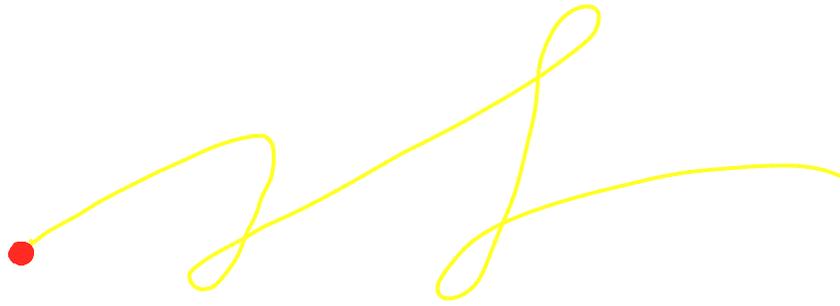


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Our Indefinite Narratives

It was William Shakespeare who wrote, “All the world’s stage,/ And all the men and women merely players” in his comedy “As You Like It.” And even today, we have been conditioned with this mindset. The number of times the phrase “the world is your oyster” has been muttered has far passed irrational. We are taught to believe that each one of us has a story and that story grows with us and helps shape us. And this is true: we reflect our stories as they do to us. However, it is not in the same way as narrative are written. Our lives are not constrained by the structure of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and, finally, resolution. In fact, each person’s narrative is nonlinear. And these nonlinear narratives that have been constructed from past experiences, major events, and inner thoughts often help explain perspective and who we are as people.



Linear storylines are beneficial when writing a book, however, they cannot be used to explain the complexities of life. This is because we do not necessarily live one life, but instead, many. Galen Strawson, a British analytic philosopher, literary critic, editor, and professor at the

University of Texas quotes Erik Erikson in his essay “On Life-Writing,” saying, “various selves... make up our composite self” (4). What this essentially means is that each one of us is merely a vessel for the different personalities we hold. This should not be confused with mental health, but instead roles-- roles that Julie Beck, an editor for *The Atlantic*, does an excellent job at describing as Shakespeare did. She explains, “Pretty much from birth, people are “actors.” They have personality traits, they interact with the world, they have roles to play-- daughter, sister... people begin to bundle ideas about the future with experiences from the past and present to form a narrative self” (7). This is why a self-narrative cannot be linear. We hold too many versions of ourselves to make one clear path. My family story has taught me different things my friend journey has and both of these timelines are different than my academic one. This does not mean that the stories do not overlap but instead form different selves that influence the present one.

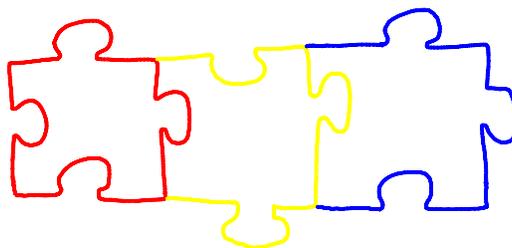
The pasts we have lived impacts our present lives, present thoughts, and future actions. We are constantly learning from the actions we take and use them to grow. Beck writes:

“In the realm of narrative psychology, a person’s life story is not a Wikipedia biography of the facts and events of a life, but rather the way a person integrates those facts and events internally-- picks them apart and weaves them back together to make meaning” (2).

Important events sparkle and shine in our lives; when they happen, we know right away to add it to our timelines. It works like this during both positive and negative times. However, It is not our own and others’ past actions that form who we are, it is the knowledge we have gained. Julie Beck continues to say:

“This narrative becomes a form of identity, in which things someone chooses to include in the story, and the way she tells it, can both reflect and shape who she is. A life story doesn’t just say what happened, it says why it was important, what it means for who the person is, for who they’ll become, and for what happens next” (2).

The events and feelings we put into our timelines hold importance to us. A memory that may seem insignificant to someone else may reveal a nugget of personality for the person who carries it. And these little pieces all come together to form each and every person.



The unique events we have experienced contribute to the equally unique perspectives we all have. Throughout life, a large group of people may all have experienced similar situations. Events like marriage, divorce, the death of a loved one, graduation; these are all frequent occurrences in life. However, this does not mean that they were the same for each person. There are many factors that contribute to these experiences that happen. Beck explains, “... biases, personality differences, or emotions can lead different people to see the same event differently” (16). It is not the physical event that affects the characteristics of a person, but how they face it, what they learn from it, and how they grow from it. They give each and every person a unique perspective on life.

This idea of perspective being built from our narratives holds true in my family as well:

https://youtu.be/dnddogP_XL4

My Nana was only a young girl when this situation impacted her life and in an instant, a new timeline was added to her own. As you can hear, she describes how this moment has influenced the way she views the world now. The timeline she built with her friend split into another, where perspective became to build. She is now very much interested in politics and the state of the world. This is one of her narratives and it connects back to the rest of them. It may have been unexpected but it is just as Strawson writes:

“Let the young soul look back upon its life and ask itself: what now have you truly loved, what has drawn out your soul, what has commanded it and at the same time made it happen... they will yield you a law, the fundamental law of your true self” (8).

Our narratives reveal our passions, something so personal and powerful for each person. These interests form while we are still young and manifest into greater things, just as we do. Once we recognize these events we have added to our narratives, we begin to see glimpses of our futures.

Our narratives are not like books-- we cannot tell where the end is or predict its final moments. It's something that continues to be written as we continue through life, by us, for us. These nonlinear lives we have lived have shaped us into the people we are today and will continue to grow with us. They may show ups and down, spirals and circles, but they ultimately reveal who we are as people.

Multimodal Statement

After reading both articles, I found myself relating more to Julie Beck's writing. Narrative, to me, is based on experience and how you grow from it. I do agree with some of Galen Strawson's points, however. For example, I also believe that how we remember our own stories are not exact or as others may. But, I still think that the way we remember and our thoughts regarding moments in our lives also help shape who we are. To better explain these ideas, I used the modes of audio, visual, and spatial, instead of just linguistic.

For spatial, I want to emphasize my visual elements. To do this, I added margins and gaps in between paragraphs that would fit more drawings in. I also wanted to make sure that my essay looked simple, clean, and professional, so I made sure to not go overboard with these spacial elements.

For visual, I included some drawings, that way it feels more personal. I believe by including the contrast between timelines adds a more descriptive element. I think this also helps describe my thoughts and ideas as well as further develop my thesis. Color was another aspect that I focused on. I decided to rely on primary colors. This is because they are the building blocks of the other colors. Like how an artist may mix these colors together, I believe our many timelines mix and branch off. Finally, for auditory, I added my interview with my Nana. The narrative she tells is a powerful one and it supports my ideas as well. I think it fits in perfectly and also contributes to how my thesis connects personally.

Overall, I wanted the looks and the audio to reflect my ideas. However, I also wanted to reflect myself as well. I appreciate creativity and I think by putting my multimodel essay together as I did makes it even more personal.

Works Sited

Beck, Julie. "Life Stories" *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 10 August 2015. Web. 20

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Strawson, Galen. "I am not a Story" *Aeon*. Aeon Strategic, 03 September 2015. Web. 20 April

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