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ABSTRACT

Many have proposed that autobiographical stories do more than describe a pre-existing self. Sometimes narrators can change who they are, in part, by telling stories about themselves. But *how* does this narrative self-construction happen? Most explanations rely on the representational function of autobiographical discourse. These representational accounts of narrative self-construction are necessarily incomplete, because autobiographical narratives have interactional as well as representational functions. While telling their stories autobiographical narrators often *enact* a characteristic type of self, and through such performances they can become that type of self. A few others have proposed that interactional positioning is central to narrative self-construction, but none has given an adequate, systematic account of how narrative discourse functions to position narrator and audience in the interactional event of storytelling. This article describes an approach to analyzing the interactional positioning accomplished through autobiographical narrative, and it illustrates this approach by analyzing data from one oral autobiographical narrative.

Telling a story about oneself can sometimes transform that self. Sitting with friends and describing recent experiences, a narrator often reinforces and sometimes recreates what sort of person she is. Sitting with a therapist and narrating a life's experiences, a client can sometimes realize who he is and who he wants to be. Noting such transformative acts of narration, many have proposed that autobiographical stories do more than describe a pre-existing self. Sometimes narrators can change who they are, in part, by telling stories about themselves (e.g., Freeman, 1993; Gergen, 1994; Grumet, 1987).

But *how* does this narrative self-construction happen? Most explanations rely on the representational function of autobiographical discourse. That is, most accounts claim that an autobiographical narrative can shape the self of the narrator by *describing* him or her as a particular type of person (e.g., Anderson, 1997; Cohler, 1988; White & Epston, 1990). When talking with friends, a therapist or another audience, autobiographical narrators represent themselves as particular sorts of people—as people who engage in characteristic activities and relate to others in characteristic ways. By describing past events in which she overcomes exploitation and takes control of her life, for instance, a narrator can reinforce or even create a more active, assertive self. If this narrator had, instead, consistently represented herself as passive and victimized in telling her story, she might have become a more passive, victimized person.

While this representational account of narrative self-construction may be plausible, it is also incomplete. Autobiographical narratives have interactional as well as representational functions. That is, autobiographical narrators *act* like particular types of people while they tell their stories, and they relate to their audiences in characteristic ways as they tell those stories (Hill, 1995; Schiffrin, 1996). This article describes how narrator

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and audience can position themselves interactionally through the telling of an autobiographical narrative. While representing herself as overcoming exploitation, for instance, a narrator might also act active and assertive with respect to the audience in the storytelling event. I argue that this sort of interactional positioning helps explain how autobiographical narration can construct the self. While telling their stories autobiographical narrators often *enact* a characteristic type of self, and through such performances they may in part become that type of self.

Autobiographical narratives do represent, however, and representation does play a role in narrative self-construction. This article describes how the self *represented* in an autobiographical narrative and the self *enacted* in the same narrative can interrelate so as partly to construct the self. The first section introduces the autobiographical narrative that will serve as an example throughout the article. The second section reviews both representational and interactional theories of narrative self-construction. The third section describes in detail how autobiographical speech can function to position the narrator interactionally. The fourth section applies this approach to the example, in order to illustrate how interactional positioning can systematically interrelate with the representations of self found in autobiographical narrative. The conclusion summarizes how interactional positioning can contribute to narrative self-construction.

Jane

This section introduces the autobiographical narrative analyzed in more detail below. This narrative was told by Jane, a woman in her late fifties. She was interviewed in 1992 by a research assistant working on a large psychological study that gathered life

stories. Jane had responded to an ad requesting adult subjects for a psychological study.

The interviewer was a female graduate student training to be a clinical psychologist, and

the interview took place in a research lab at a university psychology department. The

entire narrative lasted about fifty minutes, but I will analyze only one short segment of it

here (further analysis appears in Wortham, forthcoming). In the first fifty minutes the

interviewer prompted Jane only with the request that she tell the story of her life, as if it

were a novel divided into chapters. The interviewer expected to conduct a typical research

interview—gathering data with minimal researcher intervention, so that the data would be

comparable across subjects. We cannot know exactly what Jane expected from the

interview. But it was presented to her as part of a scientific research project, and at one part

she says that she "believes in science" and is sharing her story to help the researchers

understand people better.

       Jane begins with the setting for her story: her mother was a writer, and Armenian;

her father was a businessman, and Protestant; her maternal grandparents disapproved of the

marriage from the start, and it in fact ended in divorce when Jane was seven. At this point,

Jane begins to narrate the first episode of her life story.

	J:	<u>when</u> I was seven my parents were divorced. and, my mother went into the
		<u>mar</u>keting field. and for <u>some</u> reason was talked <u>into</u>, by a man I've never forgotten his
15		name, by the name of Mr. Mc<u>Gee</u>. Um: that I should uh, that <u>she</u> should con<u>si</u>der uh
		putting me in school, a <u>boar</u>ding school. and he recommended The Irish Girls' Academy
		which is in New York.
	I:	is- were you <u>born</u> in New York?
	J:	I was <u>born</u> in New York, in Manhattan. and uh, she looked <u>into</u> it, and they had some
20		kind of <u>sli</u>ding scale and even though I was Armenian, they agreed to take me for- I don't
		know, <u>fifty</u> dollars a month, which when I- I remember- I don't know <u>why</u> we were fifty
		dollars a month, but when you look back to, 1940 fifty dollars a month was a <u>lot</u> of money.
	I:	uh huh.
	J:	a <u>lot</u>. (2.0) I was there for <u>five</u> years.
25	I:	so you <u>star</u>ted there when you were si[x
		[seven
	I:	seven years old.
	J:	seven years old

	I:	and this- you <u>stayed</u> there all the [time? [mm<u>hmm</u>.
30	J.	[until I was <u>twelve</u>. I saw my [mother on, <u>one</u> weekend a month. one long- you know, you'd go home on <u>Fri</u>day night and come home on Sunday night. sometimes they were- you were allowed to visit with your mother on <u>Sun</u>days only. those <u>five</u> <u>years</u> were (1.0) hor<u>ren</u>dous.
	I:	unh.
35	J:	the teachers at the Academy, <u>nine</u> out of ten of them came from Europe. <u>Extra</u><u>or</u>dinarily oppressed women. I mean, we're talking, I mean it- it almost goes without <u>say</u>ing, but <u>un</u>be<u>lie</u>vable. um quite <u>mean</u> and vin<u>dic</u>tive. I was <u>beat</u>en, which my mother did not <u>know</u> about. um, my mother also, was <u>not</u> of good <u>health</u>. she'd had pneu<u>mo</u>nia several times as a child, had a <u>hole</u> in her lung. and <u>twice</u> in that five years I remember different people
40		coming to <u>see</u> me, and I found out later on that my mother had been near <u>death</u>.
	I:	uh huh.
	J:	and there was con<u>cern</u> for me. (1.0) or for my not finding <u>out</u> or pre<u>par</u>ing me for it, either one, I'm not sure at this point. um, those five years have, <u>haunt</u>ed me.
	I:	unh.

This episode contains five characters: Jane at age seven, Jane's mother, Mr. McGee, the teachers, and the friends of Jane's mother. These friends do not reappear in the story, nor do they speak with a voice that plays any important role in the rest of the story. But all four of the other characters do speak with salient voices that recur—i.e., they represent recognizable types of social actors who reappear as different characters throughout the story.

Jane presents her seven-year-old self as passive and victimized. People decided things for her and did things to her. Jane says, for instance, that the teachers "agreed to take me" (line 20). Jane also presents her seven-year-old self as a victim, who was "beaten" by the abusive teachers. Jane characterizes these teachers as both oppressed and abusive. They were "extraordinarily oppressed women" and also "quite mean and vindictive" (lines 35-37). In this passage Jane also characterizes Mr. McGee and her mother. In the verbal interaction between her mother and Mr. McGee, Jane says that her mother "was talked into" institutionalizing her (line 14). This characterizes Mr. McGee as actively wanting to get Jane institutionalized and her mother as resisting at first but then yielding. A few lines later Jane also supplies a motive for Mr. McGee when she notes the fee for her boarding

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school: "fifty dollars a month was a *lot* of money" (line 22). Jane presents her mother as

weak and as no match for Mr. McGee's self-interestedness and the teachers' cruelty. Her

mother was the sort that someone could "talk into" institutionalizing her child. Jane partly

excuses her mother for this, by citing her poor health. She presents Mr. McGee as more

responsible for her institutionalization than her mother, because he took advantage of her

mother's weakness to get what he wanted.

Figure 1 represents the four salient characters that Jane has introduced to this

point, within the embedded rectangle labeled as the "narrated event"—the characters

and actions denotationally represented as Jane narrates this episode.

===================Insert Figure 1 about here=================

Mr. McGee initiates the act of institutionalizing Jane. He is manipulative and has

selfish motives. Her mother should have taken better care of her, but was weak and

gave in to Mr. McGee. Jane herself is too young to resist. She gets pushed out from

under her mother's care and subjected to the abusive teachers.

This figure also represents the "narrating event," the interaction between Jane

and the interviewer in the event of storytelling. The dotted line between Jane at age

seven (in the narrated event) and Jane the narrator represents the strong connection

between these past and present selves. Jane notes that "I've never forgotten [the]

name" of Mr. McGee (lines 14-15). At line 43 she notes that "those four years have

*haunt*ed me." So her experiences as a young child still influence her as an adult.

Because of this strong connection between Jane's seven-year-old self and

Jane-the-narrator sitting in the room with the interviewer, the content of the story

should influence the interactional positions being adopted by Jane herself and the interviewer.

On my reading, in the interactional event of storytelling Jane makes an implicit plea for the interviewer to take a more emotionally involved position, but the interviewer does not do so. After Jane first describes how she was institutionalized as a child, the interviewer could have appropriately responded in the storytelling event with sympathy. But the interviewer responds in a more distanced way, with a request for information at line 18. Jane follows this by answering the interviewer's question, but then immediately indexes Mr. McGee's greedy motive for institutionalizing her (line 22). This, again, could have been followed by a sympathetic response from the interviewer. But the interviewer again requests information (line 25). Then at line 29 the interviewer finally reacts in a way that might be sympathetic, responding to Jane's statement that as a small child she would only occasionally see her mother by asking: "you *stayed* there [at the institution] all the time?"

As the narrating interaction continues, Jane appears to presuppose that the interviewer has indeed adopted a sympathetic position..

45	J:	I am <u>so</u> against boarding schools. anytime I hear a friend talk about putting a child in a- in an instit<u>u</u>tion, uh oh, it's better for the <u>child</u>, or, we can get on with <u>our</u> life, or I can make more m<u>o</u>ney, or the child will get a good educ<u>a</u>tion, <u>I</u> go into a <u>ti</u>rade.
	I:	uh huh.
50	J:	you <u>cannot</u> <u>put</u> a child in an institution from age five to ten or any age. those are the <u>for</u>mative years. and that has <u>haun</u>ted me. and I can <u>hon</u>estly say that I think that that was the <u>mi</u>serable time in my life. and the most <u>help</u>less. (1.0) u:m (2.0)
	I:	would you <u>say</u> that that- <u>boar</u>ding- those <u>boar</u>ding school years, would you- call that the <u>first</u> chapter or?

For most of this segment Jane moves out of the narrative and draws conclusions from her story that are applicable to the present. She describes how she, as an adult, goes "into a tirade" when others talk about institutionalizing their children (line 47). She reiterates that

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her first institutionalization "has haunted" her, and she calls it the "most helpless" time of

her life (lines 50-51). All this presupposes that Jane is narrating a terrible experience

which still affects her in the present. Thus Jane seems to presuppose that the interviewer

was being sympathetic in her question (at line 29) about conditions at the school. At this

point, however, the interviewer herself once again presupposes a more emotionally

distanced storytelling event, by asking about the organizational structure of the narrative.

When she asks about the "chapter" (lines 52-53) represented by this part of the narrative,

the interviewer indexes her opening request that Jane break her life story into chapters.

This presupposes that she and Jane are engaging in a research interview, where displays of

sympathy would be less appropriate.

This first episode in Jane's autobiographical narrative contains both complex

representational and interactional patterns. Jane represents her seven-year-old self as

vulnerable and victimized. The self-interested Mr. McGee and the abusive teachers

victimized her, while her mother acquiesced to the abusers and did not protect her.

Through her description of these events to the interviewer, Jane also positions herself

interactionally in the storytelling event. The analysis so far shows that two types of

interactional events might be occurring between Jane and the interviewer. Jane positions

herself as vulnerable and in need of support from the interviewer—perhaps as a client

would relate to a therapist. But the interviewer positions Jane and herself as participants

in a scientific research interview, dispassionately discussing Jane's story as if it were data.

I want to emphasize that the existence of interactional positioning in no way

presupposes that Jane's story was told simply for rhetorical effect. I do not doubt that she

experienced these traumatic events, and for almost anyone this childhood trauma would

continue to be upsetting later in life. But when describing real, horrible events like these (or more mundane ones) narrators inevitably also position themselves interactionally with respect to their interlocutors. The next section argues that a systematic analysis of this interactional positioning can help illuminate the process of narrative self-construction.

Narrative self-construction

How can telling an autobiographical narrative partly construct the self of the narrator? The predominant explanation relies on the representational function of narrative discourse. Telling the story of one's life gives the narrator an opportunity to redirect that life, when the narrator tells a coherent story that foregrounds a certain perspective or direction (Anderson, 1997; Cohler, 1988; Kerby, 1991; Schaefer, 1992; White & Epston, 1990). The segment of Jane's autobiographical narrative summarized above, for instance, foregrounds her vulnerability and the victimization she has endured. According to the predominant explanation, it is Jane's *representation* of herself as vulnerable that might construct her self. As we will see below, Jane's life could be represented in more than one way. She has been a victim, but she has also triumphed over adversity. An autobiographical narrative can have power by foregrounding one particular description, despite other possibilities. On the predominant view, then, the foregoing section of Jane's autobiographical narrative may have the power partly to construct her self because it represents her as a vulnerable woman who is haunted by experiences of victimization.

This explanation of autobiographical narratives' power has been advanced in several fields. Anderson (1997), Cohler (1988), White and Epston (1990) and other clinicians have presented autobiographical narrative as a therapeutic tool. Therapy, they

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argue, involves the re-shaping of a patient's life story so as to foreground a more healthful direction. The Personal Narratives Group (1989), Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992), Zuss (1997) and others have argued that autobiographical narratives provide a powerful vehicle for resisting oppressive social orders. People can construct their life stories against the grain of accepted patterns, to overcome oppression and to foreground alternative directions for their own and others' lives. Cain (1991), Stromberg (1993) and others have described how autobiographical narratives can play a central role in the development of religious identity. People can tell the story of their lives, often by highlighting a conversion experience, so as to foreground their faith and their relation to a religious community.

Despite various differences, work in all these disciplines relies primarily on a representational explanation for narrative self-construction: autobiographical narratives can redirect lives by representationally *foregrounding* more productive characteristics. But how exactly do autobiographical narratives do this "foregrounding"? Gergen and Gergen (1983), Polkinghorne (1988) and others explain foregrounding in terms of *emplotment*. Such accounts of emplotment are supported by exclusively representational accounts of narrative meaning (e.g., Bower & Morrow, 1990; Mandler, 1994). An autobiographical narrative selects some from among the many events of a life and places them in a sequence that leads toward some ending or resolution. The institutionalization episode, for example, shows a vulnerable Jane abandoned by her mother and victimized by the teachers. Because the story ends with her victimization, Jane emerges from this episode looking vulnerable and victimized. As we will see below, subsequent episodes in the story present Jane being more active and taking control of her life. This more

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triumphant plot would foreground different characteristics and relationships for Jane, and it might have constructed a different kind of self for her.

As we have seen already in the brief episode from Jane's narrative, however, autobiographical narration does more than represent the self. Autobiographical narrators also inevitably position themselves in interactional events with respect to their audiences (as shown, e.g., by Goodwin, 1990). Bamberg (1997), Gergen and Kaye (1992), Grumet (1987) and Schiffrin (1996), among others, argue that narrative self-construction centrally involves the interactional functions of autobiographical narrative. They argue that the predominant account inappropriately privileges the representational function of language and too easily falls into problematic dualist assumptions about human nature. As an alternative they suggest that autobiographical narratives might have power to construct the self because of their interactional effects, not just because they represent certain characteristics of the narrator.

In the excerpt from her autobiographical narrative given above, Jane goes beyond representing a vulnerable and victimized self to *act* vulnerable in the interactional event of story telling—when she positions herself like a client and the interviewer like a therapist. Perhaps autobiographical narratives "foreground" certain versions of a self in substantial part because of their power to *position* the narrator interactionally. Autobiographical narratives might partly construct the self because, in telling the story, the narrator adopts a certain interactional position—and in acting like that kind of person *becomes* more like that kind of person, at least in certain contexts. Jane, for instance, might construct herself as vulnerable and victimized in part as she *enacts* that role while narrating her early institutionalization.

By focusing on the interactional functions of autobiographical narrative, then, Bamberg (1997), Gergen and Kaye (1992), Grumet (1987), Schiffrin (1996) and others have begun to develop an alternative to the predominant account of narrative self-construction. Autobiographical narrators can construct themselves as they position themselves in characteristic ways in events of storytelling. But no one has adequately described *how* interactional patterns might partly constitute the self. A full account will require not only theoretical but also methodological advances. Despite the proliferation of methods for "narrative analysis," few offer empirically adequate analyses of how narratives both represent denotational content and position narrator and audience interactionally. Interactional accounts of narrative self-construction will be unable to explain precisely how autobiographical narratives can partly construct the self, unless they develop conceptual and methodological tools adequate to the task of analyzing language's interactional functions. This article sketches a set of conceptual and methodological tools, as one step toward an interactional account of narrative self-construction.

Positioning in autobiographical narrative

Any interactional approach to narrative self-construction faces a basic question: how do the linguistic (and paralinguistic) cues in an autobiographical narrative establish its interactional functions? Cues in the utterances that compose an autobiographical narrative presumably communicate various things, which together enable the autobiographical narrative to have certain interactional effects on the positioning of narrator and audience. But how do such cues communicate what they do? This section

sketches an answer to this question, although it does not offer a comprehensive account (cf. Wortham, forthcoming, for a fuller account).

The seminal paper by Labov and Waletsky (1967) makes clear that narratives always do more than represent past events in sequence. Narratives also contain *evaluation*, "the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative" (Labov, 1972:366). Labov apparently had hoped, at first, to analyze evaluation as another sequential slot in his six-part schema of narrative structure. But the data forced him to conclude that "narrative devices are distributed throughout the narrative," and that "the evaluation of the narrative forms a secondary structure" (1972:369)—a structure of a different type than the normative sequential structure he describes for narrative clauses. His primary example of evaluative structure (1972:367-8) makes clear that evaluation involves the *positioning* of the narrator in the storytelling event. He describes a story in which, according to Labov's analysis, the young male narrator aggrandizes himself and makes the other participant in the narrated event look like a fool. The narrator accomplishes this by describing himself as cool and verbally skilled in the initial stages of a dispute, then dangerous in the physical confrontation. He describes the other participant as dishonest, verbally clumsy and a coward. This evaluative aspect of the narrative contributes to the narrator's self-presentation in the storytelling event. Because a narrator's self-presentation both influences and depends on his or her interaction with the audience, Labov's account of evaluation begins to explain the interactional functions of narrative.

But how does narrative speech communicate one particular evaluation or another? Labov does not give an adequate account, because he focuses on denotational cues. The

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first device or cue that he describes is "external evaluation," in which the narrator interrupts the narrative and directly tells the audience the point. Labov also describes various sorts of "embedded evaluation," in which the narrator embeds the point within the course of the narrative. The narrator may, for instance, quote the thoughts of the protagonist and within this quote explicitly refer to the point. The narrator may also highlight certain actions which make the point salient, as in the following passage from a narrative about a near plane crash: "we had been so tense that our feet were up against the panel."

Most of Labov's (1972) devices are simply variations of a statement that explicitly denotes the evaluation. In this way his analysis of narrators' interactional positioning relies primarily on denotational statements of what narrators intend to accomplish in telling their stories. I do not deny that narrators can indicate the interactional functions of their narratives with explicit or near-explicit statements of the point, as in fables that contain an explicit moral. But in many narratives they do not. In Jane's story, for instance, at lines 52-53 the interviewer positions herself and Jane as gathering scientific data—as opposed to the sympathetic conversation or therapy session that Jane might have been presupposing as what they were doing together in the storytelling event. But the interviewer does not *denote* this interactional organization of the storytelling event. Instead, she *indexes* the research-interview frame by using the word "chapter."

If many narratives do not contain denotationally explicit evaluation, how is the evaluation or the interactional positioning communicated? Polanyi (1989) gives more extensive descriptions of the evaluative devices that provide cues for inferring the interactional functions of a narrative, and her theory moves beyond Labov's emphasis on

denotational cues. Polanyi argues strongly that there are no fixed rules for interpreting

evaluative devices—that speakers must attend to the circumstances, events, and states

highlighted by evaluative devices and then infer the point of the narrative (cf. 1989:22).

Her account of how narrative speech accomplishes interactional positioning is thus

mediated (Gumperz, 1982; Levinson, 1981; Silverstein, 1976). Participants and analysts

cannot read the meaning of a cue right off the linguistic or paralinguistic form itself.

Instead, cues make certain aspects of the context relevant, and participants and analysts

infer from cues and relevant context what interactional positioning must be going on. In

lines 52-53, for instance, the interviewer asks what "chapter" Jane's institutionalization

would be. "Chapter" indexes the question which began the interview, in which the

interviewer reads the opening question from the research protocol: "please tell the story of

your life as if it were a novel divided into chapters." The interviewer's use of "chapter" at

line 53 presupposes that Jane and the interviewer are engaged in a scientific interview.

To understand the interactional positioning going on at this point in the storytelling event,

Jane and the interviewer must make inferences from cues like this and from the context

that these cues make relevant.

Polanyi expands Labov's theory by giving a much more comprehensive list of the

evaluative devices or cues through which narrators make certain aspects of a narrative and

its context salient. She describes many sorts of non-normative uses that might foreground

a particular aspect of the narrative and lead an interpreter to infer an unexpected meaning

or function of the narrative—like phonological oddities, unusual lexical choices, or

particularly complex syntax. She also describes some discursive devices, like reported

speech and explicit meta-comments (Labov's "external evaluation"), that can highlight

aspects of the narrative and its context. On her account, narrators "monitor the relative amount of evaluation accorded the many propositions" (1989:24). That is, narrators make a certain evaluative point by highlighting the propositions in a narrative with "weights" of cues appropriate for that point. In her interpretations of particular narratives, she calculates these weights by adding up the number of evaluative devices attached to each proposition. From these propositions, highlighted to differing degrees, hearers infer the overall point of the story.

Polanyi expands Labov's account in two important ways: she goes beyond denotational evaluative devices to provide a list of many types of cues that can indicate evaluation; and she makes clear that an adequate account of narrative evaluation will be mediated—i.e., that participants and analysts infer from patterns of cues the interactional positioning that must be going on in a storytelling event. Despite the strengths of her account, however, Polanyi nonetheless relies too heavily on denotational or propositional value to explain the interactional functions of narrative. The primary means for interpreting evaluation in a narrative, according to Polanyi, involves inference from cues to a set of *propositions*. She proposes a "methodology for abstracting from the surface structure of a text those propositions about the storyworld which, if taken together, are the essence of the story as told" (1989:15). Aspects of the storytelling context might invalidate an inference, or force interpreters to revise their weighting of propositions, but ultimately the interpretation of a narrative cites propositions implicit in the narrated text. Polanyi does not rely primarily on devices that *themselves* propositionally represent the evaluation of the narrative. But she reintroduces denotational propositions as the basis for interpreting a narrative in the *next step*: hearers infer from both referential and

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non-referential cues which *propositions* are essential to the evaluation of the story. So her ultimate explanation for the point or function of a narrative relies on propositions explicit or implicit in the text.

Such a theory can only explain narrative positioning awkwardly. According to Labov and Polanyi, an interpretation of a narrative becomes plausible because of the explicit or implicit propositional values of some narrative utterances. The analysis of Jane's story above does summarize Jane and the interviewer's interactional positioning in propositional terms—as Jane's bid for sympathy countered by the interviewer's bid for scientific distance. But in the storytelling event itself these positions were *enacted*, not propositionally represented. It would not be parsimonious to posit that Jane and the interviewer were inferring propositions about what they were doing, then doing it. Instead they took advantage of language's ability to presuppose and create interactional patterns, and they enacted their relative positions. As analysts we summarize this event propositionally, but the actors themselves enact it without necessarily representing it. So Labov and Polanyi contribute to an adequate theory of interactional positioning in narrative with the concept of evaluative devices or cues and with the insight that an inferential process mediates between cues and the interactional functions of a narrative. But they rely too heavily on explicit and implicit propositions in their account of how this mediated process works.

If they do not rely on propositions, however, how do participants and analysts know which interactional patterns are emerging to organize a storytelling event? Many aspects of the context might potentially be relevant to interpreting the interactional functions of a narrative, and different configurations of relevant context would support different

interpretations. In everyday practice people often act as if narratives have relatively clear interactional functions. How do we explain this? The conversation analysts' concepts of *contextualization* and *emergence* can help develop a more adequate account (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Goodwin, 1984). Their account of narratives' functions describes how interactional positioning in narrative can emerge and solidify. Jefferson (1978) is the conversation analyst who has done the classic work on narrative, although she gives substantial credit to Sacks (1978; cf. also Goodwin, 1984). Jefferson presents her work initially as a mere "supplement" to Labov's analysis of the formal properties of stories. She analyzes how stories are integrated into ongoing conversation, focusing on how participants negotiate the beginnings and endings of stories so that they fit smoothly into an ongoing interaction. What begins as a study of stories' margins, however, elegantly leads us to rethink their essence.

Jefferson describes how audience members' contributions can facilitate transitions into and out of the story. At any moment speakers understand what is happening by examining how the most recent utterance fits into the sequence of utterances that has preceded it. Speakers use specific techniques "to display a relationship between the story and prior talk, and thus account for, and propose the appropriateness of, the story's telling" (1978:220). In beginning a story, for instance, speakers will often index the element of the prior conversation that triggered the story, and they will also often use a "disjunct marker"—e.g., "oh, I just heard a story about that"—which functions as a request for the several uninterrupted speaking turns that will be required to tell the story.

Prior sequence alone does not determine the meaning of a given utterance, however. The functions of any utterance—and the functions of an entire narrative—can be revised

based on *subsequent* utterances. Jefferson gives examples in which the point of a story emerges from subsequent conversation. She argues that the point of a story cannot be determined solely by examining its internal components, but instead emerges from the "sequential implicativeness of the story," (1978:231) or "what the story has amounted to" (1978:233). Thus, although Jefferson started her chapter claiming only to study transitions into and out of narratives, she ends up showing that both the boundaries of a story and its overall meaning and functions cannot be fixed by formal rules because boundaries and meanings emerge in ongoing conversation.

So participants and analysts know what positioning is being accomplished in a storytelling event when *subsequent* cues come to presuppose that a particular type of interactional event was going on. When we left Jane's interview, two types of interactional events had been presupposed: a sympathetic conversation or therapy session and a scientific research interview. On Jefferson's account, at this point neither participants nor analysts can know for sure which type of positioning is going on. We must examine *subsequent* context to see whether one or the other of these becomes more highly presupposed and thus emerges as the most likely interpretation of the storytelling interaction. In fact, Jane responds this way:

> I: would you <u>say</u> that that- <u>boar</u>ding- those <u>boar</u>ding school years, would you- call that the <u>first</u>
>   chapter or?
>
> J: yes, becau- well, maybe the <u>sec</u>ond chapter. the first chapter was (3.0) vaguely remember
> 55   because all was quote normal unquote.

By picking up the interviewer's use of "chapter," Jane presupposes that they are engaged in a research interview once again. But this reading of the interactional positioning is open to reinterpretation in light of subsequent context.

The work of Polanyi, Jefferson and others presents two concepts crucial to analyzing the interactional functions of autobiographical narrative. An adequate approach to analyzing interactional positioning in autobiographical narrative will present it as *mediated*—it will describe how cues in the telling make certain aspects of the context relevant to participants and analysts' interpretations of the interactional positioning going on in the storytelling event. And it will present narrative positioning as *emergent*—it will describe how patterns of cues and relevant context emerge during a storytelling event such that one account of the interactional positioning becomes more highly presupposed. Although some conversation analysts write as if their account cannot be combined with a theory like Labov and Polanyi's (e.g., Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), Silverstein (1992, 1993; Silverstein & Urban, 1996) and others have shows how the concepts of mediation and emergence can be combined in a more comprehensive account of language use in cultural context. Wortham (forthcoming) applies this argument to narrative discourse in more detail.

An adequate account of interactional positioning in narrative that uses the concepts of mediation and emergence will also have to explain what *types* of cues autobiographical narrators use to do interactional work. Wortham and Locher (1996) draw on Bakhtin (1935/1981) and Silverstein (1993) to describe five types of cues that narrators use to position themselves and others interactionally in storytelling events. Although this approach was developed initially to analyze positioning in news stories, it applies as well to autobiographical narrative. I have space here only for brief illustrations of the types of cues participants and analysts attend to in interpreting interactional positioning. See Wortham and Locher (1996) and Wortham (forthcoming) for a more detailed account.

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(1) Narrators must choose words and expressions to *denote* their characters. They inevitably choose from among paradigmatic sets, such that the word or expression chosen often communicates something about the narrator's interactional position. For instance, Jane refers to the teachers as "extraordinarily oppressed women" (lines 35-36). This positions Jane the narrator with respect to the type of person the teachers represent. She is unlike them, and she disdains them. Because her experience with such heartless people still influences her in the narrating present, Jane's use of referring expressions like this might position her as one who needs sympathy from the interviewer.

(2) When narrators represent their characters as speaking, they must choose *metapragmatic verbs* (Silverstein, 1976) to describe the past event of speaking. The choice of verb often presupposes something socially-relevant about the character. For instance, Jane says that her mother "was talked into" institutionalizing her (line 14). This characterizes her mother as weak and abdicating her responsibility for Jane—and this might also call for sympathy from the interviewer in the storytelling event.

(3) In addition to choosing metapragmatic verbs, narrators often attribute *quoted speech* to their characters. Putting words into a character's mouth also can portray him or her as a socially-relevant type. For instance, Jane describes what Mr. McGee said to her mother: "that she should consider uh putting me in school, a boarding school, and he recommended Irish Girls' Academy" (lines 15-16). Note the contrast between this quotation and the initial metapragmatic verb "talked into." Saying that an interlocutor "should consider" a course of action seems less forceful than "talking someone into" that action. What should we make of this mismatch between the metapragmatic verb in line 14 and the quotation that follows it? Jane gives us in the indirect quotation an image of Mr.

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McGee being relatively non-directive, but she (as the narrator) suggests with her metapragmatic characterization that he was in fact intent on getting her institutionalized. He had an institution in mind, and he "recommended" it immediately (line 16). I argue that this makes Mr. McGee seem like a smooth, manipulative person. He makes Jane's mother think he is simply recommending something, but he really talks her into doing what he wants. This continues to elaborate Jane's vulnerable and victimized character, and it further presupposes that the interviewer might appropriately be sympathetic in the narrating interaction.

(4) Narrators also use *evaluative indexicals*, which presuppose something about characters' social positions and position the narrator with respect to those positions. For instance, at the Academy "you were allowed to visit with your mother on Sundays only" (line 32). What kind of person keeps a seven-year-old child from her mother except for occasional visits, as if the child were in jail? With this detail Jane presupposes a recognizable voice or social type for the teachers—as cruel and blinded by archaic notions of discipline—and she positions her current self as a victim of such people.

(5) Narrators can take advantage of *epistemic modalization* to characterize the relative epistemic status of themselves with respect to their characters. For instance, Jane says "when you look back to 1940, fifty dollars was a lot of money" (line 22). She and the interviewer know this, but her seven-year-old self (and perhaps her naïve mother) did not. By presupposing her own past lack of knowledge, Jane contributes to characterizing her past self as vulnerable and Mr. McGee and the teachers as taking advantage of this vulnerability.

Further positioning in Jane's narrative

To identify the interactional positioning in an autobiographical narrative, an analyst can identify occurrences of these five types of cues—looking for the socially-relevant types of characters being presupposed and looking for how the narrator positions himself or herself with respect to these characteristic types. This sort of positioning makes a central contribution to the interactional event being enacted through the storytelling, because in positioning herself with respect to the various voices or social types represented in the narrative the narrator also projects interactional positions for herself and for her audience in the narrating event. Wortham (forthcoming) describes this methodological approach to narrative in more detail. The following section applies this approach to uncover the interactional positioning accomplished in the next episode of Jane's story.

In the twenty lines following the last segment presented above (around line 55), Jane continues to presuppose the more distanced, scientific type of storytelling event. She answers the interviewer's question about what chapters the various episodes represent, then gives a brief flashback description of her parents' marriage and divorce and her mother's situation after the divorce. Then she returns to the main story line. After Jane had been in the Academy for five years, her mother's health deteriorated so much that Jane's grandparents "sent for" her mother. So Jane and her mother moved to Louisville.

	J:	so: I can re<u>mem</u>ber um one- <u>late</u> September day. uh and it's <u>int</u>eresting how things are <u>etched</u> in your memory.
75	I:	uh huh.
	J:	leaving the Irish Girls' Academy, um (3.0) when a chi:ld from- I mean when <u>half</u> your life, al<u>ready</u>, at the age of <u>twelve</u>, is spent in an institution,
	I:	umhmm.
	J:	uhm (2.0) it was a <u>shock</u> for me to leave there. [God knows I was <u>glad</u>.

I: [umhmm.

J: um but- there was no one to <u>talk</u> about it to. um there was no way of even being in <u>touch</u>
       with those e<u>mo</u>tions, it's just that <u>I</u> can look back <u>now</u>. uh we're talking forty-five years ago.
       and re<u>mem</u>ber <u>leav</u>ing that place.

I: unh.

85   J: we packed up, mmmm. Mamma sold most of her possessions, <u>beau</u>tiful pos<u>ses</u>sions I
       might add, uh, and left some in storage boxes uh with a woman named Melinda who
       lived upstairs. Uh, we never saw those boxes again. so we came to Louisville with <u>lit</u>tle or
       <u>no</u>thing. my <u>grand</u>parents we:re <u>ve</u>ry comfortable. my grandfather had been a <u>ve</u>ry
       successful businessman. so we lived in uh we moved <u>in</u> with my grandparents. uh my
90   <u>mo</u>ther- once again, had <u>her</u> bedroom that <u>she</u> had as a child. and the <u>small</u> bedroom with
       the adjoining bath, sharing with my mother's bedroom which was the <u>maid</u>'s room. I want you
       to know, I got the <u>maid</u>'s room. My grandfather had built this building in 1917, and there was
       um ac<u>com</u>modations for uh, <u>help</u>.

I: uh huh.

95   J: so <u>we</u> lived in Eastside from 1945. (2.0) I- don't even remember which- until <u>what</u> year,
       but anyway that was, a <u>big</u> move. so <u>chap</u>ter one would be uh (3.0) your <u>ba</u>sic everyday
       (2.0) <u>tod</u>dler, yeah a <u>nor</u>mal toddler stage.

I: uh huh.

J: chapter <u>two</u> would be uh (1.0) the institutionalizing of a- of a <u>hu</u>man being, from age seven to
100 twelve, which was unh (3.0) [voice quivering] it <u>still</u> bothers me. (11.0) I'm <u>sorry</u>.

I: °it's okay.° (7.0)

J: [voice quivering] and then <u>Lou</u>isville was another chapter. (2.0) I went there (3.0) <u>ne</u>ver
       having freedom before. (4.0) in the A<u>ca</u>demy, we went to Mass <u>e</u>very day for five years.
       (2.0) we were <u>ri</u>tualistically, <u>cri</u>ticized and- uh, a<u>bused</u>.(1.0) by a bunch of pa<u>the</u>tic women.
105 (2.0) who when- the <u>one</u> priest who said the Mass would <u>walk</u> into the Academy you would
       have thought that Jesus Christ him<u>self</u> had entered the premises. (1.0) [sniff] uh (1.0) and
       so I <u>went</u> to Louisville,

The characterization of Jane and her mother in this segment remains similar to that

established earlier. Jane portrays her mother as passive and child-like. In addition to

being "sent for" by her parents (an evaluative indexical), she "once again had her bedroom

that she had as a child" (line 90). Jane herself, despite the fact that she has been rescued

from the institution, continues to be somewhat deprived. As she says, "I want you to

know, I got the *maid's* room" (lines 91-92). Jane the narrator certainly acknowledges that

life with her grandparents was comfortable—if, as she says later, interpersonally

difficult—compared to the institution. But she nonetheless points out what she considers the indignity of getting the maid's room.

Despite this brief plea, for most of this segment Jane remains distanced from the events she describes. She uses indefinite *you* (line 76-77), which distances her from the narrated events (cf. Wortham, 1996, for an account of how personal pronouns and other deictics position speakers interactionally). In lines 81-82 she talks analytically about her experience of leaving the convent, in popularized psychological terminology, saying that "there was no way of even being in touch with those emotions." This presupposes distance between her narrating and narrated selves. It might also presuppose that she and the interviewer are like peers, analyzing a clinical case together. Jane maintains this distance up through line 100, where she is summarizing the various chapters of her life story so far. But then the distance abruptly breaks down.

This is the first of three places during the interview where Jane cries. She has said earlier that her experiences in the institution still haunt her in the narrating present, and here she *enacts* this when she breaks down while summarizing that chapter in her life. By her action Jane shows that the trauma of that institutionalization continues to influence her and we as readers of the transcript artifact must recognize the horrible experiences that she endured and empathize with the trauma that she re-experienced in the interview itself. The interviewer here adopts what might be a sympathetic stance. She says "it's OK" to comfort Jane (line 101). But then she does not say anything else. In most settings an interlocutor would respond to such a painful story, and a crying narrator, by saying something else sympathetic or at least by changing the subject. But the interviewer here acts to maintain a more distanced position for herself as a research interviewer, and she waits for Jane to

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collect herself. (We should not judge the interviewer too harshly here. Like us, she is engaged in a scientific project through which she hopes to understand the enacted self better. Scientific distance has costs, but it can also facilitate important discoveries.)

After Jane collects herself, she goes on to finish her summary of chapters. But then Jane returns immediately to further description of the Academy (line 103). Here she reinforces and extends the characterization of the teachers that she did earlier. Now they are not only mean and vindictive, but also engage in "ritualistic" abuse of children. The evaluative indexes here presuppose that the institution was like a cult that does horrible things to vulnerable people Jane also characterizes the teachers as "pathetic," for their worship of the priest. The epistemic modalization accomplished with the conditional in lines 105-106 indicates that Jane the narrator herself finds the teachers' worship of the priest irrational and ridiculous.

After a brief description of her difficult life in Louisville, Jane goes on to describe her second institutionalization.

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115  J:      (2.0) so we uh lived with my grandparents for a few years, and uh that was very difficult.
             and once again, for some reason, I don't know why, but my mother thought that it would be
             best that I: (1.0) be placed in a private school again. [sniff] And this time she picked uh this is
             uh age fourteen, she was- it was again recommended, my mother was uh easily influenced
             as intelligent as she- she was, she was easily        influenced. to a place called Carter's School for
120          Girls, anothe:r, god awful institution. and I was there for a year and a half. and uh,
             evidently my uh character was being developed and- or either by age or by anger, because
             I ran away in January of 1949. I went there in May of '47, and in January of '49, I ran away.
             and uh (3.0) I went to the drug store that used to be at the corner of First and Main and I
             called my mother at my grandparent's house. and I refused to tell her where I was unti- I
125          negotiated with her. I- I look back now-, how I did that at the age of fifteen amazes me.
             sixteen. and I negotiated with her that I wouldn't come home unless she-, promised me that I
             would never go back there. um (2.0) they agreed. picked me up, and then I- proceeded
             to- spill out my heart and my guts when I got back to my grandparents'         house, who were
             appalled at all that went on at this girl's school. um, I who came from a so-called, you know-
130          good family, uh, proper family, upper middle-class family, was thrown into this uh
             institution that- was predominantly a dumping ground for the courts, for a lot of young
             women who um fought- that couldn't- uh be: put into foster homes or their- they were
             considered incorrigible and, even- even street people. You had this horrendous
             combina[tion.

135  I:                 [um hmm.
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J: so, I was u:h subjected to um (2.0) a- a side of- of uh the human race at a very early age
        without any foundation to fend for myself. I was abused, uh my- my- I took all   my recor-
        you know, when you're a youngster you don't know anybody, I took my record collection,
        it wa- destroyed, stolen, everything was stolen from me there. I- didn't know how to fend
140   for myself.

This passage contains three familiar voices or social types. Jane's mother was "easily

influenced" and again acted on someone's recommendation to institutionalize Jane (line

118). Like the Academy, this institution was "god awful" (line 120). And Jane gives the

other institutionalized girls a voice similar to the teachers'. These girls "abused" Jane,

"destroyed" her belongings and were generally "incorrigible" (lines 132-139). Jane herself,

before she ran away, was passive and vulnerable. She "didn't know how to fend for"

herself (lines 139-140).

        Figure 2 represents these voices.

===================Insert Figure 2 about here==================

The narrated event contains the same four voices as in Jane's description of her first

institutionalization, although this time she does not describe the person who recommended

the second institution. Jane hints later in the interview that her grandparents might have

encouraged her mother to institutionalize her, so I place them in this role in the figure.

Once again, Jane's mother passively acquiesces to someone's advice and subjects Jane to an

abusive institution.

        The figure also represents the storytelling event at this point in the interview. The

solid arrow from Jane's narrating self to the interviewer represents the analytic distance that

Jane maintains while describing these events. She describes these events objectively, as

would be appropriate for a research interview. The figure connects Jane's narrating and

narrated selves with a dotted line, because they are the same biographical person. But,

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unlike in the preceding segment, her actions in the storytelling event here do not indicate that her second institutionalization has any continuing negative impact on her.

In addition to mirroring the characterization of social types familiar from Jane's first institutionalization, however, this passage also describes another voice for Jane's narrated self. This time Jane did not passively endure the abusive institution. She ran away. Jane the narrator describes how this active and assertive narrated self "negotiated" with her mother and grandparents (lines 124ff.). The type of speech event characteristically described with the metapragmatic verb "negotiate" involves two parties with approximately equal status. Thus Jane characterizes her narrated self as unusually mature and competent for a sixteen-year-old. Figure 3 represents the changed configuration of narrated roles at this point in the narrative.

===================Insert Figure 3 about here=================

The thick barrier in the narrated event represents the distance that Jane has placed between herself and the former abusers. The arrow from Jane to her mother and grandparents shows that she has transformed her situation by forcing her relatives to change their behavior toward her. The voices and relationships within the narrated event in this figure represent the second of two configurations that recur throughout Jane's narrative. First, Jane was passive and victimized. Those who should have cared for her did not, and Jane was subjected to abuse. But now Jane is active and assertive. She acts to protect herself from the abusers and forces the failed caregivers to acquiesce.

What about the relationship between narrated and narrating events at this moment in the story? The figure represents Jane the narrator above the interviewer, because she maintains analytic distance while recounting this episode. Jane has recovered from the

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earlier breakdown of boundaries between narrated and narrating events, where she enacted how her horrible past experiences still haunt her by crying while narrating her first institutionalization. She reports her second institutionalization in a rational and distanced manner. She steps out of the narrative briefly while recounting this episode, with comments to the interviewer like: "how I did that at the age of sixteen amazes me" (line 125); and "I didn't know how to fend for myself" (lines 139-140). These sound like the comments of a competent adult, rationally discussing her past with a peer.

Note the *parallel* between the position of Jane's narrated selves and her own interactional positioning in the storytelling event while she describes her two institutionalizations. In her first institutionalization, Jane characterizes her narrated self as passive and vulnerable. While recounting this episode Jane the narrator herself acts vulnerable in the narrating event, in a way that shows how the narrated victimization continues to affect her and in a way that might entice the interviewer to be more nurturing. At the end of her second institutionalization, Jane voices her narrated self as active and assertive. And while recounting this episode Jane the narrator regains her composure and joins the interviewer in maintaining analytic distance on her story. This parallel between narrated and narrating positions shows Jane herself, in the storytelling event, *acting out* the transformation that she describes in her life story. Just as she did in her past life, in the narrating event she goes from passive to active. This enactment is an interactional event that also involves the interviewer too, of course. The interviewer says one thing that might be empathic or therapeutic, then adopts a consistently distanced, scientific position. As she did in various narrated events, in the narrating event Jane reacts to this scientific (and

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perhaps institutional) distance by positioning herself as alternately vulnerable and assertive.

While Jane does not adopt parallel positions in the narrating and narrated events at every point in her autobiographical narrative, analysis of the whole narrative shows that she oscillates between the positions of passive and active in both the storytelling interview and the narrated events throughout the interview. The parallel between represented and enacted events is actually more complicated than this brief summary of the early episodes can convey. See Wortham (forthcoming) for analyses of the rest of this narrative.

Conclusions

We might interpret the move from passive to active in the storytelling event as evidence of the developmental process Jane describes herself going through in her earlier life. As a child she was passive and victimized, but with development she became active and assertive. Now the Jane in the storytelling event is the active, assertive woman whose development she has just described. This would account for one function of the narrative in the storytelling event: Jane tries to establish, for the interviewer, that she is a competent adult who has chosen to participate in a scientific study and whose data can thus be relied on. This simple account will not suffice, however. If Jane developed an active, assertive self at age sixteen, why does she *still enact* the vulnerable self in the storytelling event at age fifty-seven? Jane does not simply manifest one stable self that has developed in the life story she recounts. Instead, I argue that the assertive self Jane first showed at age sixteen needs to be continuously maintained. She repeatedly enacts the transformation from passive to active, in the storytelling event, because it is in these sorts of enactments that her

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self gets established and maintained. Her "self" is not simply passive or active, but involves the more complex move from repeated victimization to active and even heroic self-assertion. This self gets established and re-established both in the narrated content Jane represents and in the positioning she enacts.

Jane's story illustrates how narrative self-construction can happen as autobiographical narrators repeatedly position themselves in characteristic ways in interactional events of storytelling. This sort of enacted positioning often happens in autobiographical narratives (Hill, 1995; Schiffrin, 1996) and narrators who repeatedly position themselves in characteristic ways can thereby partly construct their selves. Note that, although I have focused on the role of interactional positioning in narrative self-construction, the analysis of Jane's narrative in fact depends on both represented and enacted patterns. Analysts must attend to complex interrelations or mappings across represented and enacted patterns in order to understand how narrators position themselves interactionally (Irvine, 1996; Silverstein, 1998). Jane's narrative represents an interesting type of case, in which the represented and enacted patterns *run parallel*. This sort of parallel or iconism could be a particularly powerful way to construct the self in discourse (cf. Wortham, forthcoming). But even in storytelling events where positioning does not run parallel to representation, both represented and enacted patterns will normally be important to the analysis of narrative self-construction.

Drawing on the interactional as well as the representational functions of language, then, autobiographical narrators can partly construct themselves. Please note that my analysis of autobiographical narrative discourse does not *prove* that the self is constructed—instead of merely externalized—in narrative performance. I argue that, *if* the

self is partly constructed in self-narrative and *if* self-narratives involve the sort of complex interactional positioning described here (both plausible claims, in my view), then a constructionist account of self (Butler, 1990; Gergen, 1994) makes the most sense. When narrators tell stories about themselves, they characterize their past selves and position their present self both with respect to these past selves and with respect to other salient voices from their stories. They use this positioning to enact interactional events with audience members in the storytelling event. I argue that this sort of positioning, repeated in many speech events over time, can contribute important structure to the self. In other words, we are in part the kind of people we get positioned as when we narrate ourselves. But I acknowledge that the discovery of complex interactional positioning in autobiographical narrative cannot prove that narrative performances partly construct the self. Someone arguing for a pre-existing psychological self could maintain that the positioning uncovered in any self-narrative simply *manifests* that psychological self. I acknowledge that this view, though it seems unparsimonious to me, cannot be refuted with the type of data presented here.

One way to make this essentialist account more implausible will be to develop conceptual and methodological tools for uncovering complex positioning in autobiographical narrative. This article moves toward a more sophisticated account of how autobiographical narrators accomplish interactional positioning by describing five types of cues participants and analysts often use in interpreting the interactional positioning in a storytelling event. Some account like this will need to be elaborated in order for us to learn more about how autobiographical narrators can enact themselves.

Appendix

Transcription Conventions

'-'	abrupt breaks or stops (if several, stammering)
'?'	rising intonation
'.'	falling intonation
'_'	(underline) stress
(1.0)	silences, timed to the nearest second
'['	indicates simultaneous talk by two speakers, with one utterance represented on top of the other and the moment of overlap marked by left brackets
'='	interruption or next utterance following immediately, or continuous talk represented on separate lines because of need to represent overlapping comment on intervening line
'[…]'	transcriber comment
':'	elongated vowel
'°…°'	segment quieter than surrounding talk
','	pause or breath without market intonation
'(hh)'	laughter breaking into words while speaking

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