



INTRODUCTION

Engaging Social Justice: An Ethic-Onto-Epistemology Narrative Exercise: Introduction to the Special Section

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As researchers, we are irremediably stained and permanently embedded in complex institutional and geopolitical power relations. The political aspect of the research described by Maritza Montero more than 20 years ago points to how we, as researchers, contribute to social in/justice. In consonance, the articles in this special section, far from being isolated containers, ethics, and politics, together with the rest of the (now) five elements of a scientific paradigm, appear as entangled, what Karen Barad calls ethic-onto-epistemology (Barad, 2007). The contributions of this collection address the entanglement of ethics and politics in the practice of narrative research, a growing umbrella of research methods in psychology and the social sciences. The articles presented here together illustrate how narrative research can be a relevant tool for researchers who engage with the problems that affect their communities, ultimately echoing critical psychology's tradition and its long-standing concern with finding ways to contribute to social change in the form of collective emancipation (Ibáñez, 1997; Íñiguez, 2003; Montero, 1994; Parker, 2007). In this introduction, we briefly discuss the diverse field of narrative research, our own story behind this special section, and the possible ways to understand its relation to social justice. Later, we introduce the six articles from Latinx and Hispanic voices that make up the collection, focusing on how they understand narratives and the relation of narrative methods to social justice projects.

Keywords: social justice, ethics, politics, narratives

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Narratives: A Complex Ethic-Onto-Epistemology

In their seminal work *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described ontology, epistemology, and methodology as the three elements that characterize any scientific paradigm. Some years later, community psychologist Maritza Montero proposes to expand these three elements to include two additional dimensions she feels have been traditionally left aside by psychology. Thus, in her article "Ética y Política en Psicología: Las dimensiones no reconocidas" (*Ethics and Politics in psychology: twilight dimensions*; Montero, 2001), she argues for the inclusion of both politics and ethics in the paradigm of psychology. Montero's elaboration describes ethics as reflexivity regarding

what is good or bad and as a form of knowing that correlates with characterizing the relation between the knowing subject and the other. Following Barad (2007), we¹ get to know reality not by representing or looking from afar but by engaging with the world that should be material and direct.

As Lincoln (1995) argued, ethics is inseparable from the qualitative research paradigm as much as it is “fundamentally relational.” It involves the “recognition and valuing of connectedness between researcher and researched and between knowledge elites and the societies and communities in which they live and labor” (Lincoln, 1995, p. 287). This inseparability is emergent and relational (Barad, 2007). Conversely, politics is described by Montero (2001) as the inherent consequence of producing knowledge in societies fraught with power relations. As researchers, we are irremediably stained and permanently embedded in complex institutional and geopolitical power relations. The political aspect of the research described by Montero points to how we, as researchers, contribute to social in/justice.

In consonance, the articles in this Special Section, far from being isolated containers, ethics, and politics, together with the rest of the (now) five elements of a scientific paradigm, appear as entangled, what Karen Barad calls ethic-onto-epistemology (Barad, 2007). The contributions of this collection address the entanglement of ethics and politics in the practice of narrative research, a growing umbrella of research methods in psychology and the social sciences. The articles presented here together illustrate how narrative research can be a relevant tool for researchers who engage with the problems that affect their communities, ultimately echoing critical psychology tradition and its long-standing concern with finding ways to contribute to social change in the form of collective emancipation (Ibáñez, 1997; Íñiguez, 2003; Montero, 1994; Parker, 2007).

In this introduction, we discuss the possible ways to understand narratives’ relation to social justice. We introduce the six articles that make up the collection, focusing on how they understand narratives and the relation of narrative methods to social justice projects. Finally, we share our narration on how this Special Section was born.

Narrative: A Social Justice Perspective

Narrative inquiry in psychology and neighboring disciplines has a long and vital tradition, and its use has been popularized in recent times

(Andrews et al., 2013; Balasch & Montenegro, 2003; Biglia & Bonet-Marti, 2009; Bruner, 1991; Clandinin, 2007; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Domínguez & Herrera, 2013; Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1988; Squire, 2007). Although narratives are a place of common interest, a place of knowledge production, yet its research, implementation, methods, and challenges translate into an enormous plurality of perspectives and ways of understanding narratives and their role in research, configuring a field of study with lively discussions. Bamberg (2012), in order to explain the recent interest in narratives, distinguishes between: narrative as a genre, narrative as a method and narrative methods. In addition, Bamberg and Andrews (2004) present the counternarratives, which make sense only if they are related to another narrative. In other words, their position (before whom they position themselves) gives them meaning. Moreover, even though they could oppose the main narrative, that does not mean that counternarratives are per se political, nor are they seeking social justice. Kim (2016) warns us that not because narratives (and counternarratives) are committed to people or are part of social discourse does “not necessarily mean that those narratives work for progress—that is, toward social justice, equality, and equity. They may operate retrogressively, in conservative or radical undemocratic, inequalitarian directions.” (Kim, 2016, p. 14). We present here our perspective on *Narratives as a tool for Social Justice*.

We consider narratives in qualitative research from a social justice starting point; they provide a platform for marginalized individuals and communities to share their lived experiences and perspectives (Riessman, 2008). Narratives can draw attention to social injustices faced by these groups; therefore, narratives do not give voice, but amplify voices. Narrative methodologies can empower marginalized individuals by providing them with a platform to share their stories, perspectives, and struggles (Gandarias Goikoetxea & García Fernández, 2015; Woodward, 2002). This process is central to social justice advocacy.

In addition, narrative research can reveal the systemic and structural injustices embedded in

¹ In this article, as a political decision, we will use the pronoun “we” to refer to the article’s authors. This position assumes that knowledge is produced in a dialogical community (beyond our editorial guest team) and that, although the writing process is usually solitary, the production of ideas has not been.

personal stories. Researchers analyze narratives *to* uncover patterns of discrimination, oppression, and inequality (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Martínez-Guzmán & Montenegro, 2010). Therefore, narratives uncover systemic injustices. Narratives can inform social justice activism and advocacy efforts. Researchers may collaborate with affected communities to use narratives as tools for change, shedding light on the issues that demand attention (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Narrative research has the power to challenge dominant narratives that perpetuate injustice and inequality (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). Researchers can disrupt harmful stereotypes and ideologies through counternarratives (Riessman, 2008). On the other hand, personal qualitative narratives humanize social justice issues by putting a human face on statistics and data. They can increase empathy and understanding of the lived experiences of marginalized individuals (Frank, 2010).

Finally, narratives can enlighten policy development and social change initiatives. Researchers and advocates can use the stories and experiences of individuals to argue for policy reforms and systemic changes (Jones & Truell, 2012). In essence, narratives in qualitative research in psychology are integral to pursuing social justice. They serve as a means of documenting, understanding, and addressing injustices marginalized groups face while challenging dominant narratives and advocating for change.

Narratives: An Ethic-Onto-Epistemology Exercise

The relationship between narratives in qualitative research in psychology and social justice is significant and multifaceted. This Special Section explores three ways narrative research can contribute to a social justice project.

The first way the collection does so is by engaging in depth with the very concept of social justice and its political and theoretical foundations. This is the case for the article by Marcos Gemignani, Joan Pujol-Tarrés, and Itziar Goikoetxea which draws on Barad's feminist new materialism (Barad, 2007) in order to explore how an understanding of narrative research as "intra-action" can inform a performative, future-generating understanding of justice. Such is also the intention of Marcelo Lourdes dos Santos and Diego Gonzaga Da Silva, who see narrative research as a relevant tool to balance the power

relations at play between universalist notions of education and knowledge of local, situated, and territory-based truths as well as the article by Catherine Galaz and Hillary Hiner, who discuss the feminist and social psychological perspectives.

Second, the collection inquiries into how these distinct readings of social justice translate to different political engagements to contribute to the social milieus of which researchers become part. The contributions that compose this joint endeavor deal with a range of social issues, such as homemaking in deprived informal settlements, women's experiences of sexual abuse, or education in rural areas, among others. Researchers use narrative research to become engaged in these different contexts *by* generating and circulating alternative counter-hegemonic and nonhomogenizing accounts of the phenomena they study. Such is the case of Nicole Mazzucchelli and Lupicinio Íñiguez-Rueda and their research with elderly women in Chile, in which they could find alternative imaginaries of politically active women in which physical changes associated with aging were not a defining fact of their lives. It is also the case of the work of Alma Vanessa Guzmán Díaz and Patricia Trujano Ruiz on sexual abuse, which captures the ambivalent and complex nature of the experience of women that often become obscured by predominant victimizing narratives. A second way in which the work of this collection proves the relevance of narrative research to social justice is by showing its potential to foster processes of articulation between different elements of local communities. In this sense, Marcelo Lourdes dos Santos and Diego Gonzaga Da Silva illustrate how coproduction of narratives can help strengthen connections between academia and local, community-based organizations in rural Brazil. Finally, the work of Catalina Ramírez-Vega, Jorgelina Di Lorio, and Isabel Pellicer Cardona discussed a collective reflection on a contemporary topic such as people who are experiencing homelessness.

Finally, these different ways of engaging social justice in narrative research pose ethical and methodological challenges. As shown by Catalina Ramírez-Vega, Jorgelina Di Lorio, and Isabel Pellicer Cardona in their account of collective research on homelessness. While these dissimilar contexts of study present distinct traits and difficulties, the researchers of this collection used *creative and innovative methodologies* to overcome them, thus speaking of the wide range

of possibilities of narrative research. In this sense, Nicole Mazzucchelli and Lupicinio Íñiguez-Rueda make use of virtual methods with elderly women to overcome the difficulties that were derived from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Narrative: An Encounter of Voices

Narratives are placed in the in-between of the personal and the cultural and are then seen as a privileged site to interrogate the intersections of personal and social life. If, in a general sense, narrative inquiry is based on the premise that human beings have the ability to use narrative to make sense of the social world(s) we inhabit. Here, we make sense of the pathway that led us to this Special Section.

The genesis emerged at the *Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology Annual Conference* at Duquesne University in 2018, where one of the authors, Dr. Enciso Domínguez, witnessed three events. (a) The discussion on *Qualitative Inquiry In-Between the Local and the Global: Collective Reflection and Dialogues on Power, Resistance, and Decolonizing Possibilities*, (b) The Special Section Presentation *Mapping Qualitative Research in Psychology across Europe: Contemporary Trends* (Del Rio Carral & Tseliou, 2019), and (c) The European Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology Association presentation. Those events welcoming international perspectives, racialized bodies and diverse languages sparked Dr. Enciso Domínguez's idea to invite Dr. Marisela Montenegro Martinez, a Latina Scholar living in Spain, to reflect and set up a team together with Dr. Álvaro Ramirez March to discuss our common interests, to present, discuss, challenge, and advance the studies around narratives under the light of social justice.

This Special Section itself is a form of social justice in three ways:

1. It reclaims the space of Spanish-speaking and Latin American voices² in conversation with narratives;
2. It seeks a dialogue that could not take place in a bidirectional way due to the vehicular language of the academy (English) and its geopolitical entanglements (Enciso Domínguez et al., in press) without forgetting our ways of subverting it (Garcia-Meneses et al., 2023);
3. This dialogue will further the conversation on the relation of narrative and politics.

Suppose narrative psychology advocates for paying serious attention to people's stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). In that case, we pay attention to what psychologists from different parts of the world say in their research. By drawing on contributions from beyond the anglophone European and North American contexts (including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Spain), we present a collection of six articles dealing with ethical and political hotspots involved in narrative research.

Narrating the Possibilities

The authors (we) seek to focus on the work that different Spanish-speaking voices and the global south work on narratives with the hope of weaving new dialogues and advancing research and, therefore, social change.

Del Rio Carral and Tseliou (2019) make us reflect on the importance of context and the connections that shape qualitative methodologies and remind us of the downgrade position that qualitative methodologies tend to have. That is why we must focus on the points that unite us as a methodology, or as Crenshaw (1989) would say, the oppressions, so that, like Smith and Sparkes (2006), we look for a way to coexist.

The methodology is more than a process; it "is a creative move, a political move" (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, p. 8). That is why we consider it essential to think about the ethical, political, and social justice aspects of the narratives, even more so in the current political climate where narratives are important vehicles to transmit information.

As we conclude the introduction to this special section, we ask: What new discussions can be generated? What applications can they have? How could narratives impact our society (an ambitious and hopeful question)? Who can be our future interlocutors? What invitations will be answered? We know that there are many challenges to overcome, that it will not be easy, and that the narrative of a bleak world is reigning. That is why, today, more than ever, in order not to stop, it is crucial to seek alliances and create dialogues with a political perspective that seek (and tentatively achieve) social justice.

² We make the distinction between Hispanic (places where Spanish is spoken due to the colonial rule that Spain established in these countries) and Latin America (places that are located throughout the American continent from Argentina to Mexico).

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