What's the Story?

Autobiographies and Narrative Analysis
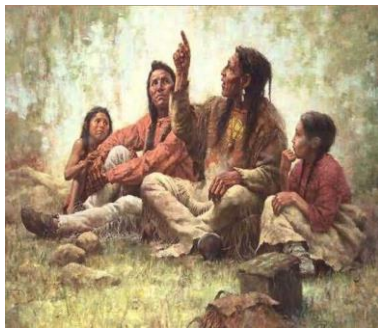
PG Research Workshop 18 January 2018

Dr Karen Howells, Sport and Fitness Lecturer
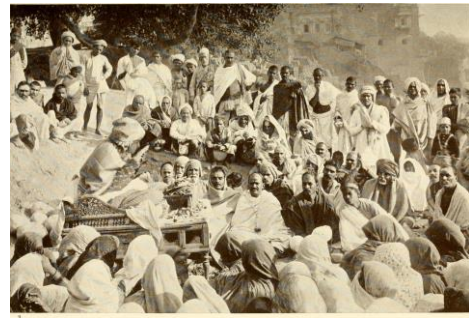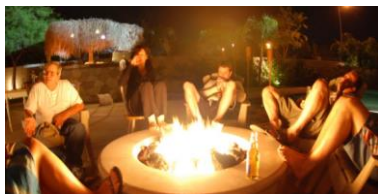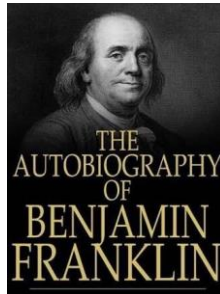
Life-changing Learning

Oral Storytelling

Across time and culture

Written Storytelling
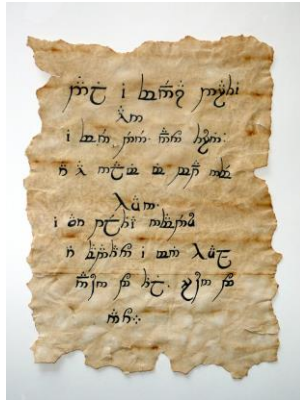
Qualitative Research

Focus Groups,
Interviews and Diaries

Autobiographies as data

Question: So if autobiographies inform us of social norms, practices, and historical events, can we use them as social scientists, and if so, how?

Autobiographies
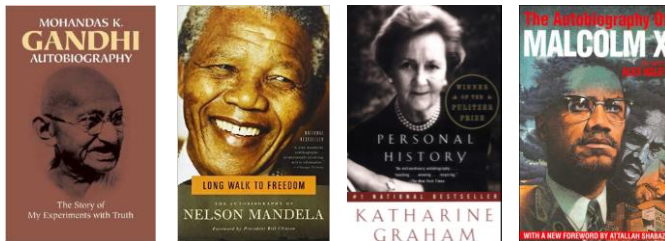
Unique contribution to understanding behaviour in a given context - literary studies and history have long used the analysing autobiographies to further understand a particular topic

Sporting Autobiographies
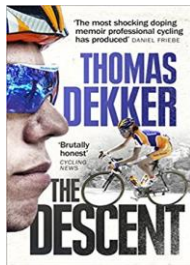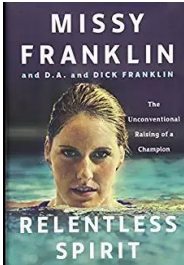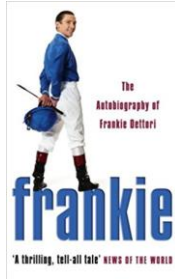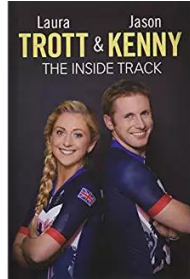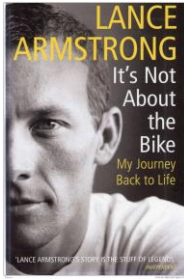
Titles and pictures…

Appeal to public but also an insight into the dominant narrative

Sporting Autobiographies

Titles and pictures…

Appeal to public but also an insight into the dominant narrative

Sporting Autobiographies

The Autobiography of Frankie Dettori

frankie

'A thrilling, tell-all tale' NEWS OF THE WORLD
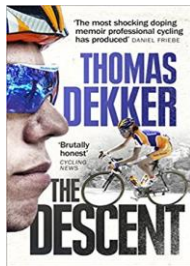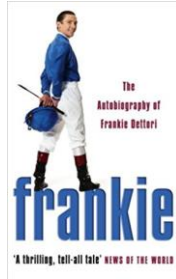
Titles and pictures…

Appeal to public but also an insight into the dominant narrative

9

Sporting Autobiographies

MISSY FRANKLIN
and D.A. and DICK FRANKLIN

The Unconventional Raising of a Champion

RELENTLESS SPIRIT
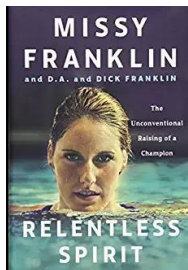
Titles and pictures…

Appeal to public but also an insight into the dominant narrative

10

Sporting Autobiographies
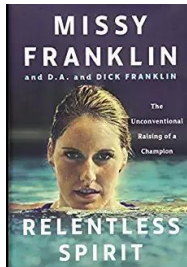
Appeal to me in respect of my research:

Autobiographies of Olympic Swimming Champions

Narrative of (posttraumatic) growth – every cloud has a silver lining

11

Autobiographies in Sport

Butryn and Masucci (2003)
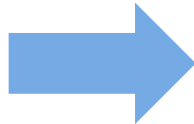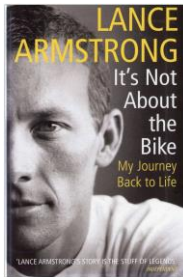
Analysis of multiple autobiographies to provide a more "*evocative force*" (Frank, 2012, p. 36)

Curtis (2007) *"Jockography…. A ludicrous performance art"*

Butryn, T. M., & Masucci, M. A. (2003). It's not about the book: A cyborg counternarrative of Lance Armstrong. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *27*(2), 124-144.
Curtis, B. (2007, November). *Capote at the bat*. New York Times Play Magazine, pp. 34–36
Frank, A. (2012). *Practicing dialogical narrative analysis*. In: J. Holstein and J. Gubrium, (eds). Varieties of narrative analysis. London: Sage, 33–52

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Narrative Research

Pluralism

Subjectivity

Relativism

There is no single absolute truth

13

Narrative Analysis

Holistic Content	Holistic Form
Categorical Content	Categorical Form
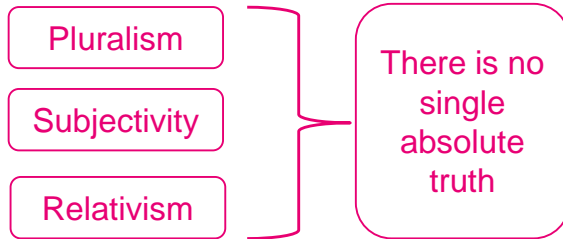
Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber (1998)
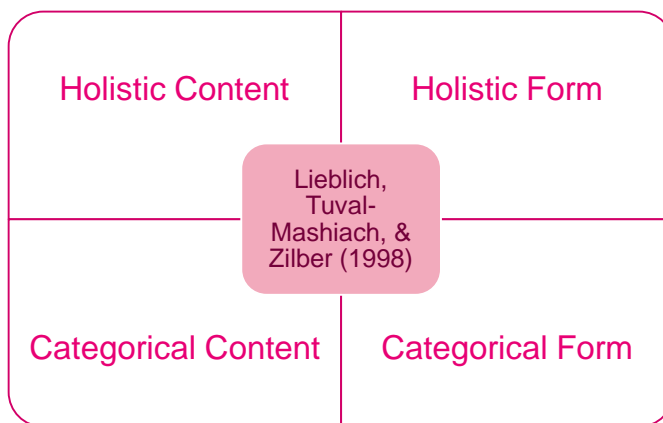
Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Reading, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

14

Narrative Analysis
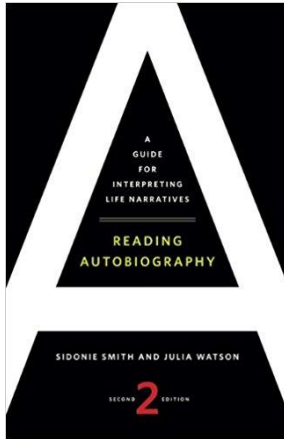
A Toolkit for reading and engaging with autobiographies. They provide 24 questions offering "entry points"…

e.g., *Audience* (e.g., Who is being addressed? Who is it written for?); *Body & Embodiment* (e.g., When and where does the body become visible in the narrative? Do particular body processes have significance?)

Smith, S., & Watson, J. (2010*). Reading autobiography: A guide for interpreting life narratives*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

15

Howells & Fletcher (2015)
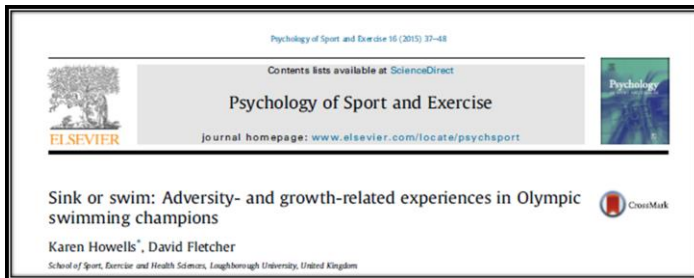
Psychology of Sport and Exercise 16 (2015) 37–48

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Psychology of Sport and Exercise

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/psychsport

ELSEVIER

Sink or swim: Adversity- and growth-related experiences in Olympic swimming champions

Karen Howells*, David Fletcher

School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, United Kingdom

Howells, K., & Fletcher, D. (2015). Sink or swim: adversity-and growth-related experiences in Olympic swimming champions. *Psychology of sport and exercise*, 16, 37-48.

16

8

Howells and Fletcher (2015)

Holistic analysis - context of the whole story (Lieblich et al., 1998)

Form (structure) and **Content** of the narrative

Informed by strategies: narrative plottings, voice, trauma and embodiment (Smith & Watson, 2010)

17

Newman, Howells & Fletcher (2016)
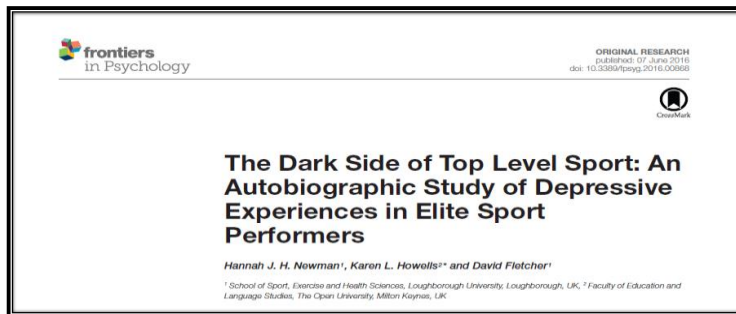
frontiers
in Psychology

ORIGINAL RESEARCH
published: 07 June 2016
doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00868

The Dark Side of Top Level Sport: An Autobiographic Study of Depressive Experiences in Elite Sport Performers

Hannah J. H. Newman¹, Karen L. Howells²* and David Fletcher¹

¹ School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK, ² Faculty of Education and Language Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

Twelve autobiographies (boxing, cricket, cycling, football/soccer, rugby union, snooker, swimming, and tennis)

Holistic content analysis and then **Categorical content analysis** (focus on the sub-texts where depression was discussed)

Newman, H. J., Howells, K. L., & Fletcher, D. (2016). The dark side of top level sport: an autobiographic study of depressive experiences in elite sport performers. *Frontiers in psychology, 7*.

18

9

Narrative Analysis
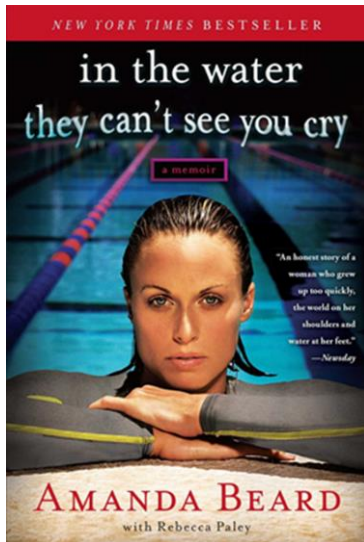
Amanda Beard, is an American swimmer and a seven-time Olympic medallist (two gold, four silver, one bronze). She is a former world record holder in the 200-meter breaststroke (long course)

Has modelled in FHM, Sports Illustrated, Playboy

Recalls body image concerns, disordered eating, depression, self-harm, drug abuse, toxic relationships

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Narrative Analysis
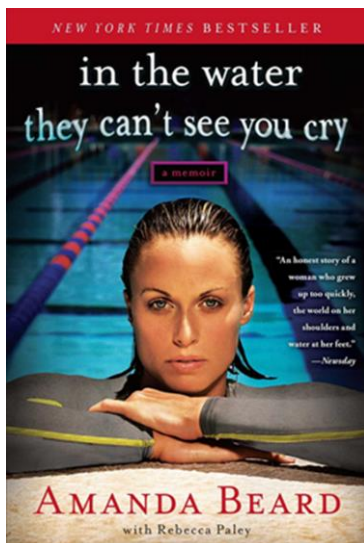
Chapter 5, Page 64-70

4 Groups

Photocopies of the selected text.
Group 1 – Holistic content
Group 2 – Holistic Form
Group 3 – Categorical Content
Group 4 – Categorical Form

15 minutes as individuals
15 mins as a group
5 mins per group to feedback

20

Holistic Content

- Read the material several times until a pattern emerges, keep an open mind.
- Write down your first impressions. Note any contradictions.
- Decide on the themes that you want to follow in the story.
- Using the markers to mark the various themes in the story.
- Discussion with other readers can be highly productive, but as this is interpretive work, do not expect to obtain "inter-researcher reliability."

21

Holistic Form

- Focus is on particular forms of speech in the whole text
- Identify comments that express the structural component of the narrative, for example, crossroads, turning point, life course, route, progress, or staying in one place. You may wish to look at the use of metaphor, italics, or the structure of the text on the page
- Identify and the language used and the use of the first, second, or third person.

22

Categorical Content

- The text is broken down into small units of analysis.
- Select subtext that is relevant to your hypothesis or research question – e.g., objectification of the swimmer's body. Ignore everything else.
- Define the content categories e.g., objectification by another, adherence to social norms
- Sort the material into the categories.
- Draw conclusions from the results. Can be either quantitative or qualitative

23

Categorical Form

- Learn something about the author that might not have been apparent from examination of content alone
- Use of frameworks – We could look at cognition e.g., thought processes (may focus on faulty/irrational thinking).
- Identify areas where there are irrational thoughts – what strategies are used to present them? Focus on the language, the structural/linguistic strategies.

24

Narrative Analysis
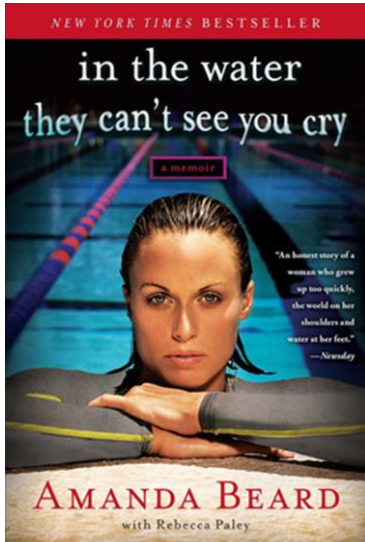
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

in the water they can't see you cry

a memoir

"An honest story of a woman who grew up too quickly, the world on her shoulders and water at her feet."
—*Newsday*

AMANDA BEARD

with Rebecca Paley

Chapter 5, Page 64-70

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26

The Response

Howells & Fletcher (2015)

Howells, K., & Fletcher, D. (2015). Sink or swim: adversity-and growth-related experiences in Olympic swimming champions. *Psychology of sport and exercise*, 16, 37-48.

Newman, Howells & Fletcher (2016)
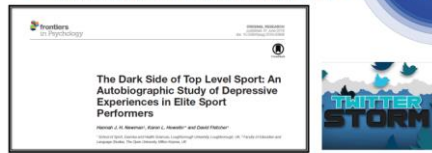
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The Response

theguardian.com/sport/2016/sep…
As an aside. Perhaps biographies are NOT so reliable as data sources for studies of performer characteristics?!

Team Sky have much to explain after Bradley Wiggins meets Andrew…
A short TV interview of Bradley Wiggins on the Andrew Marr Show was never going to yield the detailed answers required about TUE use but it is t...
theguardian.com

But they are mate! And that's the problem. Glad to hear your perspective

@ We have something like this as an UG assignment. Hence the tweet. I am not advocating research by biography.

Sorry. Would have to question this ongoing use of biographies as a sole source of data. Would historians accept this? If not, should psychs?

Excellent read - uses biographies as data
The Dark Side of Top Level Sport: journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.338…

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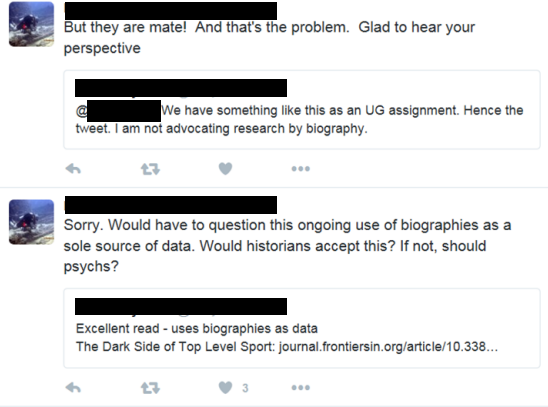
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And then the criticisms emerged in the published research…..

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The Criticisms and the Value

Truth

Commercial Commitment

Reliability

"Impression Managed"

Ghost writers

"*their stories*"
(Pipkin, 2008, p. 11)

Provide valuable first-hand perspectives of
sport that are not normally accessible to the majority

Pipkin, J. (2008). *Sporting lives. Metaphor and myth in American sports autobiographies.* 973 Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.

30

The Value

Why do we do qualitative research?

It is **not** to seek truth or to generalise and our view of the would will impact on how we view the use of autobiographies in research….

Autobiographies are not representations of reality, they are **social constructions** – but they tell us about a **context**, about **norms** and **behaviours**

31

Thank you for your participation

Any questions?

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