nadia's fourth interview, we also discussed whether the narrative was realistic. She had made changes to the transcripts and narrative to ensure confidentiality. Based on our discussion of the narrative with her changes, she said, "I don't have anything else to add. As long as it was what you were looking for, it's been great". Allowing the participants to member check not only their transcripts but also the narrative analysis helped to create a genuine interpretation because they could discuss and alter any of the data before and after the analysis to reveal their meanings

### **Who Is the Author of the Narratives?**

Throughout the interviews with each participant, I tried to develop a "conversation" to help the women coaches feel at ease and allow them to reflect on their lives and learning. However, I found that in being conversational, my own assumptions did surface. In my second interview with Nadia, I made assumptions but was quick to check if they were correct.

Me - You told me that there was a coach who was more supportive of you going to university and getting a "normal" job rather than coach. He mentioned that you would find coaching lonely and you would have to make sacrifices. You said you saw it as a challenge, but do you think you also took that as a warning as to what was to come?

Nadia- Absolutely....

Me - I was told something similar... I had one coach who told me that me wanting to coach at the highest level would be akin to him wanting to be a supermodel. In other words, it was never going to happen.

Nadia- You're kidding.

Me- When I heard what you said, I asked myself what I took from that comment, and in hindsight I think that I did really listen to him a lot more than I would have wanted to listen to that. So, for me, it's interesting to hear you say that you took it as a challenge.

Nadia- For sure it is a challenge. It's like being a national team coach has always been for men only. The number of times I've had to explain: "No, I'm not a physiotherapist. I'm not one of the coaches' girlfriends. I'm here coaching". You can't imagine how many times I've had to explain this over the past 28 years.

In checking my interpretation of her comment by explaining a story of mine that surfaced during our conversation, I was able to better understand her point of view on the topic to ensure that her meaning was reflected in the analysis of the data.

Nadia and I were both ski coaches and we had met on a few occasions before I started this research. Nadia's interview data seemed somehow different than the other coaches. Unlike the other participants who made very few changes to their transcripts, Nadia often heavily edited the transcripts. In my journal entry on June 13<sup>th</sup>, I wrote:

I was thinking about my interviews with Nadia and they feel very different than the other coaches' interviews. It feels like I have only scratched the surface so far with Nadia and haven't really gotten to the real meat. This could be for several reasons:

- 1) I knew Nadia before starting this study and so I am not probing as well with her as with the others;
- 2) I know the sport and so I am not probing as well with her as with the others;
- 3) Nadia is very private and won't share everything. She edits the transcripts and stays away from certain topics;
- 4) It is a phone interview and not face-to-face like the other participants' interviews;
- 5) Nadia knows that I know the sport and the people involved and so she doesn't want to divulge too much.

I believe that it would have been very difficult to get the same richness that I got in my data collection with these five coaches if I had only interviewed ski coaches.

These differences in Nadia's interviews and member checking compared to the other participants' interviews made me reflect on the idea of authorship. On June 30<sup>th</sup>, I wrote:

I was thinking about my positionality, transparency, and bias in the last little while. Nadia is helping me to reflect on this, because she does such a thorough

job editing the transcripts from our interviews. Then, she also edited quite a lot of the narrative analysis. All the other coaches simply had a couple of things to change, but Nadia changed even small grammatical errors in her quotes. I started wondering when these quotes become my material to play with in articles, versus staying the participant's material.

Like the other participants before her, I sent Nadia the narrative analysis to read so that we could discuss it in the fourth interview. She revised the narrative analysis and sent it back to me so that we discussed this revised version in the fourth interview. I asked her about what she thought of the idea of ownership of words.

Me - You were very involved in editing and reading through the narrative and making sure that everything was clarified... It helped me a lot because it made my job easier and made me make sure that what I had written was really clear. It also made me think about ownership of words and the idea that these are your words and your stories, but I'm writing the narrative analysis. It was really important to me that you gave me the ok on everything because they are your stories. It made me think a little bit more in detail about using quotes in articles that I'll be writing and making sure that it's always true to what you are saying and what your meaning is.

Nadia- It is funny how much one word can change the tone or the meaning. I've never interviewed anyone in my life, but I understand that it would be difficult to get the context from who you are interviewing. They are saying the words while in their minds they are thinking of the context and not explaining it. It would be a challenge to get the context without the person being misunderstood. Good on you for getting it!

Me - Well, I think that often the ownership of words goes unnoticed. You've really helped me notice it and make sure that I'm taking everyone's perspective into account.

Involving the participants in the revisions of the data analysis can muddy the water in terms of determining authorship of the narrative. It is best to call this interviewing process a "co-creation" of stories, and the resulting narrative analysis that I wrote was based on the participants' stories *and* my interpretation. The participants were not privy to the details of the theoretical framework in which the narratives were framed. It is clear that the experiences written and interpreted by the researcher are based on the perceptions and stories of the participants as these emerged from the interview questions and were finally verified by the participants.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In my research study, I created narrative analyses of the participants' stories that linked their experiences into a chronological plot line of meaningful learning experiences. In doing so, it was important to get the reassurance of the participants that their stories were properly analyzed and not misinterpreted. Josselson (2007) noted that as researchers we have ethical duties, such as to assure free consent of participants and protect them from harm, all through institutional REB forms. However, due to the relational aspect of narrative research, researchers arguably have more to do, which Josselson terms an *ethical attitude* emanating

from real practices of decisions made *in situ*. This attitude may come from being sensitive to the choice of using narrative over other research methods and methodologies. In this discussion, I build a case that narrative research is innately ethically-based and that narrative researchers should therefore have an ethical attitude. I then make suggestions for other researchers conducting narrative research and finally delineate the implications of my findings and discussion.

I acknowledge that the ethical issues I raised in this manuscript may or may not extend beyond my own research into other narrative research. The focus of my research was on the chronological component of narratives to explain lifelong learning; therefore, I did not create narratives that explored different themes compiled from the participants' stories told. It is possible that I missed the opportunity to explore different ethical issues that may have arisen from questions I did not pose. Nonetheless, ethical issues are bound to narrative research, which is apparent in the literature on narrative research even when it does not specifically explore ethics. For instance, Elliot (2005) proposed three dimensions to narrative research: temporal, meaningful, and social. The temporal dimension emphasizes the chronological embeddedness of experiences happening within a flow of time (Elliot, 2005). In my narrative research, it was ethically important that I analyze the data in such a way that the events were properly sequenced to craft a genuine representation of the participants' lives. Elliot's second dimension, that narratives are meaningful, specifies how individuals can share experiences that they deem most significant and important (Elliot, 2005). In this study, the learning experiences that the women coaches shared were those that they deemed meaningful in their lives so that the participants themselves decided what experiences to include or exclude from the narratives. Finally, Elliot's third dimension indicates that narratives are social and so participants tell stories within a specific social context and intended for a specific audience (Elliot, 2005). It must therefore be acknowledged that the questions asked in the interview process helped to shape the results of the study.

While Smith and Sparkes (2008) noted the various perspectives that may alter the types of narratives used in research, from more psychosocial perspectives that emphasize individual meaning, to more performative perspectives that emphasize social understandings, the authors also noted that every narrative research study has commonalities. Elliot (2005) explained that common themes in narrative research include: "An interest in process and change over time... An interest in the self and representations of the self... (and) an awareness that the researcher him- or herself is also a narrator" (p. 6). Elliot further explained that these themes exist despite narrative research crossing usual disciplinary boundaries. Indeed, narratives are used broadly within the social sciences and researchers of many diverse backgrounds should heed ethical standards that include the need to question their research processes. Regardless of a narrative researcher's perspective, it is hoped that this article may serve to help stimulate reflection on important ethical issues and help narrative researchers develop what Josselson (2007) calls an *ethical attitude*. Questioning ethical issues may involve the same or similar three questions encountered in my own study, and it may involve other ethical questions. Based on the breadth of narrative research conducted, it may not be possible or advisable to recommend which questions must always be considered or which take priority. Instead, researchers are encouraged to remain reflective of their practice to gain insight into those ethical matters of key importance in their own studies. What can be recommended, however, is that researchers keep their senses open to ethical issues emerging from their data; check with their participants on their interpretations of these issues; document reflections on these issues; and explore options to maximize the fair and equitable treatment of their participants and their own research process, perhaps through journaling methods as I have done, or through other individualized methods depending on the study.

While narratives describe the participants' stories, it is the researcher who decides how to translate the stories, what stories to include, and how to edit and organize the final product (Chase, 2005). There is no one true representation of narratives, because the participant chooses what to say and the researcher chooses what to relay. In my dissertation research study, having the participants each member check their four transcripts and the narrative analysis of the transcripts helped to ensure that the participants and I were satisfied with the written interpretation of the learning experiences. From this perspective, I took measures to guarantee that the ethical considerations were dealt with to the best of my ability as researcher. The findings presented in this manuscript clearly outline three questions that may be discussed in relation to other narrative research studies. The implications of the research process I presented and the questions I discussed for other investigators are as follows: that qualitative researchers using narrative methodologies may be able to relate this article to their own research process experiences and may be encouraged to review their reflections to deepen their understanding of how ethical considerations are of utmost importance in conducting narrative research.

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