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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO STORIES AND STORYTELLING:  
THE EXPRESSION OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND  
SOCIAL IDENTITY IN RETIREMENT CENTERS

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

PENNY S. EUBANK

Norman, Oklahoma

1998

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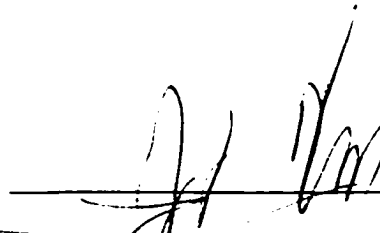
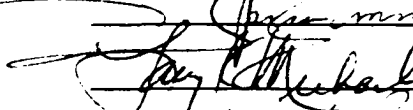
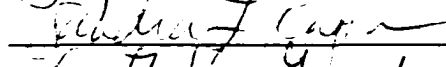

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AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO STORIES AND STORYTELLING:  
THE EXPRESSION OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND  
SOCIAL IDENTITY IN RETIREMENT CENTERS

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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## Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the functions of organizational storytelling and the expression of social identity by residents and employees in retirement centers. This perspective on storytelling has its foundations in Browning's (1992) theory that "lists and stories" are the major components of organizational communication, and in the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). An extensive, interdisciplinary review of literature reveals five functions of organizational storytelling: value expression, proof by example, sensemaking, system maintenance, and social prescription. The review also describes two predominant approaches to storytelling research: a macro-level approach that focuses more on the organization and its culture, and a micro-level approach that emphasizes the storytelling. These two perspectives do not provide a sufficiently comprehensive view of organizational storytelling; therefore, the dissertation articulates an integrative approach to research that will use multiple methods and provide more connections between stories, storytellers, and organizations.

The research described in the dissertation uses the integrative approach to analyze organizational commitment and identification with social groups in the context of three independent living retirement centers. The research was conducted to assess the proposed typology of storytelling functions and determine if residents and employees used the functions differently. The researcher also investigated differences in the two groups' levels of organizational commitment and examined a possible association between commitment level and the telling of shared organizational stories. The final aims of the research were to analyze qualitatively the expression of social identity in participants'

narratives and to find out if residents and employees differ in their social group references.

Participants were 43 residents and 46 employees of three independent living retirement centers recruited in a convenience sample. Residents and employees met in separate groups of 4 to 8 participants and completed the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979) and supplied demographic information. Participants then took part in a group interview and were asked to tell about memorable events in the organization. The interviews yielded 371 organizational stories, which were transcribed and submitted to a content analysis procedure. Three independent coders classified the stories according to storytelling function, whether the stories were personal or organizationally shared, and the use of membership categorization devices to reference social groups (Sacks, 1992). Coders classified each group reference as positive, neutral, or negative, and as an in-group or out-group reference. Intercoder reliability was .91. The coding procedure resulted in 362 group references made by residents and 360 by employees.

Results of the content analysis validated the typology of five functions and showed that stories functioning as “proof by example” were told most frequently. A chi-square test of independence revealed a significant relationship between membership status (resident or employee) and the use of storytelling functions ( $\chi^2 = 26.784$ , d.f. = 4,  $p < .001$ ). Employees used the proof by example function most frequently, and residents used the sensemaking category more than the others. The comparison of mean scores on the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire revealed no significant difference between the two groups ( $p = .107$ ). Employees told more shared stories than residents,

but no significant association was demonstrated between participants' commitment scores and number of shared stories told ( $r = -.014$ ;  $p = .898$ ). A qualitative analysis of participants' narratives shows prevalent use of membership categorization devices to express identity with in-groups and relationships to out-groups. The degree of organizational identification expressed is noticeable in both residents' and employees' narratives. A significant relationship was found between membership status and the use of in-group and out-group organizational references ( $\chi^2 = 31.599$ , d.f. = 5,  $p < .001$ ). Residents made more positive references to their own groups than employees did, and employees made more neutral out-group references, half of which were about the resident group. Employees also made more negative out-group references than residents made.

Limitations of the dissertation are the use of the convenience sample, problems with adapting the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire to residents, and the difficulty of coding group references in narratives. The following areas of future research are suggested: continued investigation of the retirement center organization as a context for communication study, further examination of storytelling functions in other organizations, development of additional methodologies for analyzing stories and social identity, and analysis of the content and themes of organizational stories.

This dissertation confirms the usefulness of multiple methods in research on organizational storytelling and social identity. It also demonstrates through the qualitative analysis the language strategies used by storytellers to construct social identity. The results from this research lay the groundwork for more social identity study in organizations and further exploration of the retirement center context.

AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO STORIES AND STORYTELLING:  
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

When people talk to each other, they commonly tell stories. Theory and research from diverse disciplines has identified storytelling as one of the most common and important forms of human discourse (Bennett, 1978; Blum-Kulka, 1993; Kerby, 1991; Moore, 1973; Polanyi, 1989). Walter Fisher (1984, 1985, 1987) proposed a paradigm of human communication which claims that “humans are essentially storytellers” (p. 7).

Human communicators create and constitute organizations (Putnam, 1983). Theory and research over the past two decades in organizational behavior and communication have shown storytelling to be a significant form of organizational talk. Mitroff and Kilmann (1975) conducted one of the earliest studies on organizational stories, comparing stories told by managers of different personality types. Since then, research on organizational stories has appeared in the publications of several disciplines, including communication, psychology, management, discourse analysis, and folklore studies. The popularity of studying stories during the past two decades is due, in part, to the emergence of the “culture” metaphor in management publications (e.g., Deal & Kennedy, 1982) and the interpretive approach in organizational communication (e.g., Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). Both of these perspectives view organizational storytelling as an important means for communicators to assign meaning to their organizational experience and as a significant element in the study of corporate culture.

This dissertation will first provide a review of the defining characteristics and functions of organizational stories found in recent publications and then outline the strengths and limitations of two perspectives represented in the literature. An integrative approach to studying organizational stories is proposed that brings together the two perspectives. The final sections report on a research project that investigated the

expression of organizational commitment and social identity in stories told by members of independent living retirement communities.

### Storytelling as Organizational Communication

#### Theoretical Background

This treatment of organizational storytelling has a theoretical basis in two perspectives: Browning's (1992) theory of lists and stories as organizational communication and the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) as it has been applied to communication. Browning extends the narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1984) to organizational communication and posits stories as one of two "central ingredients" of all organizational communication. Lists are the second ingredient and are represented by scientific knowledge as found in technical manuals, procedural guides, and statistical reports. Stories are grounded in lived experience and carry organizational memory. The power of stories is less formal than the power of lists, but stories still carry authority because they are embedded in local knowledge.

Two issues related to the use of Browning's theory need clarification. The storytelling focus of this dissertation is not intended to privilege stories over lists but is an attempt to provide a better framework for studying one of Browning's two ingredients. Also, his theory defines stories as narrations of personal experience, but the preference here is for a broader definition that includes stories an organizational member may tell about other members or about the organization itself (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Wilkins, 1978).

A second theoretical basis is the social construction of reality, which originated with Berger and Luckmann (1967) but has been "adopted" by communication scholars in the last two decades. Smircich and Calas (1987) articulate the appropriateness of this theory for the study of organizational communication:

This orientation attends to the ways that words, symbols, and actions of human actors create and sustain social reality. Meanings do not reside in messages,

channels, or filters; rather, they evolve through social interaction and sense-making activities of people. Thus communication is not just another organizational activity that occurs inside an organization; rather, it creates and recreates the social structure that makes organization. (p. 231)

When viewed from this theoretical perspective, storytelling in interaction not only recounts the past, but also recreates the reality of the past for the communicators every time the story is told (Johnstone, 1993; Ochs, 1994). Stories are even changed, reorganized, and edited in successive telling (Norton, 1989; Weick, 1995). The meanings shared about an event are not to be found in the past event itself—which is impossible to recapture—but in the shared story of the event.

The theoretical basis for this examination of organizational stories is summarized by positioning organizational stories as a central ingredient of all organizational communication by which participants construct social reality in the organization. The following section outlines five defining characteristics and five communication functions of organizational stories, as revealed in an interdisciplinary review of literature.

### Defining Stories

Theorizing about storytelling requires a means of identifying what does and does not constitute a story.<sup>1</sup> Outside the organizational literature, the following broad definition summarizes what a story is: A common form of discourse (Bennett, 1978), usually in context of conversation (Jefferson, 1978; Ryave, 1978), which tells an event in a series of more than one statement (Moore, 1973; Ryave, 1978). Stories function as a means of “packaging” an experience (Sacks, 1978) of a “distant event into a form that will allow a listener in an immediate situation to grasp its significance” (Bennett, 1978, p. 3).

A survey of organizational storytelling literature provides five defining characteristics of stories which reflect the general concepts above but limit the stories to the organizational collective. First, stories are told about past organizational events, giving them “a sense of temporality” (Brown, 1990a, p. 163). Stories are often recalled from the organization’s history (Martin, 1982) and are sometimes repeated with enough



frequency to become an enduring part of the folklore of the organization (Christensen, 1988; Kreps, 1983). Organizational stories are commonly told as personal experience of the teller (Browning, 1992).

A second defining characteristic is that the story “recounts an event which has taken place in an organization of which the teller and/or the audience are or have been members” (Holt, 1989, p. 378). The main characters are usually organizational members (Martin, 1982; Martin & Powers, 1983) instead of clients or other nonmembers. A storyteller often tells about an event in which he or she is the “hero” of the story (Brown, 1990a) or describes the acts of another organizational member as heroic or villainous.

Another characteristic of the organizational story is that it is believed to have some basis in fact (Holt, 1989) or relative accuracy (Martin & Powers, 1983; Wilkins, 1984). The story “rings true” (Brown, 1990a; Hummel, 1990) to organizational members because it “makes sense in the organizational context” (Brown, 1990a, p. 170). Obviously, this part of the definition does not imply that all organizational stories are factually accurate, only that they are believed to be accurate by the teller and/or the listener (Wilkins, 1984).

Fourth, the organizational story is usually communicated in the course of a conversation between two or more people, at least one of whom is an organizational member (Holt, 1989). In most studies reviewed here, the story is told by an organizational member to a researcher rather than another employee. The telling of the story “exhibits a story grammar, including a preface, recounting, and closing sequence” (Brown, 1990a, p. 163); in other words, the story has a plot (Martin, 1982). Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) list storytelling as one form of cultural performance, in which participants dramatize and “glorify organizational experience” (p. 138).

A final defining characteristic is that organizational stories usually make a point, which may or may not be supplied by the teller (Martin, 1982). This characteristic of stories permits communication about a variety of topics related to local (Fisher, 1984) or

informal knowledge (Hummel, 1990) that may not be easily expressed with other communication forms, such as reports or manuals. According to Martin (1982), “such implicit messages allow for ambiguity and individual differences in interpretation. . . , the conclusion to be drawn by the information receiver” (p. 257).

To summarize, organizational stories are defined by these characteristics: (a) they display temporality, (b) they recount events in the organizational context, (c) they “ring true” to the membership, (d) they are sequenced in conversation, and (e) they have a point, which may be implicit. This definition is sufficiently broad to encompass most treatments of organizational stories reviewed here but is narrowly focused to exclude forms such as metanarratives, myths, fantasy themes, organizational sagas, written histories, and stories told by organizational members about extra-organizational events or characters.

### Functions of Organizational Storytelling

When a person tells an organizational story, the story serves some function for the teller and for the organization. This does not imply causation or purposefulness (Dance & Larson, 1976), but a relationship between telling a story and what the story does as a symbolic form. This designation is not intended as an endorsement for functionalism, but is meant to be suggestive of a typology that emerges from the literature.

A review of the storytelling literature reveals that several sources classify different functions of organizational storytelling (e.g., Brown, 1985; Dandridge, 1985; McConkie, 1980; McConkie & Boss, 1986; Wilkins, 1983). While some of the typologies borrow from or show similarities to other sources, no comprehensive model seems to encompass all of the various functions suggested in the storytelling literature. A synthesis of these typologies reveals the following five functions of organizational storytelling: value expression, proof by example, sensemaking, system maintenance, and social prescription. While many stories will serve more than one function and other unnamed functions may

exist, these functions seem to adequately reflect or subsume most functions supported by the literature.

### Value Expression

Stories told in organizations often express a shared value of organizational members (Brown, 1990a; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; McConkie, 1980; Wilkins, 1983) and recreate that value for listeners each time the story is shared. Such a story may do so by “framing organizational activities in terms of organizational values” (Brown, 1990a, p. 165). Often a story which expresses organizational values particularly well will be widely shared and disseminated (Brown, 1990a; Wilkins, 1984) and persistent across time and across membership.

A common way for storytellers to express values is to communicate stories that have a “moral” (Martin, 1982; Ryave, 1978). Sometimes the teller supplies the moral independently, but often “the content of the moral may vary, depending on who is listening to the story, why that particular story is being told, and who is telling it” (Martin, 1982, p. 256). Siehl and Martin (1988) reported a study in which they presented four commonly shared organizational stories to a group of employees of various tenures. They found that as newcomers learned more about shared meanings prevalent in the organization’s culture, they were better able to assign the same “moral” to a story that longer-term employees recognized.

### Proof by Example

A second function of organizational storytelling is to “illustrate, substantiate, prove some asserted state of affairs” (Ryave, 1978, p. 123). As a conversationalist makes some observation, he or she may offer the story as “proof” that such a statement could be true in the context of the organization, in that it has actually been exemplified in the past by the recounted event. In McConkie’s (1980) study of the Concord agency, he found that a company-wide story of a firing was concluded to be “more real, particularly at an

emotional level, than anything written in a policy manual or in 'textbook learning'" (p. 218). Witten (1993) explains why stories are particularly powerful as proof:

Narrative is a singularly potent discursive form . . . because it compels belief while at the same time it shields truth claims from testing and debate. As a result, narrative is capable of commanding attention, belief, and memory with minimal risk of the argumentative challenges that can validly be made of powerful assertions set forth in other forms of talk. (p. 100)

Wilkins (1983) provided evidence that stories used as proof are "particularly effective at presenting information in a way which is concrete, vivid, and thus easily remembered" (p. 82). In a series of research projects, Martin and Powers (cited in Martin & Powers, 1983b) compared storytelling to presenting data and/or abstract ideas in various combinations and found stories to be highly persuasive, memorable, and effective in producing commitment to ideas when used as proof.

### Sensemaking

The sensemaking function of storytelling, in essence, has two components: "Stories both reflect and create people's social realities" (Tommerup, 1988, p. 319). The reflection component of storytelling relates to capturing past experience that is too important to leave behind (Dandridge, Mitroff, & Joyce, 1980; Feldman, 1990; Huff, 1985) and often deserves a place in an organization's folklore (Kreps, 1983). Edwards and Middleton (1986) describe stories as a social memory, a form of joint recall. Since stories "connect facts" and "store complex summaries in retrievable form," they help organizational members more fully comprehend their environments (Weick & Browning, 1986, p. 255).

Storytelling also serves a sensemaking function in the present, as members "create" their social reality and shared construction of meaning (Bormann, 1983; Gioia, 1986). Deal and Kennedy (1982) afford storytellers an important role in organizations: "The tales that storytellers tell, like myths in a tribal setting, explain and give meaning to the workaday world" (p. 87). As members encounter uncertainty in the work environment, the communication of an organizational story often reduces that uncertainty by helping to

define the situation, based on past events, identities, or description of what the organization is “really” like (Brown, 1985, 1990a; Tommerup, 1990). Stories help individuals to “translate knowing into telling” (White, 1981, p. 1). Based on the experiences related to them by others, people may build theories about organizational life (Martin, 1982; Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph, & Smith, 1992) and explain or give reasons for their actions (Deetz, 1987). Storytelling helps members connect accounts of past events to their present reality. As such, organizational “stories are to the storytelling system what precedent cases are to the judicial system,” in that they allow participants to “make sense of an equivocal situation” (Boje, 1991, p. 106).

Stories are especially powerful for sensemaking because they sequence events that may be otherwise chaotic (Norton, 1989). Weick (1995) explains that “stories allow the clarity achieved in one small area to be extended to and imposed on an adjacent area that is less orderly” (p. 129). A recent study of the merger of a national bank and state bank (Eubank & Akande, 1994) demonstrated how employees of the state bank made sense of the experience through stories. Although official bank communications announced the change as a “merger,” the stories of state bank employees labeled the event as a “takeover” as a way of accounting for the loss and anger brought about by the change.

### System Maintenance

The fourth function of storytelling, system maintenance (Dandridge, 1985), is reflected by Martin and Powers’ (1983) description of stories as a “symbolic form of management” (p. 161). Such stories reinforce the power, practices, and policies of the organization (Martin & Powers, 1983; Witten, 1993). System maintenance stories help to define the organization by expressing unwritten rules or “unrecorded-but-managerially-favored customs of organizational life” (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 139).

Wilkins (1978) analyzed system maintenance stories as part of his dissertation research. He defines these stories as those which “emphasize and legitimate the

management philosophy" (1983, p. 81). He concludes that stories can be used to generate commitment to management philosophy, when the stories meet two criteria:

The stories must symbolize the overarching purpose and philosophy in a way that inspires and teaches. However, they must also provide enough of a suggestion about how participants should act that they know what to do once they have been inspired. Stories are uniquely qualified to perform both functions simultaneously. (1984, pp. 44-45)

The first function Wilkins requires is the system maintenance function. The second is for the stories to prescribe behavior, which is the fifth function of storytelling in this review.

### Social Prescription

Finally, organizational members use stories as "maps that help people know how things are done in a particular group. People want to know how to fit in and avoid major blunders in a new culture" (Wilkins, 1984, p. 43). Stories are both prescriptive of desirable individual behavior (Evanchuk, 1988; McConkie & Boss, 1987) and predictive of organizational outcomes (Martin, 1982; Wilkins, 1983). "Stories can guide action before routines are formulated and can enrich routines after those routines are formulated" (Weick, 1995, p. 129).

At the individual level, stories serve a vicarious learning function for the organizational member who "learns the ropes" by hearing of someone else's blunder instead of making the same mistake (Akin & Schultheiss, 1990). The prescriptive story shows how failures or successes came about in the past and forecasts what might happen if similar events should recur (Martin, 1982). It functions to give advice, suggest eminent rewards and punishments, and define behavioral limits for organizational members (McConkie & Boss, 1986; Wilkins, 1983).

Organizational stories also contain "blueprints" (Martin, 1982) or "scripts" (Wilkins, 1983) that provide information employees can use to predict corporate behavior. A story that indicates how the organization has acted in the past provides a

“map” for the future. Not only does storytelling communicate what is expected of employees, but also what to expect from the organization.

Individuals learn appropriate behavior from both positive and negative narratives. Positive narratives recount the successes of some organizational member who did the right thing, and negative narratives recount failure from which the hearer should learn from someone else’s mistake. Santino (1978) and McCafferty (1995) found many examples of negative stories that showed how danger resulted from inappropriate behavior. Such stories may be more instructive than positive stories if they are more memorable.

### Summary

The above review has provided a working definition of organizational stories and five storytelling functions: value expression, proof by example, sensemaking, system maintenance, and social prescription. As evident from this review, the study of organizational storytelling has been far reaching in the last two decades, extending into numerous academic disciplines.

### Two Approaches to Studying Organizational Storytelling

Along with the increased interest in organizational stories has been the development of two diverse approaches to their study: a macro-level approach that focuses on the organization and its culture, and a micro-level approach focusing on the stories. The existence of two approaches is not necessarily problematic, but rather the incompleteness of each in studying organizational stories. A review of research and theory under each perspective will show that neither the macro- nor the micro-level approach sufficiently explains the communicative importance of organizational storytelling, in that the former approach privileges the organization and the latter approach privileges the storytelling.

According to Langellier (1989), the study of stories is inherently problematic because of their “ubiquitous nature.”

The positioning of the personal narrative [is] somewhere between a number of traditional categorical pairs: between literary and social discourse, between written and oral models of communication, between public and private spheres of interaction, between ritual performance and incidental conversation, between fact and fiction. (p. 244)

Therefore, it is not surprising that research on organizational stories has developed in two different directions.

Storytelling, according to the view adopted in this dissertation, is essentially an interpersonal communication activity (Mandelbaum, 1989) occurring between conversational partners. However, when the stories told are organizational stories, the interpersonal communication becomes organizational. The two approaches described below reflect this tension between studying storytelling as an organizational variable at the macro level and as a conversational variable at the micro level.

#### Macro-Level Approach

The majority of published studies on organizational storytelling adopt a macro-level approach. The focus of these studies is likely to be the organization and its culture rather than the communicative aspects of storytelling experienced by the teller and audience. The story, like a tool, is more important for what it does rather than for what it is. Three broad categories of theory and research represent how organizational stories are studied in the macro-level approach: stories as management tools, cultural tools, and diagnostic tools. These categories are not intended to be exhaustive nor mutually exclusive but are outlined as descriptive of this approach.

#### Organizational Stories as Tools

Stories as management tools. Some of the most frequently cited studies on organizational stories were conducted by Alan Wilkins (1978, 1984) and Joanne Martin (1982; Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983; Martin & Powers, 1983; Siehl & Martin, 1984, 1988). These reports treat organizational stories as a symbolic form that is especially effective for management to use in conveying certain types of information to employees and for eliciting certain desired responses. "Organizational stories legitimate



the power relations within the organization; they rationalize existing practices, traditions, and rituals; and they articulate through exemplars [sic] the philosophy of management and the policies which make the organization distinctive” (Martin & Powers, 1983, p. 97). A recent example is a trade publication (Neuhauser, 1993) which is addressed specifically to managers with instructions on how to “use” stories as a powerful management tool.

Another conclusion from this research is that stories are associated with commitment to organizational ideals and philosophy. Wilkins (1984) found that positive stories about organizational events encourage commitment to management ideology:

An important difference between excellent companies and the less successful companies is that the former have a clear set of concrete examples of past management actions (passed on informally from employee to employee as stories) which make the philosophy come alive to participants who are far removed from the executives who write the policy statements. (p. 42)

In two studies (Martin, 1982; Martin & Powers, 1983), stories were compared to statistical information and abstract statements and were reported to be more effective as a means of generating commitment to management philosophy. Dandridge (1985) recommends stories as a means for management to “encourage different perceptions” about the organization to outside audiences and to employees.

Research on organizational stories as management tools has also identified stories as a means of social control which can generate models of permissible action for members (Witten, 1993), create and represent political processes in the organization (Feldman, 1990), and reinforce acceptable behavior (McConkie & Boss, 1986).

Stories as cultural tools. Many of the published works on organizational stories identify them as symbols which carry information about the culture of the organization (Brown, 1990b; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Wilkins, 1984). According to this approach, one can better understand the organization and its culture by knowing its stories (Schein, 1985; Wilkins, 1983). Stories also reveal what membership in that culture means

(McCafferty, 1995) and how the organization perceives itself (Hopewell, 1987). Wilkins (1984) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) point to stories as a shaper of “strong cultures.”

Stories are suggested as a way to “transmit” organizational culture to employees (Siehl & Martin, 1984). Siehl and Martin (1984, 1988) assessed the cultural knowledge of organizational members by asking them to assign appropriate “morals” to well-known stories in their organization. Employees with longer tenure and those who attended a “culture” orientation more often answered correctly. The orientation was designed to acquaint new hires with cultural information, such as stories, jargon, and local humor.

Kreps (1983) collected organizational stories at RCA and then incorporated many of the stories into an orientation program designed to socialize employees into the culture of the organization. Evanchuk (1988) interviewed former members of a dance company and devised a similar, though less formal, socialization program after hearing their stories. Retired company members came in at infrequent intervals to share stories with new and tenured dancers. This allowed retirees to continue their involvement in the culture while communicating and preserving its traditions.

Stories about an organization’s founders and history often reveal important aspects of the culture (Martin, Sitkin, & Boehm, 1985). Martin and Powers (1983) described how stories about Thomas Watson, former head of IBM, influenced the culture and management philosophy of the organization during its history. Tommerup (1988) analyzed stories about Howard Hughes told by Hughes Aircraft employees and determined that such stories reveal a shared portrayal of a company’s culture as it has been understood and evaluated by members over time. He concluded that stories commemorate only the most salient and deeply felt aspects of past events, their protagonists, and their present effect.

Stories as diagnostic tools. A third treatment of organizational stories in the macro-level approach is as a tool for research and diagnosis (McConkie & Boss, 1986). Mitroff and Kilmann (1976) were early proponents of studying organizational stories and myths

in order to facilitate organizational design and analysis. Dandridge et al. (1980) called for a comprehensive research program on stories and other forms of “organizational symbolism” in order to move beyond studying the “surface” structure and investigate how symbols reveal the “deep structure of organizations” (p. 82). Hummel (1990) suggests studying managers’ stories as a way of connecting with the “reality” of their lived experience.

This approach recommends that researchers and interventionists attend to organizational stories as an important analytical tool in discovering the informal culture of organizations that is often difficult to uncover and to describe (Myrsiades, 1987). Organizational storytelling has also been suggested as an important activity during organizational development efforts (Akin & Schultheiss, 1990; McConkie & Boss, 1986) and training activities (Zemke, 1990).

Summary. In the macro-level approach to studying organizational stories, research and theory have emphasized what stories do for the organization. The three categories reviewed above exemplify this approach: stories as management tools, stories as cultural tools, and stories as diagnostic tools. The macro-level approach represents the majority of published studies on organizational storytelling and has made some valuable contributions to the study of organizational communication; however, it is not a sufficient framework. Following is a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the macro-level approach to studying organizational stories.

### Strengths

The primary strength of the macro-level approach to organizational storytelling is that it has generated a considerable number of empirical studies that have added to our knowledge about organizational culture and communication. Taken at face value, the studies reviewed above have manifested a reasonably long list of the things that stories do for the organization. Even if the approach is incomplete, the scholars cited here are to be

commended for following through with the research program proposed by Dandridge et al. in 1980.

A second strength of this research is that it examines the actual communication of organizations and their members. The primary methodology for most studies in this review is to analyze stories collected at the workplace. Participants are not asked for hypothetical stories or those they predict might be told. Even when self-reported, organizational members are telling actual organizational stories. Richetto (1977) addressed this concern in an early history of organizational communication research by criticizing the limited study of actual communication behavior: “One finds measures of attitudes, measures of information flow, and measures of message content. In none of these approaches is the observation of actual communication behavior evident” (p. 342). This program of research demonstrates an improvement in that regard.

Finally, this approach makes a contribution to organizational communication because it prioritizes talk across disciplines in the study of organizations. Although none of the publications reviewed here privileges stories to the extent that Browning (1992) does, all display agreement that communication is central to organizations.

### Limitations

The first limitation of the macro-level approach is that stories and other symbolic forms are treated as an internal variable of organizations. Smircich and Calas (1987) argue that this approach does not adequately reflect the relationship between communication and culture, as if “organizations are social systems that produce distinct cultural artifacts such as rituals, legends, and ceremonies” (p. 237).

Despite the appearance of adopting an interpretive-symbolic approach to communication theory, this work implicitly incorporates mechanistic assumptions and linear models of communication. . . . Symbols are related to culture in a quasi-causal fashion. . . . Stories, legends, and myths, although symbolic in form, project a static and almost “physical” quality in the corporate culture literature. (p. 238)

Weick and Browning (1986) call this approach backward, in that it treats stories as a “symptom of culture” (p. 251).

The second limitation of this approach is that it largely ignores much of the storytelling theory and research from other communication contexts that would inform the study of organizational stories. Although many macro-level studies employ methodologies from conversation and discourse analysis, there is a lack of integration of storytelling research from family communication (e.g., Nussbaum & Bettini, 1994; Ochs et al., 1992), small group communication (e.g., Hollihan & Riley, 1987; Peterson, 1987), and cultural studies (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1993; Polanyi, 1989). One relevant example from family communication is Stone’s (1988) research, which found that family stories lay ground rules, define the family identity, point to family “monuments,” establish underground rules, and communicate family myths of explanation. Organizations are obviously different in many ways from families, groups, and cultures, but have enough systemic and cultural similarities that organizational story researchers should consider integrating theory from these other areas.

Another limitation of this approach is what Martin et al. (1983) call the “uniqueness paradox” of organizational stories. Most of the research in the macro-level approach makes uniqueness claims about the culture in which the stories are told, using organizational stories as a way to explain more fully and understand more accurately that particular culture. Yet in a study across organizations, Martin et al. (1983) found seven themes of organizational stories that were common to all of the organizations. Santino (1978) reported similar results in stories told by members of technical occupations. Theory on organizational stories has not resolved this paradox, yet uniqueness claims are still implicit in the literature.

The fourth limitation is the one that indicates most strongly the need for an integrative approach to studying organizational stories. As stated before, research in the macro-level approach so often focuses on the organization that it largely neglects the

teller, the storytelling event, and sometimes even the story. In many cases, this is evidenced as a preoccupation with management's interest in the stories (e.g., Martin, 1982; Martin & Powers, 1983; Wilkins, 1978, 1984). In other instances, studies have focused on the broader organizational use of the stories without suggesting that there is any importance to the communicative event of storytelling (e.g., Dandridge, 1985; McConkie & Boss, 1986). This treatment of communication is disjointed, in that it removes the message so far from the interaction in which it was created that it takes on properties of a static entity (Smircich & Calas, 1987). This approach is incomplete. The study of organizational storytelling becomes the study of text as an artifact rather than communication (Boje, 1991).

### Summary

The preceding section has reviewed macro-level research on organizational stories. This approach is represented by studies that treat stories as management tools, cultural tools, and diagnostic tools. Although this line of research has produced numerous valuable empirical studies, has encouraged the study of actual communication behavior in organizations, and has drawn attention to the role of communication in organizational research, it is not a sufficient framework for the study of organizational stories. The macro-level approach suffers from at least four limitations: (a) stories are treated as internal variables, (b) related theory from other contexts is ignored, (c) the uniqueness paradox remains unresolved, and (d) the organization is privileged over the storytelling. The following section describes the second predominant approach to organizational storytelling.

### Micro-Level Approach

Although the micro-level approach has produced considerably fewer studies than the macro-level, it is still a predominant approach in the organizational storytelling literature. This approach focuses more on storytelling as an interpersonal activity (Mandelbaum, 1989) and emphasizes the teller and the telling instead of the organization. Just as the

macro-level approach is represented by studies which treat stories as tools used by the organization, studies from the micro-level approach show how individuals use organizational storytelling as a coping tool and an identity tool. Again, these categories are exemplars and are not intended to be exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

#### Organizational Storytelling as a Tool

Storytelling as a coping tool. Carter (1995) interviewed employees of an oil company and found that emotional expression was not an appropriate mode of communication in the organizational culture. In order to cope with such a constraint, communicators engaged in storytelling as a way of expressing emotions vicariously by narrating organizational events associated with those emotions. Dorries (1994) reported that soup kitchen volunteers told stories about their experiences in the organization as a way of coping with boundary management in their organizational roles. Organizational members also tell stories as a way of coping with organizational changes, such as layoffs (Jody Martin,<sup>2</sup> 1988), and the stress of organizational life (Wilson, 1988).

Storytelling as an identity tool. According to the micro-level approach, people tell organizational stories as a way of managing their identity as individuals and as organizational members. Bauman (1992) observed dog traders in Canton, Texas, as they passed the time telling stories about their work. He found that they not only use storytelling as a way to portray what kind of traders they are, but also to establish their identities as good storytellers. Linde (1993) interviewed 13 participants to hear their stories of how they came to be in their professions. In telling these stories, they expressed their sense of personal identity and their identities as part of that profession.

Holt (1989) collected stories told by university employees and used discourse analysis to identify markers of action and constraint in the storytelling. Action markers identified instances when storytellers were expressing independence in relation to the organization, and constraint markers showed when the members' actions were being regulated by the organization. Holt claims that this method reveals the way storytellers

see themselves in relation to the organization. Other studies related to the identity tool show that organizational members tell stories to express beliefs about their work and their role in the organization (Ledwell-Brown & Dias, 1994) and their feelings of job fulfillment (Tommerup, 1990).

Summary. The micro-level approach emphasizes storytelling and the individual instead of the story's meanings for the organization. Two patterns found in the research in this approach are storytelling as a coping tool and storytelling as an identity tool. The following section will outline the strengths and limitations of the micro-level approach.

### Strengths

One strength of micro-level research on organizational storytelling is that many of the studies sequence the stories in conversation. The stories are not studied solely as a text to be analyzed, but as a cultural performance in a specific organizational context (Boje, 1991; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982). While this is not true of every study in this approach, most studies display a concern for the communicative act of storytelling and not just the story.

A second strength of the research, as is true with the macro-level research, is that the methodologies examine actual communication behavior. The preferred methods for story collection in this approach are the interview (e.g., Ledwell-Brown & Dias, 1994; Linde, 1993) and participant observation (e.g., Bauman, 1993; Boje, 1991).

Finally, the articles reporting these studies are rich with personal narratives of organizational experience. Although some macro-level studies print entire accounts, most print excerpts or summaries of stories or no stories at all. Studies in the micro-level approach allow the individuals to voice their own stories and add considerably to our understanding of what it means to individuals to be organizational members.

### Limitations

The first limitation of research and theory in the micro-level approach is its neglect of relevant theory on storytelling outside the discipline of communication. As in the



macro-level approach, storytelling research conducted with families, small groups, and cultures has been largely overlooked. With a few exceptions, the micro-level research also fails to integrate a fairly significant body of research from related disciplines such as philosophy (e.g., Kerby, 1991; Ricoeur, 1985), discourse analysis (e.g., Polanyi, 1989), sociolinguistics (e.g., Tannen, 1993), and sociology (e.g., Riessman, 1993).

Second, this approach is limited by its disparity. There is no evidence of a program of research that could be synthesized into a body of knowledge about organizational storytelling at the micro level. The macro-level approach is more coherent in its approach, and several strands of research can be identified (namely, from Alan Wilkins, Joanne Martin, and Mary Helen Brown) that have resulted in cumulative knowledge about organizational stories. The micro-level approach is instead growing in several different directions, using different methods and units of analysis and generating situation-specific conclusions about its participants.

Third, the micro-level approach is incomplete in that its focus narrowly emphasizes the individual and the storytelling event and says too little about the story's bearing on the organization. This narrow treatment almost makes the organizational story seem like an isolated event in organizations that serves a function for the teller, perhaps the listener, and ultimately for the researcher and the reader, but is separate from the organizational culture. Most research and theory in this framework would argue for the social construction of reality for participants in the storytelling, but the studies do not go far enough to demonstrate how the stories also create and recreate the organization and its culture (Smircich & Calas, 1987).

### Summary

The review above has presented the macro-level and micro-level approaches to studying organizational storytelling. Although both lines of research have been relatively productive, their limitations reveal that neither approach is sufficiently comprehensive for the study of organizational stories. The following section proposes an alternative

approach to organizational storytelling research and demonstrates its importance in studying stories and their functions in organizations.

### An Integrative Approach

To capture fully the significance of organizational stories to both the organization and its storytellers, an integrative approach is necessary. If Browning's (1992) theory of lists and stories is reasonable and stories are a central ingredient of organizational communication, they cannot be appropriately studied solely at the macro-level, which says little about the storyteller, or at the micro-level, which says little about the organization. An integrative approach must focus on both the organization and the storytelling, the interpersonal and the cultural, the performance and the story.

### Characteristics of an Integrative Approach

An important distinction here is that this dissertation calls for an integrative approach rather than defining the integrative approach. The reason is that there will be more than one way to study organizational stories comprehensively. In fact, integrative approaches already exist, as will be shown below. However, they are still the exception rather than the rule. Such research on organizational storytelling should be identified by the four characteristics which follow.

First, an integrative approach will use multiple research tools. A comprehensive study of organizational stories will likely include both qualitative and quantitative methods and reporting of results. Stories are usually collected through interviews, observation, or taping, but researchers should use other data collection methods to learn more about the organization, its members, and the content of the stories.

Second, the research will provide sufficient contextual information about the organization. Not only should the stories be used as descriptors of the organization, but integrative researchers will provide a context for understanding the stories. For example, a story about "beating the system" takes on a different meaning in an organization with strict policy guidelines than it does in a family business where everyone is an "owner."

Third, when the research is reported, it will include some or all of the stories. When the stories are summarized by the researcher or referred to rather than reported, the importance of the story is minimized. In many macro-level studies, the organizational effect of the stories was reported instead of the actual stories. Reporting the stories allows the reader of the text to assess their validity and subsequent analysis.

The final characteristic of integrative research will be a demonstrated connection between storytelling, communicators, and the organization. For example, this connection could be made by research which answers questions about the types of organizational members likely to tell certain kinds of stories, qualities of the organization that explain/constrain storytelling, and qualities of storytelling that explain/constrain the organization.

Some integrative storytelling research is already being conducted in organizations. The three studies below fit this framework and are presented as exemplars of an integrative approach. Two studies, though unrelated, examine stories of sexual harassment in the organization, and the third looks at police stories as organizational drama. These studies were chosen because their methods are diverse, but each report demonstrates most of the characteristics outlined above.

The first study (Clair, 1993) used taped interviews with 50 women taken from a quota sample to study stories of sexual harassment in the organization. This study differs from the other two in that the storytellers all come from different organizations. Interviewers asked several questions about the women, their work, and their organizations. Respondents also completed a questionnaire that included demographic questions and three communication scales. Clair analyzed the stories collected about harassment to determine what framing devices were used in the storytelling. By studying how these devices were used, she determined that the use of framing devices in storytelling either reinforced or challenged “the dominant ideology” of the organization (p. 131). According to this study, storytelling is one way women’s communication in the

organization can be “emancipatory” or “oppressive” (p. 135). Clair’s account is full of description about the women, their stories, their language, and their organizations.

Taylor and Conrad (1992) focused on narratives of sexual harassment from university employees. Their study is included in a special issue of the Journal of Applied Communication Research which includes 20 complete stories used in the study. Not only do they provide thorough description of the organizational context of the university, but also a broad view of sexuality in organizations in general. They discuss themes of the narratives and what it means to the women to tell the stories. Connections are established between the tellers, the storytelling, and how the organization impacted and was impacted by the stories.

The third study (Trujillo & Dionisopoulos, 1987) examined how the drama of police work is socially constructed through storytelling and other forms of talk. The method of analysis used shows how the surface level of story content reveals information about the teller and other participants in the story; the deeper level of narrative structure in police stories carries information about how the culture is enacted through the narrative form. The stories express personal and group identity for the police officers and shape the organizational “drama” of police work.

To summarize, an integrative approach to organizational storytelling research is characterized by the use of multiple methods, organizational contextualization, the inclusion of stories in the report, and a clear connection between storytelling, communicators, and the organization. The three studies described above portray important elements of this approach and demonstrate three different methods for conducting integrative research. The remaining sections of the dissertation describe a research project that adopts this approach by studying organizational stories told by members of independent living retirement centers.

### Rationale and Research Questions

One of the earliest organizational communication studies to focus on storytelling was Brown's (1985) dissertation research on the relationship between organizational socialization and the use of stories by nursing home employees. In a later publication (1990b), she described the organizational culture of the nursing home using employee stories. These studies, particularly the latter, could be described as integrative research and are seminal studies in the organizational communication literature on storytelling. However, the nursing home culture may be only partially described because the stories were collected only from employees and not residents. Perhaps very different stories would have emerged from the "rest" of the organization in these studies.

The research reported here collected organizational stories from both residents and employees of independent living retirement centers. Retirement centers were the focus of this dissertation rather than nursing homes for four reasons. First, the growing industry of independent living centers is largely an untapped resource for organizational communication study. Recent statistics show that over 33.5 million people in the United States are age 65 or older, a number that will likely grow to 69 million by 2030 (Administration on Aging, 1998). The greatest percentage of growth in the elderly population is expected in the group aged 85 and over, expected to grow by 56 percent by the year 2010. The retirement center industry is keeping pace with these increasing numbers by providing more options for senior adults who are ready to be a part of a retirement community, but do not yet require daily health care assistance. The independent living center is one component of many continuing care retirement communities which have been built in the United States since the latter 1800s. The concept began to develop further after World War II, with a large wave of building in the 1960s. According to the University of Arizona's Senior Academy (1995), the largest development occurred during the 1980s and still continues, barely keeping up with demand with about 900 continuing care retirement communities in the United States.

A second reason for choosing independent living centers for the research is that most independent living residents choose for themselves which center to live in and when to move in (California Registry, 1997), whereas a significant number of nursing home residents are dependent on a family member for those decisions. In order to compare the results of this dissertation to other organizational studies, it is important to have participants who choose the residence just as employees choose their workplace.

The third, and perhaps least important, reason is that the residents of independent living centers are generally younger and more active in organizational events than nursing home residents (California Registry, 1997), which allowed for a greater pool of respondents for interviews and questionnaire administration and provided data more comparable to employee responses. Independent living centers, by definition, are usually a complex of residences—sometimes apartments and/or cottages—sharing a common activity center and dining facility, although most centers have kitchens in individual units (Capital Senior Living, Inc., 1998). Transportation, laundry, and cleaning services are usually provided, but most communities resemble apartment complexes rather than nursing homes.

Finally, the nature of the retirement center makes it a unique organizational context for research, in that the resident is both customer and organizational member but is very different demographically from most employees that are part of the same organization. Most residents are middle- to upper-class in economic standing, as most retirement centers require a substantial entrance fee and high monthly maintenance payments for residents (California Registry, 1997). In contrast, most centers have a relatively small number of salaried professional staff but a larger number of hourly dining center, housekeeping, maintenance, and security workers. There is also a considerable age gap between the average age of residents and employees in retirement centers. A similar context for research might be the university, where students fit the customer/member role. However, the retirement center resident has usually made a commitment to remain in the

organization for the rest of his or her life or until the resident's health care needs can no longer be met by the center. This interplay of commitment to and dependence on the organization, as well as the distinct differences between organizational groups, makes the independent living center an ideal context for communication study.

Because this dissertation is characterized by an integrative approach to stories and storytelling, the following variables were examined to make the connections between the story, the storyteller, and the organization: storytelling function, organizational commitment, and social identity. The following section will discuss each variable and list the research questions.

### Storytelling Functions

As discussed in the literature review above, the following five functions of organizational storytelling have emerged from the literature of several disciplines: the expression of organizational values, proof by example, sensemaking, system maintenance, and social prescription. However, this typology has not been tested empirically in organizational research. Brown (1985) found support for three functions of storytelling in her study of nursing home employees: (a) a descriptive function, telling what life in the organization is like; (b) an energy controlling function, motivating or demotivating individuals; and (c) a system maintenance function. One limitation of this list is its focus on what the story does for the organization rather than the individual. A second limitation is its exclusion of many relevant storytelling functions suggested by numerous publications on organizational stories. Therefore, this dissertation assesses the five-function typology with the first research question:

RQ1: When retirement center residents and employees tell organizational stories, what functions do the stories serve?

In alignment with the integrative approach proposed above, this research question will help to enhance understanding of the storytelling event in organizations and what storytelling does for the teller.

Although the researcher is unaware of any other studies of storytelling with retirement center residents and employees, a limited number of studies have examined stories from different generational groups. Nussbaum and Bettini (1994) analyzed stories told by college students and their grandparents and found that the subject matter was different for the different age cohorts. In an intergenerational study not specifically focused on stories (Williams & Giles, 1994), college students and older adults both contributed narratives, which were included in a category of “satisfying” communication. Besides the obvious age difference, the researcher anticipated storytelling differences because of the different roles of residents and employees and the disparity in the amount of time spent in the organization on a daily basis. The second research question addresses the differences in storytelling functions of these different age groups, as well as different organizational groups:

RQ2: Are there differences in the functions of organizational stories told by residents and employees?

#### Organizational Commitment and Identification

A second variable considered in this dissertation is organizational commitment, defined by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) as follows:

The relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization. It can be characterized by at least three related factors: (1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values; (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. (p. 226)

Although this is the most frequently cited definition in the organizational literature, a great deal has been written about the conceptual confusion between organizational commitment and organizational identification (see Cheney, 1987; Sass & Canary, 1991). Early works on the subject (Lee, 1969, 1971) use the terms synonymously, while others (Mowday et al., 1979) include the term “identification” as part of the definition of



“commitment.” Fifteen years ago, Morrow (1983) observed over 25 concepts and measures related to this construct.

Extensive reviews of organizational commitment and identification research are available elsewhere (see Mael & Tetrick, 1992; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Reichers, 1985; Sass & Canary, 1991); therefore, this section will briefly summarize the important elements of each construct by adopting essentially the same distinctions made by Cheney and Tompkins (1987) and Sass and Canary (1991). Within this perspective, identification is seen as a symbolic and psychological association with the organization. The identification concept in the organizational behavior literature is based on a psychological perspective (Lee, 1969; Mowday et al., 1979), while the organizational communication version (Cheney, 1983, 1991) has its roots in Burke’s (1950/1969) rhetorical strategy of identification. Tompkins and Cheney (1985) have operationalized their definition of identification by modifying Simon’s (1976) original definition: “A decision maker identifies with an organization when he or she desires to choose the alternative which best promotes the perceived interests of that organization” (Tompkins & Cheney, 1983, p. 194). This approach is language-centered and focuses on “the researcher’s understanding of the actor’s subjective meanings with respect to organizational relationships” (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987, p. 1). Although the theoretical foundations of organizational commitment are rooted in identification (Sass & Canary, 1991), commitment has been most often measured quantitatively (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Cheney and Tompkins (1987) make the distinction that identification is a “process” and commitment a “product”; identification refers to the “substance” of individual-organizational relationships, and commitment refers to their “form” (p. 1). Organizational commitment is usually defined in terms of a behavioral and an attitudinal component. Attitudinal commitment has been showed to be interrelated conceptually with identification (Sass & Canary, 1991), but empirical evidence shows behavioral commitment to be apparently distinct (Morrow, 1983).

This dissertation addresses both concepts, with organizational commitment measured quantitatively and identification assessed qualitatively as a symbolic process. The research questions relating to organizational commitment investigate the relationship each of the two groups has with the retirement center organization and how that commitment is expressed.

RQ3: Do retirement center residents and employees have different levels of organizational commitment?

A previous study by Wilkins (1978) established a link between organizational commitment and storytelling. He compared stories told by employees of two companies as a measure of organizational commitment and understanding of management philosophy. Storytellers who were more positive about their organization were more likely to tell shared organizational stories rather than personal stories of their own experience. The fourth research question asks whether or not these results hold true in the retirement center context:

RQ4: Is organizational commitment associated with the telling of shared stories?

The third and fourth research questions address organizational commitment of members. Because identification with the organization is a similar process to identification with other social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), organizational identification will be assessed as part of the broader construct of social identity discussed in the following section.

### Social Identity

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains one way that individuals develop identity according to membership in salient social groups. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), individuals see their social world in terms of social categorizations that not only systematize that world, but also “provide a system of orientation for self-reference: they create and define the individual’s place in society”

(p. 40). Identification with a social group, one's "in-group," also allows for comparison with other "out-groups" and the enhancement of esteem when one's own group is positively distinguished from other groups.

Giles (1978; Turner & Giles, 1981) has demonstrated the applications of social identity theory to intergroup communication, first in studies of language in ethnic group relations (e.g., Giles & Johnson, 1981) and later in the broader application of Communication Accommodation Theory (e.g., Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). Giles' work investigates language strategies used when interactants from different social groups communicate. Recent research with Justine Coupland and Nikolas Coupland (e.g., Coupland, Coupland, & Giles, 1991) and Jake Harwood (Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995) has focused on the discourse strategies of older people as a social group, demonstrating how age identity fits within the tenets of social identity theory.

Coupland, Nussbaum, and Grossman (1993) identify six communication strategies through which an older person or another speaker might express an "elderly identity": (a) disclosure of chronological age; (b) age-related category or role reference; (c) age-identity in relation to health, decrement, and death; (d) addition of time-past perspective to current or recent-past topics; (e) self-association with the past; and (f) recognition of historical, cultural, or social change (pp. xxiii-xxiv).

A limited number of organizational studies have also applied social identity theory to intergroup behavior. Two of the studies most closely related to Tajfel's work were conducted by Brown (1978; Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade, & Williams, 1986) in industrial organizations. In the 1978 study, social identity was measured by participants' responses to a hypothetical situation about workgroups presented during a dyadic interview. In the 1986 study, the interview also included a 10-item, Likert-type scale to measure group identification. Both studies lent support to social identity theory, with participants showing strong identification with particular groups at the workplace. However, Brown et al.'s (1986) results from interview data and the group identification

measure were rather weak and inconsistent in predicting group differentiation and in explaining the reasons for the identification.

Another study by Mael (cited in Ashforth & Mael, 1989) used social identity theory to explain the identification of alumni with a university. In a more recent study, Scott (1997) measured organizational members' identification with multiple targets in a state cooperative extension service using a modified version of Cheney's Organizational Identification Questionnaire. While this dissertation provides some conclusive findings about the relationship of occupational and job tenure to group identification, it only measures identification with formalized organizational groups, such as offices and agencies. Social identity should also be assessed for social groups in which membership may be "psychologically" rather than formally defined (Turner, 1982), such as ethnicity (Giles, 1978), social status, (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and age of organizational members (Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995).

DeWine and Daniels (1993) have called for organizational communication scholars to use social identity theory to a greater extent, but few publications have been forthcoming. The study of organizational stories may be the answer to the complex question of how to assess social identity as expressed by individuals in organizations. Linde (1993) proposes that storytellers use personal stories "to claim or negotiate group membership and to demonstrate we are in fact worthy members of those groups, understanding and properly following their moral standards" (p. 3). The studies cited below demonstrate how social identity is expressed as storytellers identify with family, occupational, generational, and sociocultural groups.

Nussbaum and Bettini (1994) reported that 80% of the grandmothers in a recent study referred to family membership when asked by grandchildren to tell a story that captures the meaning of life. Grandparents may also tell stories to grandchildren to impress upon them their place in the continuity of family history (McKay, 1993). A

family's stories express what it means to be a member of that family and define the family's unique identity (Ochs & Taylor, 1992; Stone, 1988).

Storytellers also identify themselves with social groups in organizations. Santino (1978) studied occupational narratives in the railroad, airline, and telephone industries and found that workers told stories that aligned subordinates against management and engineers against the bureaucracy of the Federal Communication Commission. Linde (1993) asked participants in 13 interviews how they came to be in their chosen profession. She found that the stories of joining a professional group contained significant cues of identity. In a study of nursing home employees' stories, Brown (1985) reported that "stories served as a means for members to express their knowledge, understanding, and commitment to the organization" (p. 38). As organizational newcomers worked in the nursing home longer, they told different types of stories and demonstrated a stronger identity with organizational values.

Two studies demonstrate the social identity function in older storytellers who claim membership in a generational group. Baum (1980) reported that many older people were revitalized by sharing their oral histories, which signifies their place in history "not only individually but also as a representative of their own group" (p. 51). In the Nussbaum and Bettini (1994) study cited above, 80% of the grandparents in the sample either told their ages explicitly or alluded to their age in the story, and 20% of grandmothers contrasted life today with their lives in the past. The strategy of age-telling may be one way that storytellers identify themselves with a particular generational group (Coupland et al., 1993).

Finally, social identity may also be obtained from sociocultural groups. Hopewell (1987) conducted storytelling research in an interracial church and concluded that stories were a primary form of "self-perception" for the congregation. A study of a "Toughlove" parental support group (Hollihan & Riley, 1987) exhibited how group members used personal stories to identify with other parents of troubled teens. Van Dijk (1993) analyzed

stories told by Caucasian storytellers about minority groups which served to strengthen the identity of the storytellers as members of the dominant group. Dinner-table stories of Jewish-American and Israeli families (Blum-Kulka, 1993) exemplified social identity through storytelling in a comparative study of the two family cultures. In an even broader social category, Polanyi (1989) collected personal stories told in conversations by peers to construct an "American identity" that is communicated through storytelling.

Goodwin (1993) discovered that children also use stories to develop social identity. She conducted fieldwork for one and a half years in a West Philadelphia neighborhood, observing pre-adolescent children at play. As young girls told stories regarding the offenses of other girls who were absent, they formed alliances through their discourse and marked who was and was not included in the social group at the time.

A significant number of published studies have linked storytelling to the expression of social identity. However, few organizational communication studies have examined social identity, and none has made this specific connection with organizational storytelling. The retirement center is an especially rich context for studying social identity because of the numerous group identifications available: age groups, resident groups, employees, management, family, and social circles. Many of these centers are also associated with religious groups, which may be another important target for social identity of members. In keeping with an integrative approach to understanding stories, the expression of social identity in the language of members' stories makes the connection between the story, the teller, and the organization and its groups. Therefore, the researcher investigated organizational storytelling in independent living retirement centers to answer this research question:

RQ5: How is identification with social groups expressed in the stories of residents and employees?

Another important component of social identity theory is the use of comparisons individuals make between their own groups, or in-groups, and other groups of which they

are not members, out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This social comparison function enhances the esteem of the individual especially in situations where positive qualities of one's in-group can be distinguished from negative qualities of an out-group. In a study about the attribution of blame for HIV and AIDS in Australia (Pittam & Gallois, 1996, 1997), participants often used narratives to identify the negative behaviors of out-groups. To examine whether or not the same result will be found in stories told in the retirement center, the final research question is proposed:

RQ6: Are there differences between the organizational in-group and out-group references in stories told by employees and residents?

The following section outlines the methods used to collect data for answering the above research questions, including a description of the participants, the procedures used, the measurement of variables, and the data analysis.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODS

## Participants

After receiving approval by the university Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), participants for the research were recruited from three independent living retirement centers in north Oklahoma City: Terrace Inn,<sup>3</sup> Candlewick, and Eagleton. The three organizations were chosen because they are among the largest retirement centers in the area, are similar in size and mission, and were built around the same time (see Table 1). All three are associated with different Protestant churches, and all three offer extensive services for independent living adult residents. Two of the centers also offer continuing care with differing levels of assisted living and a health center. The third has a small wing for assisted living residents but no health center.

Table 1

Population Data for Participants' Retirement Centers

Residents in	Center		
	Terrace Inn	Candlewick	Eagleton
independent living			
Total	177	74	281
No. of males	37	13	77
No. of females	140	61	204
Average age (years)	82	85	82

Note. Information was provided by staff members at the organizations.



In previous discussions with a staff member at one of the centers, it was determined that a random sample of residents would not be appropriate. Participants needed to be volunteers who were willing and able to take part in the research procedures and communicate openly. In that this dissertation is exploratory in nature, the researcher will not be making generalizations about retirement center organizations as a whole.

With the assistance of the activities director at each residence, the researcher recruited participants from each location. The target number for each center was 15 residents and 15 employees for a total of 90. This number was chosen to allow the use of large-sample statistical tests but also to be manageable in terms of conducting group interviews at each location (discussed below). However, as a result of some participants' missing their scheduled times and some extra participants being recruited, the final total was 89: 43 residents and 46 employees. The resident total included 7 men and 36 women. This proportion is similar to the makeup of the three centers, in that their populations average about 22% males. The average age of residents who reported their age was 83.4 years ( $\bar{n} = 39$ ;  $SD = 5.2$ ), ranging from 72 to 93. Two of the retirement centers list the average age of their independent living residents as 82, and the third lists it as 85, so the participant group also seems to be similar in age to the overall population of the three centers.

The employee total included 9 male and 37 female participants. The employee groups represented a fair cross-section of staff levels, with participants from upper management, professional staff, and nonprofessional staff (see Table 2). The average age for employee participants who reported their age was 38.8 years ( $\bar{n} = 42$ ;  $SD = 13.1$ ).

The activities directors also helped in recruiting members with a variety of tenures in the organization, so that both newcomers and longer-term residents and employees were represented. The average tenure of resident participants at Terrace Inn was 3 years ( $\bar{n} = 13$ ;  $SD = 2.6$ ), 5.6 years at Candlewick ( $\bar{n} = 16$ ;  $SD = 3.1$ ), and 5.5 years at Eagleton

Table 2

Organizational Positions Represented by Employee Participants

Position	<u>n</u>	%
(N = 46)		
Nonprofessional staff	25	54.3
Professional staff	16	34.8
Management	4	8.7
Unlisted	1	2.2

(n = 12; SD = 3.1). Employee averages were 2.4 years (n = 16; SD = 2.4), 4.9 at Candlewick (n = 13; SD = 2.8), and 3.4 at Eagleton (n = 15; SD = 2.2). As reflected in these averages, Candlewick has been in operation the longest, since 1985. The other two centers opened in 1990.

All resident participants were part of the independent living communities of the retirement centers. Several of the employees, however, also work in other areas of the centers but have regular interaction and responsibilities with independent living residents. In the two centers that have large assisted living facilities, independent living residents may spend time in assisted living when recovering from illness or when needing extra health assistance. Many return to their apartments after time spent in assisted living, while others remain in assisted living indefinitely. Therefore, some employees pointed out the difficulty in focusing specifically on independent living residents during their participation in the interviews.

## Procedures

Participants who volunteered were asked to sign up for a group interview time and were instructed that the research would involve communication about their experiences in the retirement center. The group interview setting was chosen for data collection after reviewing other methods used in the literature. Other storytelling studies involving organizational members and/or older people have used various methods for collecting stories, including written recollections (Williams & Giles, 1994), grandchildren interviewing grandparents (Nussbaum & Bettini, 1994), participation in a memory improvement course (Thorsheim & Roberts, 1990), experimental design (Martin & Powers, 1983), participant observation or fieldwork (Bauman, 1992; Blum-Kulka, 1993; Dorries, 1994; Goodwin, 1993; Hollihan & Riley, 1987; Johnstone, 1993; Ochs & Taylor, 1992; Polanyi, 1989), and basic dyadic interviews with a researcher (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1981; Linde, 1993; McKay, 1993; Norton, 1989; Riessman, 1993; Stone, 1988).

The group interview has the advantages of embedding stories in a conversational setting and allowing time for participants to think of stories, rather than “putting them on the spot” in a dyadic interview. The group sessions are also more efficient, as several interviewees can meet together and be recorded at once, rather than setting up separate interviews for all participants. Linde (1993) and Riessman (1993) both argue strongly that the interview format will elicit conversational stories when interviewers use open-ended questions and provocative follow-up questions. Therefore, the group interviews facilitated with participants have both the advantages of a social gathering and a guided interview.

Participants met with the researcher in small groups to complete questionnaires and take part in a group interview. Each group was composed of either residents or employees, the researcher, and an assistant who helped with notetaking. Each group interview included between 4 and 8 participants, depending upon availability at the

scheduled time. Most resident groups had only 4 or 5 participants, with one resident group having 7. Three resident group sessions were held at each retirement center. Employees met in three separate group sessions at the first location, but time constraints required that only two sessions each were conducted with employees at the latter two locations with either 7 or 8 participants at each meeting. This number posed no problem with recording the sessions, and no differences in participation were evident between the larger groups and smaller groups.

At the beginning of each session, participants were introduced to the dissertation and asked to sign an informed consent statement (see Appendix A). They were also reassured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the results. Participant numbers were assigned with an identifier of the location; this number was written on all forms used by the individual and on a name tag to identify speakers during the interview. Before the interview began, the participants completed a questionnaire that contained demographic information (Appendix B) and a 15-item attitude scale (Appendix C, Appendix D). The interview sessions were recorded on audiotape, and notes taken during the sessions helped to identify speaker contributions.

The interviews were guided by two main questions but were relatively loosely structured. The participants were asked to tell about something that has happened at the retirement center that would help an outsider know “what life is like” there. A second question was, “If, for some reason, you had to leave [name of residence] and move somewhere else, what would you think of as the most memorable thing that has happened here?” Although the two questions are somewhat similar and could elicit similar types of stories, the important objective was that stories were told and not that specific questions were answered. The researcher tried to encourage participation from each person and followed up with secondary questions when members seemed hesitant to contribute. In one of the resident groups, an individual completed a questionnaire but did not stay for the discussion because of another appointment. An employee in one of the groups did not

participate verbally in the discussion. All other participants, however, contributed in some way to the conversations, except that one employee participant did not specifically contribute a story.

The groups were scheduled to meet for approximately 35 minutes, but groups were concluded when participation diminished. Taped group discussions averaged about 20 minutes, but ranged from 15 minutes up to an hour for an employee group that was eager to participate. Group sessions were held on site at each organization in either the library or a private conference room.

### Measurement

#### Content Analysis of Stories

After each group interview was concluded, the researcher transcribed the discussion sessions verbatim. Although this dissertation focused only on the stories embedded in the discussions, transcribing the full text allowed the stories to be interpreted in context and provided further information on references made in the stories to organizational events and participants. Because the transcription was used for a content analysis rather than a conversation analysis, no special coding scheme was used for the transcription. The discussions were printed out in a format similar to a script, with participant numbers in the left margin and dialogue printed in paragraph form. (A full transcription of the group interviews is available from the researcher upon request.)

The researcher marked and numbered the organizational stories in the text for use in the content analysis. Stories had to coincide with the definition outlined in the first section of the literature review in order to be used as data. A significant requirement was that a story be an organizational story, and not simply a story about the participant's life. Additionally, a minimum requirement for marking a story was Labov's (1972) criteria that a minimal narrative would contain an event sequence within at least two clauses, with temporal sequencing either explicit or implied. The interviews yielded 371 narratives that met the criteria.

Although this dissertation includes substantial qualitative analysis of the stories, a content analysis is appropriate in order to compare results quantitatively with other variables. According to Kaid and Wadsworth (1989), one of the advantages of using content analysis is that it combines well with other research techniques. Holsti (1969) argues that content analysis is especially appropriate in situations when, “given certain theoretical components of the data themselves, the subject’s own language is crucial to the investigation” (p. 17).

### Categories

The most critical step in the content analysis methodology is the formulation of categories (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989). The categories must be devised in order to provide answers to the research questions and ideally should be exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Krippendorff, 1980). In the present analysis, the categories for story function are those which emerged from an extensive literature review (see Appendix F, item 9). Because these functions have not yet been tested empirically, they may not be exhaustive. For this reason, coders were given the option of using the “other” category to write in any functions which were grounded in the data but not satisfactorily described by any of the five functions in the typology. It is also probable that the categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, a participant might tell a story that expresses organizational values with an explicit “moral” provided but also give some direction on how organizational members should behave (social prescription). In this instance, the story was categorized according to its predominant function in the story. Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) note that “in practice, the necessity for exhaustive or exclusive categories may not always be essential to answer a particular research question” (p. 203).

A second set of categories for the content analysis of the stories refers to groups with which participants might identify (see Appendix F, item 12). The researcher generated this category list on the basis of general knowledge about the retirement center context and participation in the group interviews. This list also allowed for an “other”

category to make the selections exhaustive. According to Tajfel (1978), a group may be any collective that “thinks” of itself as a group:

which may include a range of between one to three components: a cognitive component, in the sense of the knowledge that one belongs to a group; an evaluative one, in the sense that the notion of the group and/or of one’s membership of it may have a positive or a negative value connotation; and an emotional component in the sense that the cognitive and evaluative aspects of the group and one’s membership of it may be accompanied by emotions (such as love or hatred, like or dislike) directed towards one’s own group and towards others which stand in certain relations to it. (pp. 28-29)

The group category was also classified by in-groups and out-groups by recording whether or not the storyteller is a member of the identified group. References to groups were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral. An important distinction for this category on the codesheet is that the group reference is the unit of enumeration rather than the story. In other words, one story may have references to four different groups; in such case, all four references were recorded and coded as positive, negative, or neutral, as well as in-group or out-group.

Group identifications were coded when explicitly stated and also when referenced by the use of plural personal pronouns, such as “we,” “they,” “us,” “ours,” and so on. Sacks (1992) called these markers “membership categorization devices” (MCDs) that are used in conversation to express knowledge and inferences about social groups. Nilan (1995) examined the use of membership categorization devices in spoken and written texts to explain social identity. Burke (1950/1969) discussed the use of group references in language as part of his explanation of identification:

Names function both as terms of description and terms for action. With reference to ourselves we use terms of identification to say not only “who we are” but also “how well we’re doing.” Many terms contribute to self-enhancement, including but not restricted to the ways they place us in social hierarchies. (p. 16)

Even when one’s in-group is not referenced explicitly, the use of “we” has a “social bonding aspect and the establishment of solidarity” (Muhlhausler & Harre, 1990, p. 174).

Coders also categorized stories as an individual or collaborative effort. Because stories told in a group of colleagues often serve as a form of “joint recall” (Edwards & Middleton, 1986), many storytelling incidents in the interviews were jointly constructed by more than one participant. Those stories were coded only once for type and function, but were analyzed separately for each speaker who contributed, and coded for each social identity reference.

A final category identifies the story as personal or shared (Wilkins, 1987). A personal story is one in which the narrator is a character, while the shared story is about others and does not include the storyteller as a character. Telling a shared story allows the narrator to express cultural knowledge about the organization by telling about an event that is “organizational” rather than just “personal.” When stories were told as collaborations between more than one participant, coders in the content analysis completed separate codesheets for each storyteller in order to categorize the story as personal or shared (see codebook, Appendix F, item 7). For instance, one teller might have been a character in the story, making it a personal story for that individual, while another collaborator might not have been a character but contributed significantly to the story, making it a shared story for that participant.

#### Intercoder Agreement

Three independent coders analyzed the content of the stories to answer the research questions. One coder holds a doctorate in communication and is familiar with content analysis techniques, the second coder is a senior organizational communication student, and the researcher served as the third coder. This selection of coders meets Krippendorff's (1980) dual qualification that coders should be “familiar with the nature of the material to be recorded but also capable of handling the categories and terms of the data language reliably” (p. 72). Coders were trained in preparation for the content analysis during a 90-minute session by going over the definitions of categories provided in the codebook (see Appendix F).



During the training session, the three coders practiced by coding a sample of seven stories randomly selected from the transcripts and discussed any problems or differences in coding each category. Following the training, all three coders conducted the content analysis with a random sample of the same 30 stories (8% of the total) to provide a check on intercoder agreement before continuing to the remainder of the analysis. Using simple percentage of agreement for the calculation (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989), mean intercoder agreement was .91 across categories for the 30 stories (see Table 3). Reliability ranged from .67 on two of the group membership categories to 1.00 on five separate categories. Particularly important to the analysis was the coding for the categories of personal vs. shared stories, which was .97, and story function, which was .82. Furthermore, intercoder agreement on group references (positive, negative, neutral) was .88 and on group membership (in-group or out-group) was .94. Disagreements on the coding for these 30 stories were resolved either by majority rule (two out of three coders making the same categorization) or by the researcher's coding decision in two cases where there was no majority. Because the overall agreement and the agreement on key categories was higher than .80 (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989), coders were given some additional clarifications on key definitions and then instructed to continue the content analysis with a set of randomly assigned stories from the transcripts. Each coder completed approximately one-third of the remaining coding.

#### Organizational Commitment and Identification

Organizational commitment and its "process" component of organizational identification were assessed with two methods: a questionnaire and the analysis of organizational stories from the group interviews. Using multiple methods allows some comparison between the quantitative and qualitative data, and the results of each method should enhance understanding of the other (Allen & Brady, 1997; Tompkins & Cheney, 1983).

Table 3

Intercoder Reliabilities for Categories of Content Analysis

Category	%
1. Codesheet number	n/a
2. Story number	n/a
3. Retirement center location	100
4. Storyteller code number	100
5. Membership status	98
6. Personal or shared	97
7. Significant collaboration	97
8. Previously coded	100
9. Function of story	82
10. Time-specific or recurring	90
11. Use of social identity markers	93
12. Group references	87
Positive/negative/neutral	88
Teller's membership	94
13. Number of groups referenced	88
Total	91

Note. Reliability percentages were rounded to the nearest one-hundredth. Intercoder reliabilities are calculated as simple percentage of agreement.

### The Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in the research is the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) designed by Mowday et al. (1979). This is the most frequently used scale to measure the construct (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) and has been used widely in communication studies (e.g., Allen, 1992; Allen & Brady, 1997; Eisenberg, Monge, & Miller, 1983; Guzley, 1992). Mowday et al. (1979) reported reliability and validity for the instrument over a 9-year period with over 2500 employees from nine diverse work organizations. They found the internal consistency reliability was consistently high, with the coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) ranging from .82 to .93, with a median of .90. In a meta-analysis of over 80 studies using the scale (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), the average internal consistency reliability of studies in the sample was .882 ( $SD = .038$ ). Item analysis results showed that each item on the scale has a positive correlation with the total OCQ score, with the range of average correlations from .36 to .72 and a median correlation of .64 (Mowday et al., 1979). Factor analyses generally resulted in a single-factor solution, supporting the conclusion that the items are measuring a single common underlying construct. Participants in the study were retested at intervals up to a 4-month period, and test-retest reliabilities ranged from  $r = .53$  up to  $r = .75$ . Assessment of the OCQ instrument also provides evidence of convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity, particularly when compared with other similar attitude measures. Barge and Schlueter (1988) compared four instruments designed to measure commitment and/or identification and found the OCQ to be the most tested and developed.

Two versions of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire were administered to participants in the retirement center groups. Employees answered questions on the

scale in its original form (Appendix C), with the organization's name inserted in most scale items. Residents used the OCQ (Appendix D) with the wording of questions 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 15 modified to reflect "tenants" rather than "employees," and "living" rather than "working" at the organization. The resident OCQ was also printed in larger type for readability by older participants and read aloud during most resident group sessions to accommodate those with some degree of vision impairment.

Responses to each of the 15 items are measured on a 5-point scale with scale point anchors labeled as follows: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither disagree nor agree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Mowday et al.'s (1979) original instrument includes a 7-point scale, but other studies (e.g., Guzley, 1992) have modified the scale to include only five choices and still reported reliable results. Items 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 15 are "reverse" items which are negatively phrased to avoid a response bias; these items are reverse-scored. To calculate a participant's OCQ score, results of scale items are summed and divided by 15 for a summary indicator of commitment, ranging from 1 to 5.

#### Story Analysis

A second method to assess organizational commitment and identification was the analysis of stories told in the interviews. Wilkins (1978) found that in organizations with highly committed members, employees told more stories, in general, and more organizationally favorable stories than in organizations with lower commitment. Cheney and Tompkins (1987) explain that identification is commonly expressed through language: "In both 'idiosyncratic' and 'common' narratives we gain greater understanding of identification as a process and a product—how it 'tells its own story' and how it is manifested in the form of concrete decisions, behaviors, commitments" (p. 6). Larkey and

Morrill (1995) suggest a research approach that uses multiple methods and views organizational commitment as “communication processes which are integrally tied to the creation of organizational cultures” (p. 194) and involve “identification via symbolic processes” with multiple groups in the organization. The organizational story is one of those processes.

In the coding for content analysis, stories were categorized as “positive,” “neutral,” or “negative” in regard to group identification. To assess organizational identification, only those stories which referenced the organization or an organizational group as a target were used. Those nine categories were as follows: retirement center–general, residents–general, independent living residents, assisted living residents, employees–general, employees–nonprofessional, employees–professional staff, management, and owners/controllers. Organizational commitment and identification were also assessed by the number of shared stories told.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis includes both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Results from each research question are elaborated in the following section, but this summary restates each question and the data analysis procedures used to answer it.

Research question one asks what storytelling functions are present in the organizational stories of retirement center residents and employees. The results from the coding procedure in the content analysis yielded a frequency count and percentages for each of the five functions, as well as the “other” and “cannot be determined” categories.

The second research question addresses differences between the storytelling functions of residents’ and employees’ stories. Again, using the coding for story function,

the results were cross-tabulated for a potential 2 x 7 contingency table (membership status by storytelling function). A chi-square test of independence was used to determine whether a significant relationship was found between membership status and storytelling functions.

Research question three asks if residents and employees express different levels of organizational commitment. A two-tailed t-test was used to determine if mean scores of the two groups on the OCQ differed significantly.

The analysis for the fourth research question also involves the use of scores on the OCQ. In order to find out whether an individual's organizational commitment was correlated with the number of shared stories told, a linear regression was calculated using the OCQ score and the number of shared stories coded for each participant in the content analysis. The Pearson product-moment correlation and probability statistic are reported.

A qualitative analysis is utilized for research question five, which asks how identification with social groups is expressed in the stories of residents and employees. Although frequency counts and percentages are reported from the content analysis, the primary analysis is a description of membership categorization devices used to reference participants' in-groups and out-groups.

Finally, the sixth research question addresses differences between the organizational in-group and out-group references in residents' and employees' stories. The coding used in question five provides the data for this analysis, although the only group references tabulated are those involving the organization. A cross-tabulation of membership status (resident or employee) by group reference types (positive in-group, positive out-group, neutral in-group, neutral out-group, negative in-group, negative out-group) resulted in a

2 x 6 contingency table. A chi-square test was used to assess whether membership status was significantly associated with the use of organizational group references.

## CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Data collected from the questionnaires and group interviews were analyzed with both quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to answer the six research questions. Eighty-nine participants completed the questionnaires, but only 88 participated in the group interviews, and 87 participants contributed to the 371 stories that met the minimal criteria for inclusion in the content analysis. Residents told 157 (42%) of the stories, and employees told 214 (58%). When counting storytelling incidents by the predominant storyteller only (not including collaborations), the mean number of stories per resident was 3.7 ( $n = 42$ ;  $SD = 2.9$ ), ranging from 0 to 11. The mean number of stories per employee was 4.8 ( $n = 45$ ;  $SD = 4.5$ ), ranging from 0 to 18. A t-test revealed no significant difference in mean number of predominant stories per participant between the two groups ( $p = .219$ ). When counting storytelling collaborations (which includes the number above), residents averaged 5.5 per storyteller ( $n = 42$ ;  $SD = 3.1$ ), ranging from 1 to 13. Employees averaged 7.2 collaborations per speaker ( $n = 46$ ;  $SD = 6.7$ ), ranging from 0 to 28. Again, no significant difference was found between the means for collaborations per participant in the resident and employee groups ( $p = .124$ ).

The following section reports the results of the data analyses and provides examples of stories from the group interviews where appropriate. While some excerpts from the narratives are lengthy, the integrative approach advocated in this dissertation requires the inclusion of organizational stories, not just the counting and classifying. The application of social identity theory also necessitates looking at the language of communicators; therefore, participants' own words are provided as much as possible.

## Storytelling Functions

Research Question One

The first research question asks what functions of storytelling are found in residents' and employees' organizational stories. This question was answered from categorizations made by coders in the content analysis. Table 4 shows frequency counts and percentages



Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages for Storytelling Functions

Storytelling function	<u>n</u>	%
(N = 371)		
Value expression	84	22.6
Proof by example	117	31.5
Sensemaking	77	20.8
System maintenance	59	15.9
Social prescription	30	8.1
Other/unknown	4	1.1

for the five functions described in the literature review above. Three story functions were coded as “unknown,” and one story function was coded as “other” by a coder who described “simple humor” as the storytelling function. The most frequently observed storytelling function was “proof by example,” which accounted for 31.5% (n = 117) of stories. The “social prescription” function was apparent in only 8.1% (n = 30) of stories.

Because the sample of participants was not selected randomly, no generalizations will be made about the population of retirement center residents. However, the descriptive statistics resulting from this dissertation seem to validate the proposed typology of storytelling functions. All but four stories fit into these categories according to the definitions provided to the coders from the literature, and intercoder agreement on storytelling function was .82, an acceptable level for content analysis procedures (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989). The stories below demonstrate each storytelling function with examples from the interview transcripts.

### Value Expression

The first function is value expression, which accounted for 22.6% ( $n = 84$ ) of stories collected. Value expression stories often express a shared value of organizational members (Brown, 1990a; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; McConkie, 1980; Wilkins, 1983) and recreate that value for listeners by “framing organizational activities in terms of organizational values” (Brown, 1990a, p. 165). The following story was told in an interview with employees about one of the residents:

1. E1: And we’ve had some humorous things that have happened since we have . . .
2. Was it Gene Lewis?<sup>3</sup> Was that his name? The police chief’s . . .
3. E2: Lawless.
4. E1: Lawless. He became our elevator man one time. He was suffering from
5. dementia, unfortunately, but um, people treated it okay, and they just sort of
6. took it in stride. And he decided he needed a job, and uh, he couldn’t find what
7. he could do, and he decided he’s gonna run the elevator. Do you remember
8. when he did that?
9. E4: No, that musta been while I was gone. That’s great.
10. E1: Well, he ran the elevator. And he’d get on, he’d get dressed, you know, ‘cause
11. he was always dressed okay, fine, and everything, and he, he’s put cowboy
12. boots and stuff, and he’d, he’d be in the elevator, and people’d get in the
13. elevator and he’d go, “Where are you going?” And they’d go, “I, I want to go
14. to one” or whatever, and he’d push the buttons, and he wouldn’t let anyone
15. touch the buttons, and then, sometimes he wouldn’t let them go where they
16. wanted to go. He’d go, “No, everybody’s getting out on the second floor
17. today.” [laughs] And, and the women came down, they go, “He made us walk
18. down stairs because he wouldn’t let us stay on the elevator.”
19. E4: Well, there’s another elevator on the other end, they could’ve just gone to it.
20. E1: Right, but I think it
21. E2: You know, I think a lot of people don’t realize that.
22. E1: Yeah, you’re right, but I think that people were so tolerant of him, they still got
23. on the elevator, even though he, they knew he was gonna be there, you know.
24. E4: You have a good point. You have a good point, you know. I think overall most
25. people are tolerant of other people’s problems, too. There but by the grace of
26. God could go you or I or one of them, you know.

The value of “tolerance” is expressed in lines 5 and 6, that people took the behavior “in stride,” and again in lines 22 and 25. While this story might be viewed as just a humorous

anecdote on the surface, the function it serves is to express an organizational value shared by both residents and employees.

A resident's story also demonstrates the value expression function:

1. R1: Well, it seems to me that the people that choose Terrace Inn, um, all seem to,
2. and the present residents, all seem to have a Christian background, and it's,
3. makes for nice, nice atmosphere here, as [another resident] said, everyone
4. seems to care for everyone around here. And my husband passed away since we
5. lived here also, about seven months ago, and my, the people are so caring and
6. supportive, and uh, it's, it's just a comfortable place to live, and as I said, my
7. son, who I just returned from visiting suggested that I might like to move back
8. out to Albuquerque, and I went to look at a new place. It's beautiful, and it's
9. kind of plush, but it didn't fit me [laughs]. It didn't fit me at all, and I couldn't
10. think of starting over and making new friends.

This storyteller expresses several organizational values in this narrative. She notes that the Christian background of residents is important in line 2, describes the organization as caring and supportive in lines 4 through 6, and stresses the value of "comfortable" over "plush" in lines 6 and 9.

#### Proof by Example

The next category is the storytelling function of proof by example, which was the most frequently used type (31.5%;  $n = 117$ ). In this type of story, an assertion is often followed by "proof" that such an event could take place in the organizational context.

This story was told by employees about residents:

1. E1: Sometime the older residents drive, and sometime they shouldn't drive, stuff
2. like that. Remember Jim Murray?
3. E2: That hit a water hydrant?
4. E1: Uh huh, remember when he ran into 7-11? Ran in the store, he crashed in the
5. store.

This storyteller confirms the assertion that older residents should not drive by offering "proof" of one resident's accidents. Several stories told by employees fit this category, using proof by example stories to show that residents often forget things, treat the staff

poorly, or suffer physical and mental decline. Residents also told proof by example stories to show that older people are often forgetful or absent-minded, the staff is responsive and caring, and that employee turnover is difficult for residents. As noted above, this function was demonstrated in more stories than any of the other four storytelling functions.

### Sensemaking

Stories with the sensemaking function accounted for 20.8% ( $n = 77$ ) of narratives from the interviews. This type of story helps the teller “make sense of an equivocal situation” (Boje, 1991, p. 106) and sequence events that may be otherwise chaotic (Norton, 1989). Many of the sensemaking stories told by residents were about moving in to the retirement center. The following story by a resident was categorized as having a sensemaking function:

1. R1: It's two years first of August. So, I came from Nebraska. Knew nothing about
2. the place. Had a son living here, and he had looked into several similar places
3. like this, and he chose one other, and of course, I came back and had
4. opportunity to visit the various places, and the one he chose I didn't care for as
5. much. And when I saw this one, I said, well, I thought this was it. And I guess I
6. would be considered, maybe I'm more of a timid sort. It was a little hard for
7. me, leaving my own home, going this far, but I was amazed at how, how well I
8. was accepted, and everyone, seemed to me, just put out every effort to make
9. me feel at home, and it wasn't long until I felt that I was really in my home. I
10. really appreciated it.

Sensemaking stories were also frequently told by both residents and employees to describe medical emergencies or the death of loved ones.

### System Maintenance

The fourth storytelling function evident from the interviews was the system maintenance function, apparent in 15.9% ( $n = 59$ ) of the stories. These are stories that serve to legitimate management philosophy, customs, or organizationally-sanctioned events. Many system maintenance stories were told about special occasions in the

retirement centers. Others reiterated organizational policies, such as the following story told by an employee:

1. E1: There are several residents here who will take dishes back to their apartments,
2. and that's one thing that [the manager] does every now and then, whenever he
3. sees 'em going, like, to the grocery store or something like that, he'll go on a
4. dish hunt and come back with a tray full of juice glasses, or you know,
5. something out of their apartments. And I asked him, I said, "Well, what do they
6. say to you when they come back and all their dishes are gone?" Says, "Well,
7. nothing, 'cause they're not theirs."

The function of this story is apparently to confirm the organizational policy that residents should not remove dishes from the dining room and to legitimate the manager's role in taking the dishes back from resident's apartments.

### Social Prescription

The final storytelling function is social prescription, which appeared in 30 of the stories, or 8.1%. A social prescription story offers advice or a "blueprint" for how other organizational members or the organization itself should act. A professional staff member is the predominant storyteller in the following narrative:

1. E1: I had someone recently start, and she asked me a question after I had hired her
2. that really shocked me. She said, "What will my typical day be like?" And I
3. went
4. E2: What's typical? What's that word?
5. E1: [laughs] And I, I, I was so taken aback by that question, and it frightened me
6. actually, that somebody really thought that they were gonna come in here and
7. that they were gonna have this typical day every day.
8. E3: Daily routine
9. E1: And it's not like that. And you have to be able to, it, to work, I think, in this
10. environment here at, at Candlewick specifically, you have to have the type of
2. personality where you can shift gears.
12. E2: Right
13. E1: You have to be able to improvise. I know [the assistant dining room director]
14. has to do it all the time. You're supposed to make reservations, and 20 extra
15. people show up. Okay, with a smile on your face, you've gotta pretend like this
16. is not, um, any big deal, and you've gotta shuffle with, uh, a big old grin on
17. your face, you know. Uh, I have an entertainer not show up. [The assistant
18. activities director]'s gotta get up and dance and pretend like, you know, "This
19. is what we were gonna do, isn't everybody having a good time?"
20. E4: And isn't it fun?

The storytellers in this interview collaborate to provide advice on “getting along” in their work environment. Other social prescription stories were told to offer advice about dealing with specific residents and their problems, how to handle the dilemmas of old age, and how to prepare for a medical emergency in one’s apartment.

### Research Question Two

The second research question asks if differences exist between the functions of organizational stories told by residents versus employees. The coding for the first research question on storytelling functions was separated into two groups for residents’ and employees’ stories. As noted above, coders were unable to assign a function to only three stories, and one coder listed “simple humor” in the “other” category on one story. For the frequency count and cross-tabulation, the categories of “cannot be determined” and “other” were combined. However, all four of the stories in that categories were employee stories, leaving a cell in the contingency table with an observed frequency of 0. For the statistical test, the four stories that did not fit the five categories were excluded in order to meet cell count requirements for the chi-square test of independence (Agresti & Finlay, 1986), resulting in 367 stories in the analysis. The chi-square test revealed that the relationship between membership status (resident or employee) and storytelling functions was significant ( $\chi^2 = 26.784$ , d.f. = 4,  $p < .001$ ; see Table 5).

The differences in storytelling function can be seen by looking at the proportion of stories each group told in the five categories. Employees told stories classified as “proof by example” more often than residents did (40.2% of employee stories, compared to 19.7% for residents). In fact, proof by example stories accounted for the largest percentage of employee stories. The largest percentage of resident stories (29.9%) fell

Table 5

Frequencies of Storytelling Functions by Membership Status

Storytelling function	Residents		Employees	
	<u>n</u>	%	<u>n</u>	%
	(N = 157)		(N = 214)	
Value expression	36	22.9	48	22.4
Proof by example	31	19.7	86	40.2
Sensemaking	47	29.9	30	14.0
System maintenance	32	20.4	27	12.6
Social prescription	11	7.0	19	8.9
Other/unknown <sup>a</sup>	0	--	4	1.9

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth.

<sup>a</sup>The “other/unknown” category was excluded from the chi-square test of independence ( $\chi^2 = 26.784$ , d.f. = 4,  $p < .001$ ).

into the “sensemaking” category, while only 14.0% of employee stories were coded as having a sensemaking function. Finally, the “system maintenance” category had different proportions of each group’s stories, with 20.4% of resident stories and 12.6% of employee stories.

## Organizational Commitment

### Research Question Three

The third research question asked if differences exist between the levels of organizational commitment as expressed by residents and employees on the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). The overall mean score for 89 participants was 4.06 ( $SD = .494$ ; a score of 5.00 indicates the highest level of commitment). A comparison of the two groups' mean scores using a two-tailed test revealed no significant difference ( $p = .107$ ; see Table 6). The mean OCQ score for employee participants was 4.13 ( $n = 46$ ;  $SD = .577$ ), and the mean score for residents was 3.96 ( $n = 43$ ;  $SD = .372$ ). Employee scores ranged from 2.60 to 5.00 (two participants scored a "perfect" 5.00), and resident scores ranged from 3.27 to 4.73. Further analyses of mean scores also showed no significant difference between resident and employee groups at individual retirement centers.

### Research Question Four

The results of the OCQ were also used for research question four to measure association of organizational commitment with the telling of shared stories. As part of the content analysis, stories were coded as "personal" if the storyteller was apparently a character in the story, or "shared" if the storyteller was not a participant in the story being told (see Appendix F, item 6). The unit of analysis for this category was a story collaboration, rather than just a story. For example, the following story was told by several employees who collaborated to construct the event:

1. E1: Well, the one that got me is the one, the lady that came through there and told
2. [E3] that she looked like her [laughs], looked like her
3. E2: Looked like who?
4. E1: Her, her dress.
5. E3: Didn't like my dress.
6. E4: Didn't like your dress.
7. E3: Oh, didn't like my dress. One day, yes, a lady from [independent living] was
8. staying in [assisted living], and she told [laughs], and she was say-, did you
9. hear her say it, too?
10. E2: Yes.



Table 6

Mean Scores on the OCQ for Resident and Employee Groups

Group	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
All participants	89	4.06	.494
Residents	43	3.96	.372
Employees	46	4.13	.577
Separate organizations			
Terrace Inn	30	3.98	.491
Residents	14	3.88	.353
Employees	16	4.08	.582
Candlewick	30	4.05	.526
Residents	16	3.93	.381
Employees	14	4.20	.638
Eagleton	29	4.11	.470
Residents	13	4.10	.372
Employee	16	4.13	.137

Note. Two-tailed t-tests conducted for comparison of residents' and employees' mean scores. All results were nonsignificant. Overall,  $p = .107$ ; Terrace Inn,  $p = .274$ ; Candlewick,  $p = .165$ ; Eagleton,  $p = .860$ .

11. E3: She was really upset. She said, "Why did you wear that dress to work?" You
3. know, or something like that. "I really, I don't like that dress. It's really tacky."
13. E2: Yeah.
14. E3: "Well, that's a tacky little dress." You know, I said, "Well, I won't wear it any
15. more." And I'm thinking, "Well, believe me!"
16. E1: She told me. "She looked like she come from the farm."
17. E2: She said. she said. "Don't wear it no more."
18. E3: "Don't wear it any more."
19. E2: "I don't like it. It's ugly."
20. E3: She said, "You know what you need to do? You need to go home and cook and
21. clean in that dress, but don't leave the house with it on." "Okay." And I haven't
22. worn that dress to work any more.

Although the story is about Speaker 3, others know the story and add to it as it is constructed. It is personal to one storyteller, but it has apparently become an organizationally shared story. This example shows how story collaborations are counted rather than just number of stories told. The above story was coded for Speakers 1, 2, and 3 (Speaker 4 did not significantly collaborate on this narrative).

As a result of the content analysis, each participant had a frequency count for the number of shared story collaborations. The mean number of shared story collaborations per resident was 2 ( $n = 42$ ;  $SD = 1.6$ ), ranging from 0 to 6. For employees, the mean was 4 ( $n = 45$ ;  $SD = 4.2$ ), ranging from 0 to 14. A two-tailed test revealed a significant difference between the two groups ( $p < .005$ ).

No significant relationship was found between participants' OCQ score and the number of shared story collaborations. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r = -.014$ ) revealed a weak, inverse relationship, but no statistical significance ( $p = .898$ ). Another variable was computed as a ratio of shared story collaborations to total story collaborations by a participant. This variable was intended to account for individuals' telling more shared than personal stories, not simply a large number of

stories. However, no significant association was found between the shared story ratio and OCQ score ( $r = -.038$ ;  $p = .730$ ).

### Identification with Social Groups

#### Research Question Five

The fifth research question addressed how identification with social groups is expressed in storytelling. In the content analysis, coders categorized all group references according to the group identified, the valence of the story, and the membership status of the narrator (see Appendix E). A group was counted once per story per speaker. Therefore, if a storyteller mentioned “residents” as a group several times within one story, it was only counted once for that speaker. However, if another speaker collaborated on the story and used the reference again, “residents” was coded again for the next speaker. This allowed coding for valence and group membership for separate speakers.

This coding scheme essentially resulted in six types of group references: positive in-group, positive out-group, neutral in-group, neutral out-group, negative in-group, and negative out-group. (Only one reference was coded as membership in group “unknown” and was subsequently included as an out-group reference.) These reference types applied to 21 different social identity targets named on the codesheet, as well as the “unknown” and “other” categories. Because of the complexity of this categorization, the exploratory nature of the research, and the importance of the stories themselves, the analysis for this research question was primarily qualitative, but this section will also summarize the main group categorizations made by storytellers. Tables 7 and 8 report frequency counts and percentages. Following the group summaries, the analysis will examine the expression of organizational identification in the stories and its relationship to organizational

Table 7

Frequencies of Group References in Residents' Story Collaborations

	Type of reference			Total ( <u>N</u> = 362)	
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	<u>n</u>	%
In-group references					
Residents – general	28	42	1	71	19.6
Retirement center – general	38	20	2	60	16.6
Family	5	9	3	17	4.7
Older people	4	8	2	14	3.9
Friends	5	9	0	14	3.9
Independent living	2	4	0	6	1.7
Church/religious group	2	1	0	3	0.8
New residents	1	2	0	3	0.8
Resident committees	2	1	0	3	0.8
Other groups <sup>a</sup>	1	4	0	5	1.4
Total in-group references	88	100	8	196	54.1

Table 7 continued

	Type of reference			Total ( <u>N</u> = 362)	
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	<u>n</u>	%
Out-group references					
Management	2	9	9	20	5.5
Employees – general	11	4	3	18	5.0
Professional staff	10	2	2	14	3.9
Nonprofessional staff	8	3	1	12	3.3
Ill/disabled people	0	7	4	11	3.0
Entertainment groups	8	1	1	10	2.8
Owners/controllers	1	2	5	8	2.2
Assisted living	3	2	2	7	1.9
Family	0	6	1	7	1.9
Local businesses	0	6	1	7	1.9
Church/religious group	3	3	0	6	1.7
Hired people (not of ret. ctr.)	1	3	2	6	1.7
Men – general	0	6	0	6	1.7
New residents	2	2	2	6	1.7
Nursing home	0	2	4	6	1.7
Other retirement center	1	2	2	5	1.4

Table 7 continued

	Type of reference			Total (N = 362)	
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	<u>n</u>	%
Ethnic group	2	1	1	4	1.1
Prospective residents	1	3	0	4	1.1
Nonmembers/outsideers	0	1	1	2	0.6
Younger people	0	0	2	2	0.6
Other groups <sup>a</sup>	1	4	0	5	1.4
Total out-group references	54	69	43	166	45.9

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth.

<sup>a</sup>Groups that were referenced only one time were combined into the "Other groups" category for this table.

Table 8

Frequencies of Group References in Employees' Story Collaborations

	Type of reference			Total ( <u>N</u> = 360)	
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	<u>n</u>	%
In-group references					
Employees – general	18	33	0	51	14.2
Retirement center – general	15	23	0	38	10.6
Professional staff	10	15	0	25	6.9
Nonprofessional staff	2	12	1	15	4.2
Women – general	0	9	1	10	2.8
Other groups <sup>a</sup>	1	3	0	4	1.2
Total in-group references	46	95	2	143	39.7
Out-group references					
Residents – general	28	47	25	100	27.8
Assisted living	5	6	14	25	6.9
Family	1	8	2	11	3.1
Older people	2	1	6	9	2.5
Ill/disabled people	0	4	4	8	2.2
Nonprofessional staff	2	5	0	7	1.9
Independent living	0	4	2	6	1.7

Table 8 continued

	Type of reference			Total ( <u>N</u> = 360)	
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	<u>n</u>	%
Local businesses	2	3	1	6	1.7
Medical professionals	1	4	1	6	1.7
Management	1	4	0	5	1.4
Nursing home	0	2	3	5	1.4
Prospective residents	0	5	0	5	1.4
Younger people	0	1	3	4	1.1
Church/religious group	0	3	0	3	0.8
Friends	1	2	0	3	0.8
Professional staff	0	3	0	3	0.8
Law enforcement	0	2	0	2	0.6
Other groups <sup>a</sup>	1	6	2	9	2.5
Total out-group references	44	110	63	217	60.3

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth.

<sup>a</sup>Groups that were referenced only one time were combined into the "Other groups" category for this table.



commitment. Next, the focus will turn to the use of membership categorization devices to reference in-groups and out-groups. Examples of group identification in stories are provided for each analysis to provide connections between the language of the storyteller and social identification processes.

### Summary of Frequent Group References

The content analysis resulted in 722 group references made by 87 speakers in 562 story collaborations. Resident storytellers made 362 group references ( $M = 8.6$  references per participant;  $SD = 6.6$ ), and employees made 360 ( $M = 8.0$ ;  $SD = 7.5$ ). No significant difference was found in mean number of references per storyteller between the resident and employee groups ( $p = .742$ ).

The group that was mentioned most frequently across both participant groups was “residents – general,” which accounted for 23.7% ( $n = 171$ ) of all group references. Residents made 71 references to their own group, 28 of which were positive, 42 neutral, and 1 negative. Employees made 28 positive references to the resident group, 47 neutral, and 25 negative.

Employee groups were the second group mentioned most frequently. Employees used this category 107 times, including 33 positive references, 73 neutral, and 1 negative. Most employee references were about one’s own work group, although 15 references were made by employees about an employee out-group. Residents made 64 references to these groups, including 31 positive references, 18 neutral, and 15 negative.

The third group referenced most often was the retirement center organization. Residents made reference to their own retirement center a total of 60 times in story collaborations, with 38 positive references, 20 neutral references, and 2 negative.

Employees referenced the organization 38 times, including 15 positive, 23 neutral, and no negative references.

The following sections detail more of the qualitative analyses of these main group references, and Tables 7 and 8 show the frequencies for all group references. In addition, research question six examines differences in residents' and employees' organizational group identifications. However, it is worth noting here some of the other frequently named groups in the story collaborations. These references help in understanding the connections a retirement center resident or employee makes to social groups.

Residents mentioned family groups in 24 collaborations, with 3 negative references about one's own family and one negative reference about other residents' families who may be neglectful. Other frequent references by residents were to older people as a group (14 references) and to ill or disabled people (12 references).

Employees made 25 references to assisted living residents (5 positive, 6 neutral, 14 negative). Although the researcher gave instructions in each interview about focusing on independent living residents, employees explained that their daily work often involves residents from different areas, and some residents move from one area to another and back again (as described above). Employee storytellers also referenced family groups frequently, mentioning residents' families 11 times and their own families 1 time.

#### Organizational Commitment and Identification

Although organizational commitment of participants was assessed with the OCQ, organizational identification was examined through their stories. One way to show the relationship between the "product" of organizational commitment and the "process" of identification (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987) is to align OCQ scores with excerpts from the

narratives. Cheney's (1983; Tompkins & Cheney, 1983) work on account analysis has used this reporting technique to demonstrate how participants with various mean scores on his organizational identification scale express their extent of organizational identification when talking about decision making.

To accomplish this, OCQ scores for the participant group were ranked in ascending order and divided by quartiles. Representative narratives from participants in the top and bottom quartiles show how different levels of organizational identification are expressed. The first narrative is from a member of management who scored a 5.00 on the OCQ, the highest score possible. This excerpt follows a story she told about an activity involving both residents and employees:

1. E1: It's almost like you shouldn't be having this much fun when you're working. . .
2. It's just that once a month, . . . and uh, and it's great interaction with the
3. residents, and I think that's really, really what it's all about, too, is that we all
4. have, yes, we all have our job descriptions, but it goes much further beyond
5. that. Because if it weren't for the people that we serve, um, none of us would
6. be here, doing, carrying out those, those, uh, job descriptions, but uh, it is, it's,
7. it's like one big family. And we all have, belong to a great team of, of
8. associates, uh, directed, so to speak, by a, a great leader, our executive director.
9. But uh, you know, it's the residents and the interaction and, and what they give
10. back to us, which is, you know, that's, that's really, it's what it's all about, it's,
11. they're very special people. We have been invited into their home, and um,
12. we're here to serve them in any capacity that we can.

In an excerpt from another story about employees' disagreeing with each other but then apologizing and moving on, the same employee sums up why she feels so strongly about the organization:

13. I think if you can do, if you can do that, you've got, you've got it all because
14. you're gonna spend the majority of your life at your job, and I think if you can
15. enjoy coming to your job and enjoy the people that you work with and the
16. people that you serve, then you, you've got, got a good place.

One of the notable aspects of both excerpts is that the employee expresses identification not only with management (line 8) or the employee group (line 15 and most of the personal plural pronouns), but mentions the organization as a whole (lines 7 and 16) and the residents that she serves (lines 5, 9, 11, and 16).

Two of the residents in the top quartile also expressed their identification with the organization through narratives. The highest OCQ score for a resident was 4.73, which was scored by a female participant who told how her husband had died two years after they moved in to the retirement center. She speaks about being thankful for “caring people” so close around her and also describes her feelings about the organization:

1. R1: Well, it's uh, it's a place where, of security, first of all because we know God is
2. always with us. We never have to be alone. Then there are neighbors and our
3. friends, and it doesn't make any difference where you live, what kind of
4. apartment you have, how much money you have, what church you belong to, or
5. anything. We are just one family, and that is the feeling here.

A resident with an OCQ score of 4.67 told a story about when she moved in and concluded, “It's the best decision I ever made, and I would broadcast that far and wide.” She later said twice that she “loves” the place and referred to it as “family” two times as well.

To demonstrate the other end of the scale, the lowest OCQ score of 2.60 was from an employee who contributed to a total of 15 stories. This employee was rich with cultural knowledge about the organization, in that 14 of the stories were shared stories, rather than personal stories in which she was a character. However, most of the stories in which she collaborated were about negative resident behavior, such as slapping employees, cursing at employees or spouses, and accidents that involved residents. The only in-group references made by this participant were neutral: an organizational reference, “We did

have a resident that died in a car accident”; and a reference to her work group in telling about a practical joke they played on another employee.

Another employee with a relatively low score (2.67) contributed to 6 stories and made several in-group references to the organization and to the employee group and several positive out-group references about residents. However, the participant worked in accounting and may not have had as much personal interaction with residents as some other employees interviewed. In the introduction to a story about an organizational recreational activity, she stated: “It’s fun to see the interaction between employees and residents, but you don’t really get to see a whole lot of that. . . . Some residents, you know, some employees do, but there’s others that don’t.”

Another employee with a score in the lowest quartile (2.73) contributed to 6 shared stories but made no references at all to the organization and two neutral in-group references to his work group. He told a story about repeatedly helping a female resident every time she asked for help, only to find out from other employees that the resident did not really need help but was always asking. In another story, he told about a resident who asked how long he had been working there, because the resident did not recall seeing him there before. After the employee responded that he had worked there about two years, the resident said, “This is my first time ever seeing you. I don’t think, I don’t think they even know that you work here.” The employee also told a story about removing furniture from a resident’s apartment in order to clean the floor, only to have the resident return to the apartment and exclaim, “Help! Help! This Black man is stealing my TV!”

The lowest resident OCQ score was 3.27. This resident did not contribute much in the group interview and collaborated on only 3 stories. Two of his comments indicated

that he does not feel closely connected to the organization. When other residents were discussing a retirement center policy about admitting disabled residents, the participant stated, "I don't know what the policy is. Nobody ever told me." Another time, residents were talking about the center's assistant director, and the speaker said, "I don't know what his position is. Really, nobody ever explained it to me." When the researcher confirmed to another participant that she could contribute either positive or negative recollections, this resident made the comment: "For me, it's good. I have to have a place to live. It's bad because I don't have things the way I want 'em."

A final comment that he made was said "under his breath" as a joke but is worth noting here. Another speaker complemented the center's transportation service: "They'll take you to the doctor, they'll take you shopping, to the malls, you know, and everything." To that, he responded, "They'll take you, alright!"

To summarize, the higher OCQ scores typically came from participants with strong bonds to the organization and its members, not only their own individual groups but the retirement center as a whole. Lower scores came from participants who were more likely to tell neutral or negative stories and made fewer positive references to the organization as a whole.

#### Membership Categorization Devices

One of the methods used by coders to classify group references was the participants' use of membership categorization devices, or MCDs (Sacks, 1992). An MCD is either an explicit reference to a social group or the more subtle uses of plural personal pronouns in conversation to express knowledge and inferences about social groups. These social identity markers were found to be prevalent in the narratives of both residents and

employees, and the following section provides a qualitative analysis of four of the major categories of social identity markers observed: groups within the organization, groups with different health care levels, generational groups, and the organization as a whole. This analysis will provide representative story excerpts from the interviews with commentary about the MCDs apparent in the discourse. However, the analysis will not be strictly organized according to the four categories listed above because many of the narratives encompass more than one category of social groups.

Organizational groups. As mentioned above, the most frequent group references by both residents and employee participants were to organizational groups. The following example shows how a resident positions himself in relation to residents, management, and the organization:

1. R1: Well, I've been here a little over three years and I've had no problems, uh other
2. than last year. Uh, I think they unfairly charged us to park in the basement that
3. had prior to that time, or about, just about a year ago, that, uh, considered part
4. of was, facility arrangements, and I think that, uh, plus an annual increase in, to
5. comp-, to compensate for, uh, for inflation, I think turned a lot of people off.
6. They did not feel that that was, was proper. And the only other thing, thing I
7. would change is to not have to pay your, your apartment. Many, all these new
8. residence or retirement homes coming in do not charge, do that, you just pay so
9. much a month. And I'll say this, they do, they do give you or your heirs a 75
10. percent of what you paid going in, after they sell your apartment. So, uh, and
11. that's a lot better than what I understand it is out at [another retirement
12. center].

In line 2, the speaker uses "they" without any apparent antecedent but seems to imply the management or decision-makers of the organization. He uses "us" to include himself in the group of residents that was unfairly charged. However, he distances himself from this group in lines 5 and 6 by referring to the dissatisfied residents as "a lot of people" and "they." The final social identity markers in his narrative set his own organization apart from others in the area. Although he claims in lines 7 and 8 that new organizations may

have a better policy on leasing an apartment, those are unnamed organizations and may not present a competitive threat to the “superiority” of his own. He returns to his own management with the positive “they” reference in lines 9 and 10, and when he does refer to an area competitor by name in line 11, he constructs his own organization as superior.

An employee story shows a similar “we/they” positioning, but this time the roles are reversed:

1. E1: We have, like, parties a lot. Like on Fridays, we have, like, Happy Hour, and
2. they, they uh, they love that, and it’s, they just enjoy having fun still, and the
3. employees like to put things on for ‘em like that, like big parties and social
4. events, and it’s just like a normal place. I mean, it’s not, they’re not any
5. different, they still like to have fun and have Happy Hour.

The speaker refers to the staff he belongs to as “we” in line 1 and shows the positive role of the employees in providing entertainment for the residents (“they”). The employee also speaks from the perspective of a younger person, clarifying the fact that older people are “normal” and still enjoy having fun.

Although residents used more negative than positive group references regarding management, most references to employees and staff members were positive. The most frequent references were about the staff’s attentiveness and caring behavior, as well as the staff’s scheduling of interesting activities and entertainment. Many of the residents’ stories of medical emergencies or illness cite examples of helpful staff support. The following excerpt is representative of such narratives:

1. R1: Within the first week or so that I was here, I accidentally fell out in the lobby,
2. and I want you to know that within a minute some people had come out of the
3. office to see if they could help me, and within five minutes, two of the nurses
4. from the other part of the facility were there to help, see if I was allright. And
5. then to top it all off, a man came by and said he was a doctor and wanted to
6. know if he could do anything.



This resident specifically names employee groups from the office (line 3) and the nursing staff (line 3), but other resident narratives frequently refer to employee groups with implicit membership categorization devices. The following comments from separate resident narratives use these devices without any explanation of who the referents are:

1. R1: I'm well pleased with everybody. I mean, they're, they are congenial and
2.        outgoing, I think.
3. R2: I really do, uh, think that we are blessed in the way they do manage some of our
4.        things that are fun to do.
5. R3: I like the, uh, uh, maintenance of the, uh, premises. They have, have a contract
6.        with an agency that does that for us.

The reference in the first excerpt seems to relate to the entire staff, and the second and third excerpts include a reference to the activities staff and general management. The last two comments also include in-group references to the residents as "we," "our" (line 3), and "us" (line 6).

Another interesting use of personal pronouns to show social identity is in the use of possessive pronouns. The interviews yielded several examples of employee statements such as "one of our residents" or "a resident of ours," implying ownership either by the organization or the employees. The following resident story also hints at ownership of an employee and contains several intriguing group references:

1. R1: We have a good staff.
2. R2: Everybody's congenial and
3. R3: They're always
4. R2: thoughtful.
5. R3: Always pleasant to everybody. We did lose a man that everybody was very
6.        fond of here. I think when Jim left, everybody was upset.
7. R4: Oh yes.
8. R3: To lose him.
9. R2: It was just, he was a Black man.
10. R4: One of the maintenance men, that uh
11. R2: And we all liked him and respected him, and uh, we felt sad when he left.

12. R5: And he remembered everybody's name, which just amazed me.
13. R2: Well, and the reason he left, he, they told him he had to go next door to work
14. R4: over to the health center
15. R2: And he said he wouldn't do it.
16. R4: The health center. And it seems to me all they would've had to do is ro-, put it
17. on a rotating basis, because it would not be the most pleasant place to work, in
18. the health center. And he was a very outgoing, congenial, happy guy that
19. wanted to talk to people.

The use of “we” in the story could be taken to refer to the organization as a whole if only interpreted by lines 1 and 5. However, line 11 makes it clearer that the speakers are referring to the residents, and the reference has the connotation that they “had” the employee before they “lost” him. This story also shows how five speakers collaborate to construct a coherent story and affirm a social identity, which is the “we” of the residents’ group.

Two more interesting social group references are in line 9 and line 10 where the speakers clarify the groups to which the employee belongs: he is a Black man and a maintenance worker. The identification of these groups does not seem integral to the events of the story but may allow the speakers additional ways to characterize “Jim” as a social group member, but not a member of their own group.

Speakers 2 and 4 refer to the management group in lines 13 and 16 and express their dissatisfaction with the way “they” handled this personnel situation. Finally, the last speaker again positions her own resident group as separate from the residents in the health center (lines 17 and 18), which is more similar to a nursing home than the independent living area.

Another use of social identity markers by both residents and employees is to distinguish subgroups among larger organizational groups. In one retirement center, a new wing had recently opened, and the new residents who lived in that wing were

referenced in several of the interviews at that location. One of the new residents participated in an interview and told several stories about architectural problems with the new wing. As seen in the following excerpt, other participants in the discussion empathize with the new residents but still relate to them as a separate group:

1. R1: They're wonderful people, and, and I think that they feel happy because we've
2.       liked 'em, and, and they're part, we, they come down the other hall for a meal.
3. R2: They're wonderful. They're just like, they're just like us, as far as that's
4.       concerned.
5. R1: Everybody loves 'em, there's no problem, they're wonderful. And a number of
6.       couples, and some of them are handicapped couples. So, it's really, it's a
7.       wonderful group.

Interestingly, the only differences between the new residents and the speakers are the length of time they have lived at the retirement center and the wing of the building in which they live. Yet the group references in the narrative construct the group as distinct. The group references in line 6 also point out that two other subgroups are represented in the new wing: married couples (a minority in a retirement center) and handicapped residents. Both references further confirm the out-group status of the new residents in relation to the speakers.

Employees also used social group references to distinguish subgroups of retirement center workers. A nursing staff director referred to "the kitchen help" in one of her stories, although the dining room employees did not refer to themselves as "help" in any of their narratives. The same speaker tells about finding a confused resident wandering outside in the cold. The resident soon had to move to a "locked facility," and the speaker explains, "Because we just couldn't, it wasn't safe for her to be here. They just couldn't keep her here." The speaker begins by including herself with the "we" that could not keep the resident at the retirement center; however, she stops herself and changes the reference

to “they” to indicate it was a management decision, not one from her own group. This excerpt also demonstrates another example of retirement center members’ positioning themselves as separate from other facilities such as nursing homes, which was a common social identity strategy.

Groups with different levels of health care. Some of the residents’ stories provide evidence that they frequently confirm to themselves and others the difference between their own organization and a nursing home. One male resident told how his children reacted to his decision to move in:

1. R1: They said, “Well, you’re not old enough to go into a nursing home.” I said,
2. “It’s not a nursing home.” And so, they, well, they’d come out and look at it.
3. So they come out and checked on it, and they were, they were impressed. I
4. said, “Well, it’s the nicest thing for you because if I’m here, you know, this is
5. life care, and then you don’t have to worry about me. I’m, I’m here, and I’m
6. gonna be taken care of. . . .” When they checked out and saw what, all the
7. medical facilities, they decided that that was okay. The other thing is that I said,
8. “I want to move where I decide to move when I decide to do it. I’m not gonna
9. wait till I’m in a bed and you’re gonna make all the decisions. So I’ll do it
10. now.”

The speaker implicitly positions his retirement center organization as superior to the nursing home: the retirement center is for younger residents (line 1); his children are impressed by this organization (line 3); he will get life care here (line 5); this place has medical facilities (line 7); and he is in control of his decisions here (lines 8 and 9).

Another resident told how her children visited the retirement center, and their reaction was, “Mom, it don’t smell bad.” She then told how they had visited “other places” before, insinuating that nursing homes have a bad smell.

Employees also used this strategy to distinguish the retirement center from nursing homes. A staff member told a story about how a group of residents formed a rhythm band and wanted to perform somewhere:

1. E1: And so we did, we went to another nursing home once and that was enough.
2. [laughter] Well, it really went very well, I was real surprised. But uh, we went
3. to a nursing home where they were less able to care for them-, you know,
4. themselves than we were. And so I think that kind of depressed 'em so they
5. didn't want to go back.

She includes herself with the group even though she is talking about the residents' band.

She uses "we" to refer to the group, even in the obvious reference to residents in lines 4 and 5 about being able to care for themselves. In doing so, she identifies with the group as a retirement center group, which is distinct from a nursing home. Then she reverts back to "they" to refer to the residents' band in concluding the story, excluding herself from those that were "kind of depressed" (line 4), and no longer making the comparison between the two organizations.

Residents also established their social identity as independent living residents, distinct from assisted living, severely ill, or handicapped residents. This difference was especially evident in Eagleton, where participants frequently referred to the assisted living wing as "over there," "back there," and "downstairs," and the nursing care area as "upstairs." Two stories by employees report incidents of residents' communication about the assisted living facilities. The first story is told by a nurse about a conversation she observed between an independent living resident and a home health aide about residents in the assisted living wing:

1. E1: It's almost like there's a curse on 'em from the other residents. They have this
2. theory that they're, you know, they're, uh, I don't know, that they're mentally
3. crazy, I guess, I don't know. It's what a lot of 'em think, and um, in fact, there
4. was a lady the other day that never is down here, and she was down, sitting
5. down there, and one of our home health aides was down there. . . . She was
6. saying, you know, "These people down here, you know, they don't even, you
7. know, know what's going on, and they're all sick and in their beds, and they
8. never get up." She said, "No, they're not." She said, "Everybody down here
9. gets up out of bed. Nobody down here gets to just stay in bed, you know,
10. they're not sick like that." And she said, "They just need a little more help.

11. That's what we're here for, is to help 'em with different things." This lady was
12. adamant about she knew what went on down here. So when we tell families
13. when they do move 'em down here, that that is a concept that so many people
14. have, but if, if it, if their, their physical condition got to where they needed to
15. be down here, or their memory or whatever, they would definitely take this
16. over going to a nursing home. 'Cause they haven't seen anything till they've
17. been to a nursing home. Most nursing homes, anyway.

The speaker uses "they" (or a form of it) in this narrative to refer to three different out-groups: assisted living residents (lines 1, 2, 13, and 14), independent living residents (lines 1 and 3), and families of assisted living residents (lines 13, 15, and 16). Finally, as seen in other excerpts above, the participant uses a negative out-group reference to distinguish her organization from nursing homes (lines 16 and 17).

A story collaboration by two employees describes a resident's resolve not to move to assisted living. Just before this story was told, another employee said, "They fight to keep from coming. They do everything they can." The nonprofessional employees are evidently required to call for medical help if a resident falls, but the resident in the narrative feared that the call for assistance would lead to a required move out of independent living.

1. R1: We had one resident in [independent living], she say, "It'll be over my dead
2. body before I go over there." And believe me, she died right after, I mean, she
3. didn't go over there. 'Cause she was always falling, and when they, when she
4. fall, we would have to call for help. And she be saying,
5. R2: "Don't do that."
6. R1: "Don't call no help. Help me get up. Just help me get up." "We're not
7. touching you. We got to call for help." "I don't give a d- what you say. Help me
8. up! Don't call nobody."

Although this story is told about a specific resident, the speaker reverts to "they" in line 3, which may indicate this is more of a recurring incident with other residents, and this story is told as more of a prototypical example. A resident's own words further confirm this

attitude about assisted living: “We’re all glad that it’s there, but we hope we don’t have to live back there.”

Residents stated more than once in the interviews that the continuing care aspect of the retirement centers was a major reason many residents chose the organization. However, the language strategies of this resident reveal how he distances himself from the group that lives in assisted living:

1. R1: That’s why we moved out here. But it’s just sort of down the hall, so to speak,
2. and if a person has to go over there, they can move over. Their spouse is here.

He begins using “we” but changes to the membership categorization devices of “a person” and “they” in line 2. Apparently, he includes himself with the group that moved in because of the continuing care, but excludes himself from the group that may have to live “over there.”

A collaborated narrative of three residents displays similar attitudes about an area of one center dedicated to Alzheimer’s care. The story begins as a “sensemaking” story about deciding to move in and develops into a narrative that distinguishes the independent living residents from those with Alzheimer’s:

1. R1: My circumstances in coming were my, I lost my wife about three and a half
2. years ago, and this was the ideal answer for my problem. I didn’t want to stay
3. in a big house by myself, me have all the responsibilities, and then the fact that
4. you have, not necessarily cradle-to-grave, but from adulthood-to-grave
5. facilities here to take care of you, be able to go to the assisted living if you
6. reach that physical point, or to, uh, the Al-, the Alltimers group, if you lose
7. another part of your . . .
8. R2: We’re not, we’re not gonna have to the Alzheimer’s.
9. R1: No, that’s available.
10. R2: I’m gonna die first.
11. R1: Well, I hope so, but the, the third, third
12. R3: We’re not gonna know when we’re there, though, that’s the . . .
13. R1: The third, the third and final choice is the health center.
14. R2: That’s like I told my doctor once, “I, I, I’m not remembering things like I used

15. to. Do you think I have Alzheimer's?" He said, "If you think you have it, you  
16. don't. Relax."

Speaker 1 shows the switch from first person to second person in line 4 when he begins listing the assisted care areas in the retirement center, perhaps indicating that he does not want to include himself with residents who may have to live there. Speaker 2 affirms that the group that these residents belong to ("we're" in line 8) will not be going to that area, and she is even supported by Speaker 1 (line 11) in the hope that she dies before having to join that group.

Generational groups. Participants also used MCDs to establish social identity as part of an age group. The most frequent references were by residents who categorized their generation as an in-group, although employees also used age as an out-group reference, with more negative than positive uses by employees. Resident references to older people were primarily positive or neutral. The following story is perhaps the best illustration of this in-group strategy, and the speaker tells the event in such a way as to emphasize the positive over the negative:

1. R1: Well, I think one of the most interesting things which is kind of characteristic  
2. of all of us. One evening or one time my husband and I were sitting down here  
3. on Saturday evening, I think it was about 8:30. One of the older gentlemen  
4. came down all dressed up with his tie on. He was all ready to go someplace,  
5. and we said, "Where are you going?" And he said, "Well, my children are  
6. going to pick me up for Sunday School in the morning," I mean, "pretty  
7. quickly". And [my husband] and I looked at him and we said, "Did you know  
8. this was Saturday night?" And he just laughed and laughed at himself, and we  
9. got the biggest kick out of that because it's so characteristic of all of us. And I  
10. thought it was so nice that he'd laugh at himself about it.  
11. R2: That's funny. We all do have those.  
12. R1: Yeah, we all do these crazy things.

The reference to "all of us" in lines 2 and 9 is obviously to older people and not simply to residents, and the second speaker agrees that the behavior is typical to the group. In this



case, the in-group reference is positive because the speaker emphasizes the good attitude the male resident had about his blunder. Another interesting MCD in the narrative is in line 3 where the speaker categorizes the man as “older,” implying that he is in a different subgroup of residents than she is.

Another resident narrative emphasizes the importance of one’s generational group after a discussion interviewees were having about the feeling of family and community among the residents:

1. R1: There’s a generational difference, you know. It’s nice to visit when your kids
2. come and so forth, but it’s nice also to have companions of your generation.
3. When you talk about a Depression, they know what you’re talking about, you
4. know. They’ve been there. So it, it does help. I mean, you do feel a little
5. closeness.
6. R2: Yeah. When we forget something or do something stupid, everybody says,
7. “Join the group,” you know.

This resident’s “kids” (line 1) are undoubtedly adults, but by calling them by that label, he demarcates the generational difference. The second speaker refers to their age group with the markers, “we,” “everybody” (line 6), and “the group” (line 7).

One group of residents explained a policy of management about carrying food out of the dining room. Evidently, some residents had been using little bags to carry extra food back to their apartments after meals, and the practice had become excessive.

1. R1: I think they’d be surprised how much they find in those little bags.
2. R2: Well, I think they would be surprised, too, what they find in those little bags,
3. but that’s just a, I guess, an older person’s
4. R3: Well, older people tend to do those things.
5. R2: They’re afraid, well maybe it’s because we all, most of us lived through the
6. Depression and we’re afraid we’re going to be hungry [laughter].

Again, this narrative shows the in-group references to older people, and the out-group marker of “they” in lines 1 and 2, referring to management, which is likely a group of younger people that did not live through the Depression or ever worry about being

hungry. Speaker 2 also employs a change in MCD in line 5, first referring to older people who do these things as “they,” but then switching to “we” to include herself in the group.

Employee references to older people were more likely to be negative out-group references, often involving absent-minded behavior, such as losing things or being confused in one’s surroundings. Another frequent theme was rudeness by older people who “say what they think.” An example already analyzed above showed how a resident criticized an employee’s dress. Another narrative shows how an employee received advice about older people’s behavior:

1. E1: That’s one thing that somebody told me when I first started working here.
2.       ‘Cause when you think of older people and the older generation, you think,
3.       little nice people who never say a bad word to anybody, well, that’s not true.
4. E2: [laughs] It’s not true!
- [E3 and E1 simultaneously]:
5. E3: Well, just because they got old doesn’t mean they’re nice.
6. E1: Just because you get old doesn’t mean you get nice. That’s right.
7. E3: That’s right. Yeah, that’s, I say that all the time.
8. E1: You know, people who have personalities when they’re younger have
9.       personalities when they’re older, and it doesn’t change.
10. E4: Usually worse.

The statement in lines 5 and 6 is evidently some type of “motto” among these employees because they recite it simultaneously almost in the same words, the only difference being the pronouns used. Neither of the speakers, however, uses first person to indicate they might be in that group someday.

Only two employee narratives made specific group references to older people that were coded as positive. One participant described a resident who was 90 years old as a “goer” and listed many social activities in which the resident participated. Another employee talked about the progress of a male resident who was going to a treatment program for depression: “When you see that growth in people, I mean, and even if you’re

85 or 90 years old, you see growth, it's wonderful." Although she began by discussing a specific resident, she generalizes to other older people in this statement by using the categorization devices of "people" and "you're 85 or 90."

The organization. The final category of group references pertinent to this analysis is the organization as a whole, used as an in-group reference. In all of the narratives, the content analysis revealed only two negative references to an entire organization. The first is a story by residents that recounts the change in ownership of their organization:

1. R1: We had a change in the management situation, too, from the time it began until
2. what it is now. It went from a non-profit organization to a for-profit
3. organization. . . . It was, it was begun by the [church] diocese, and it was uh,
4. set up for a non-profit organization, and uh, was doing quite well and then went
5. into the economic slump. . . . And uh, then that's when Fairfield came in and
6. took over, and it now is a for-profit outfit.
7. R2: I feel like when it was, uh, handled by the [church], that the residents had a
8. little more say about what was being done, am I right?
9. R1: That's true. That's true.
10. R2: And now that it's under Fairfield, it's, it's controlled by Fairfield, they, they
11. make the laws and the rules and the demands, and we have very little voice in
12. it, as far as, uh, residents are concerned.

Many of the organizational references in other resident stories use the pronoun "we" to refer to the organization to which they belong. However, as seen in line 1, these speakers refer to the retirement center as "it" and the residents' group as "we." They also distinguish the different controlling groups, by naming the church diocese with a positive reference in lines 3, 4, and 7, and naming Fairfield with neutral references by Speaker 1 and negative references by Speaker 2. Speaker 2 also positions the residents as "we" in line 11 and Fairfield as "they" in line 10.

The second negative organizational reference is also interesting because of the resident's use of "we" and "they":

1. R1: The special care unit wasn't here at the time we came in. Then we moved, and

2. didn't have the lobby, you know. They didn't have the dining room yet. And
3. then we had the freight elevators on each end, freighters. . . . There were open,
4. empty places, and people were working. Strange people around. . . . Well,
5. it was the workmen, and we didn't have locks on the outside doors, so they
6. could just come and go, or anybody else could.

In line 2, the speaker refers to the organization as "they," as if she is referring to an out-group. However, in line 3 and again in line 5, the organization becomes "we." Perhaps the change is due to the resident's reflection on moving in: she may use the third person reference in thinking about before she was a member and then the first person to include herself after joining.

As noted before, the majority of residents' references to the organization as a group are positive, but the majority of employees' references to the organization are neutral (see Tables 7 and 8). Speakers make the group reference by mentioning their organization by name and also by implying the organization by the use of pronouns. The following narrative demonstrates both devices with positive organizational references:

1. R1: Well, you know that a lot of retirement buildings are under construction here
2. in Oklahoma City.
3. R2: Not like ours, though.
4. R1: No, no, they're, they're just retirement . . .
5. R3: I think this, this is what struck them, that we were really a choice classic, what
6. do I want to say, that the plan for future retirement is here, the way this is
7. constructed and staffed and everything else.
8. R2: And at one point, we were, Candlewick, Fairfield at Candlewick was
9. considered the queen of the, all of Fairfield.
10. R3: That's what I was trying to say.
11. R2: Uh huh, and they call it the queen ship because it's the most outstanding one
12. that Fairfield has, and just last week we had a gal that was there for lunch that
13. was from somewhere else, and was, had come to watch our operation, food
14. preparation, that's what, but she was from another Fairfield place. So, I think
15. we got the best there is [laughs].

This narrative is an excellent demonstration of what Burke (1950/1969) describes as the "self-enhancement" an individual gains from social identification. By including one's self

through identification strategies with a successful group, one establishes a place in a social hierarchy (p. 16). The speakers in this narrative position their own organization as superior not only to others in the city but also to others under the same management group. In line 3, Speaker 2 establishes ownership with the use of the possessive pronoun “ours.” Speaker 1 then labels the other centers in town as an out-group (“they’re,” in line 4) by which to compare Candlewick’s success. These other organizations are “just” retirement centers, whereas the implication is that Candlewick is life care.

Another out-group is established by Speaker 3 in line 5. Although not clear from this brief excerpt, the resident is referring to Fairfield, the management group who bought the retirement center, as “them” and Candlewick as “we.” This distinction continues with Speaker 2, who establishes that their own organization (“our operation,” line 13) is the “best there is” (line 15). Clearly, Fairfield and its other retirement centers are out-groups to these speakers, and Candlewick is the in-group.

#### Research Question Six

Finally, the sixth research question asks if differences exist between the organizational in-group and out-group references in stories of employees versus residents. For this analysis, the only group categories used were those directly related to the organization: retirement center—general, residents, independent living, assisted living, new residents, resident committees, employees, nonprofessional staff, professional staff, management, and owners/controllers (see Tables 7 and 8 for frequencies). For each of these groups, counts were totaled for positive, neutral, and negative in-group and out-group totals (see Table 9) and then cross-tabulated by membership status (see Table 10), resulting in a 2 x 6 contingency table. A chi-square test of independence revealed that the

Table 9

Frequencies and Percentages for Organizational Group References

Type of reference	<u>n</u>	%
(N = 504)		
Positive		
In-group	118	23.4
Out-group	73	14.5
Neutral		
In-group	152	30.2
Out-group	95	18.8
Negative		
In-group	4	0.7
Out-group	62	12.3

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table 10

Organizational Group References by Membership Status

Type of reference	Residents		Employees	
	<u>n</u>	%	<u>n</u>	%
	(N = 228)		(N = 276)	
Positive				
In-group	73	32.0	45	16.3
Out-group	37	16.2	36	13.0
Neutral				
In-group	68	29.8	84	30.4
Out-group	25	11.0	70	25.4
Negative				
In-group	3	1.3	1	0.3
Out-group	22	9.6	40	14.5

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth.

relationship between membership status (employee or resident) and types of organizational group references was significant ( $\chi^2 = 31.599$ , d.f. = 5,  $p < .001$ ).

Examining the frequencies and proportions in Table 10 shows where the main differences lie between residents' and employees' use of organizational group references. First, residents were more likely than employees to make positive in-group references (32.0% of residents' references, compared to 16.3% of employees' references). Referring back to Tables 7 and 8, residents made more positive references to their own resident group and to the retirement center organization as an in-group than employees made to employee groups or to the organization. A second noticeable difference in organizational references is that employees made more neutral out-group references (25.4%) than residents did (11.0%). An examination of the group references shows that half of employees' neutral out-group references were about the resident group. Third, employees also made more negative out-group organizational references than residents (14.5% compared to 9.6%). In this case, all of the employees' negative out-group references were about residents, although several references were specifically about assisted living residents.

The frequencies also reveal two overall differences in the organizational references. Residents' positive organizational references (48.2%) outnumbered their neutral (40.8%) and negative references (10.9%), but employees used a majority of neutral references (55.8%). Finally, residents used more organizational in-group references (63.1%) than out-group references, but employees used slightly more out-group references (52.9%) than in-group.



### Summary

This section has reported the results of the data analysis in order to answer the six research questions. The results of the content analysis offer support for the typology of storytelling functions proposed in the literature review. In addition, the relationship between membership status and storytelling function was shown to be significant. Residents and employees in the participant groups used these categories differently. However, no significant difference was found in the two groups' mean scores on the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, and no relationship was found between mean OCQ scores and the telling of shared stories. A qualitative analysis demonstrated how participants expressed social identity and organizational identification through story collaborations. Finally, the relationship between membership status and use of organizational group references was found to be a significant one. Residents and employees varied in their references to organizational in-groups and out-groups.

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The previous chapter presented the results from the data collection procedures and addressed the six research questions. The task that remains is to make connections between the answers to those questions in order to assess this dissertation's contribution to the discipline. This final section will serve as a "sensemaking" story, in essence, as it functions to give meaning and order to the findings. To do so, the discussion focuses first on an assessment of the proposed integrative approach, comparing the results with previous research and trying to discern how these findings integrate with current organizational storytelling theory. Following that assessment, limitations of the dissertation and directions for future research will be discussed.

### An Integrative Approach

The first chapter of this dissertation critiques the macro-level and micro-level approaches to studying organizational storytelling and argues for a more integrative approach. To reiterate some of that critique, one of the limitations of both approaches is their neglecting to synthesize theory and research from other storytelling contexts. The micro-level approach is also criticized for its disparity and the lack of coherence in the body of literature using that approach. In line with the proposed integrative approach, the following section discusses the findings about the variables investigated in this dissertation and attempts to integrate those findings with relevant theory and research. After a look at each variable, the discussion will then turn to an assessment of how well this dissertation has met the proposed requirements for an integrative approach.

### Functions of Organizational Storytelling

The group interview methodology proved to be a valuable tool for collecting organizational stories in the retirement center context. In the initial proposal for this dissertation, the researcher estimated that approximately 180 stories would come from the interviews (assuming 2 stories per participant). Surprisingly, the interviews yielded over twice that many stories, with 371 stories marked on the interview transcripts. All interview sessions included at least 12 distinct narratives, and almost every participant contributed to an organizational story.

In choosing representative excerpts to include in the results section above, the researcher did not make an attempt to select narratives from every interview session, but instead looked at the value of the story itself in demonstrating whatever point was being made. However, a cursory examination of the excerpts chosen revealed that indeed every group interview was represented. This seems to indicate, at least intuitively, that sessions were similar in the type of narrative elicited from participants and that they felt the freedom in each session to contribute openly.

The group interview was also valuable in allowing for collaborated narratives. Individual interviews may have elicited stories, but the group setting facilitated the social construction of reality demonstrated when storytellers join together to recall and reconstruct an event from their shared history. According to Peterson and Langellier (1987), the collaborative strategy of storytelling creates “a supportive context in which storytelling functions as the discovery of shared meaning” (p. 100).

The large number of stories resulting from the interviews was helpful in validating the proposed typology of five storytelling functions. Had the number been significantly

smaller, the researcher would be less able to state with confidence that this typology seems to describe the predominant functions of organizational storytelling. Given that the five functions and their definitions are grounded in an extensive body of storytelling literature, and coders were able to classify all but four stories according to these functions, this typology seems to be valid and deserves further research and confirmation.

The five functions also demonstrate an improvement over the three storytelling functions suggested by Dandridge et al. (1980) and investigated by Brown (1985) in the nursing home context. The three functions in their list are descriptive, energy-controlling, and system maintenance. Although their definitions share some commonality with the five functions in this dissertation, these three functions relate primarily to how the stories function for organizational purposes. However, the sensemaking and proof by example functions defined in this dissertation take into account the function of storytelling for organizational members. The value expression, system maintenance, and social prescription functions connect the storyteller to the organization by allowing the speaker to express knowledge and evaluation of the organization's culture and practices.

Another important finding from the first research question regards the proportion of organizational stories categorized under each function. More proof by example stories were told than any other type. This could be due to the fact that most of the stories were being directed to the researcher, an outsider to the culture, and storytellers were using the stories as proof for assertions they were making about the organization. Another possible explanation may be that this is the most common organizational storytelling function, but future research with naturalistic observation methods would be required for that conclusion. The researcher's role might also explain why social prescription stories were

told the most infrequently. Participants may not have seen the need to use narratives to give advice or prescribe behavior to an outsider who had no potential role in the organization. Such stories would be more appropriately told to new residents and employees.

The second research question showed a significant relationship between membership status and storytelling functions. To the researcher's knowledge, no other studies have compared story use by two groups of organizational members such as residents and employees. Brown (1985) found significant differences in the functions and types of stories told by nursing home employees in various socialization stages, but no residents were participants in the study. Therefore, no comparisons are appropriate to other studies. However, some exploration of the differences in storytelling function between residents and employees may add to our understanding of how stories are used.

The most apparent difference was in the use of proof by example stories. Employees' stories were classified as this function more often than any other function and more often than residents' stories. When comparing this result to the number of group references employees made about residents and looking back at the transcripts, a reasonable conclusion is that many of the proof by example stories are about residents' behavior. In many instances, employees in a group session would make comments about residents' behaving a certain way, and then someone would follow that with a story.

Residents, however, were more likely to narrate their own experiences without making generalizations about the entire group's behavior. This probably accounts for the large proportion (29.9%) of residents' stories categorized with the sensemaking function. Sensemaking is more of an individual than an organizational function, and residents were

more likely than employees to tell personal experiences about moving in, dealing with the loss of loved ones, and making adjustments to both being alone and living in a communal setting.

Two findings from the second research question help to tie in storytelling functions to the study of organizational identification. First, both residents and employees made frequent use of value expression stories, showing their ability to articulate in narrative form shared organizational values. Cheney (1983) lists “the espousal of shared values” as a technique often found in organizational rhetoric aimed at increasing identification. Through value expression stories, the participants in this research demonstrated, to a great extent, that they recognize and affirm organizational values.

A second relationship seen between storytelling functions and identification was the unexpected use of system maintenance stories by residents. System maintenance stories function to legitimate organizational practices and management philosophy (Wilkins, 1983). Therefore, a reasonable expectation would be that the employee group (which included management) would use system maintenance stories more than residents. However, only 12.6% of employees’ stories were in this category, compared to 20.4% of residents’ stories. Three factors may influence this finding. First, given the high degree of organizational commitment expressed by residents on the OCQ and the positive nature of organizational stories told by residents, the use of system maintenance stories may be one more expression of identification with the organization. In other words, residents feel a strong connection to the retirement center and tell stories that promote its practices. A second explanation for the difference may lie with the employees: employee stories were primarily about residents and not the organization as a whole, resulting in fewer system

maintenance stories. A third explanation may be found in the content of residents' system maintenance stories. Although the content analysis did not address the subjects of organizational stories, the researcher's familiarity with the interview transcripts confirms that many residents' stories were about organizational events, such as parties, style shows, and management-sponsored activities. By definition, these stories fell in the system maintenance category. Residents seemed to use system maintenance stories to promote management practices regarding activities and events more so than policies and procedures.

In summary, the proposed typology of organizational storytelling functions proved to be a useful tool for classifying and understanding the use of stories in the retirement center context. Further, the typology helped to illuminate differences in the types of stories told by resident and employee groups. Future research is necessary, however, to validate further the usefulness of this classification system. Some suggestions for the direction of that research are offered in a later section of this discussion.

### Organizational Commitment and Identification

#### Organizational Commitment Scores of Residents and Employees

Research question three related to the expression of organizational commitment as measured by the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday et al., 1979). A comparison of the mean scores from this questionnaire revealed no significant difference between the resident and employee groups. Although no direction was predicted in the research question, this finding was somewhat unexpected, in that the researcher began with the intuitive prediction that residents would express higher levels of commitment. After all, residents in independent living and continuing care retirement centers make a

substantial financial investment in order to become members of their organization. In addition to the financial commitment, residents also join a community or “family,” as many residents labeled it, and so one would expect that level of commitment to be higher than that expressed by paid staff. Not only was the difference not statistically significant, but the employee mean (4.13) on the OCQ was actually slightly higher than the resident mean (3.96). Without any similar studies for the purpose of comparison, some explanations are offered here based on the results of the OCQ as well as other findings from the content analysis.

An important factor in examining the results of this question is that OCQ scores across all participants were relatively high. With the highest possible score being 5.00, the mean for 89 participants was 4.06. The results of the OCQ in this dissertation are not directly comparable to Mowday et al.’s (1979) normative data. In their studies, they used a form of the questionnaire with a 7-point scale for answering each question, whereas this researcher used a 5-point scale (see Methods section for discussion of the instrument). However, some comparison is possible. Mowday et al. provide normative data on the OCQ from over 2,500 individuals in a variety of organizations. Although their norms separate participant scores by gender, roughly half of all scores are above 5.00, and approximately one-quarter of all scores are below the midpoint of 4.00.

In this dissertation, however, the mean is well above the midpoint, and only 3 participants’ scores (3%) are below the midpoint of 3.00. More than half ( $n = 51$ ) of the OCQ scores are above 4.00. Therefore, even when comparing the results of this 5-point scale to the norms for the 7-point scale, it is evident that this group of participants has high scores relative to established norms. The higher scores seen in both resident and



employee groups may account for the lack of statistical significance in the test of differences.

Another possible explanation for the similarity in mean scores may be the voluntary nature of the sample. Residents and employees were recruited by the activities directors of the organizations, and the selection process itself may have biased the participant group. Organizational members with lower commitment levels may not have been recruited or may have refused the invitation, resulting in somewhat homogenous groups with regard to commitment. This possibility will be addressed in the discussion below of limitations.

A third factor underlying the high scores may be the nature of the human service organization. Residents' high scores were not so unexpected, due to the investments described above. However, perhaps emotional investment might also explain the high scores of employee participants. The employees told several stories about being attached to certain residents, attending funerals of those they had become close to, and feeling a part of the community. The scores may be indicative of the nature of working in a retirement center, a place where your "clients" not only live, but also may become ill and eventually die. The encouraging implications of this analysis may be that employees in retirement centers are extremely committed both to their organizations and to their residents.

#### Organizational Commitment and Storytelling

The fourth research question asked if organizational commitment was associated with the telling of shared organizational stories. As measured by the OCQ score and the number of shared story collaborations per participant, no significant relationship was

demonstrated. This contrasts somewhat with Wilkins' (1978) research in which he compared two organizations whose members demonstrated differing levels of commitment. Members of the "higher-commitment" organization told more shared stories than personal stories, compared to the "lower-commitment" organization whose members told more stories of personal experience.

The primary reasons for the difference between this researcher's results and Wilkins' results are likely the definition of categories and procedures used to collect stories. Wilkins defined shared stories as those which were told by more than one organizational member and not necessarily one's own experience. The stories were collected in individual interviews, and so no story collaborations were reported for the study. In the current research, shared stories are defined as those told by someone who is not a character in the story. The purpose of both definitions is the similar: to demonstrate a knowledge of organizational events outside one's own personal experiences. However, the correlation found by Wilkins to organizational commitment was not replicated in this dissertation. Additionally, the unit of analysis was story collaborations from the group interviews. A final difference is that Wilkins administered his own questionnaire to measure commitment, which included other items measuring several variables for his study. No evidence is available comparing his questionnaire and Mowday et al.'s (1979) OCQ.

Besides the comparison to previous research, some further explanation is warranted regarding the relationship of organizational commitment and storytelling. The overall high OCQ scores may, in fact, have a bearing on this research question as they did with the third research question, making a statistically significant correlation less likely.

Another possibility, however, is that this is not a suitable type of analysis for stories generated in a group setting. The number of any type of stories told may be influenced more by communicator characteristics, such as assertiveness, confidence, and familiarity with the group, rather than a participant's attitudes toward the organization. A useful avenue for future research on storytelling may be to examine what determines the telling of shared stories in a group.

A more useful comparison of OCQ scores to organizational stories was the alignment of high and low scores with participants' narratives. Cheney (1983) and Tompkins and Cheney (1983) demonstrated this technique by reporting participants' organizational identification scores with representative narrative from accounts of the employees' decision-making processes. Although their studies focused specifically on accounts rather than storytelling, Deetz (1987) defines accounts as stories that function as sensemaking for organizational members. The importance of the reporting technique is that it combines quantitative and qualitative data in a meaningful way and reveals how organizational identification (or commitment, in the case of the OCQ) is expressed through discourse. Larkey and Morrill (1995) have argued for such an approach to studying organizational commitment as a symbolic process, proposing that narratives may "provide clues" to the ways individuals manage their identifications with organizational groups (p. 209).

In summary, although statistical analyses were not significant for the questions related to organizational commitment, the qualitative results from the narratives help to interpret participants' scores and enhance our understanding of the expression of commitment through communication.

### Social Identity

Perhaps the most important contribution of this research is to the study of social identity. The storytellers constructed in-group and out-group identities throughout the narratives, resulting in an overwhelming number ( $n = 722$ ) of group references coded in separate story collaborations. This result was seen in similar numbers for both resident and employee groups. The conclusion seems warranted, then, that social identity theory is a promising framework for studying organizational stories.

The methodologies in this dissertation also represent a contribution to the social identity literature. Similar techniques were used by Pittam and Gallois (1996, 1997) in a study of intergroup communication about the attribution of blame for HIV/AIDS. They coded group references made by speakers for their quantitative analysis and used a discourse analytic method to explore social identity expression. Their findings were similar, in that participants were more likely to make negative references about out-groups than in-groups. However, they were interested in the homogeneity of groups referenced by speakers and in comparisons of different make-ups of interview groups, so many of their results are not relevant to this dissertation. Also, they only allowed two group references coded for each narrative, an object and an agent of the action.

In the Pittam and Gallois studies and in this present research, however, the combination of methodologies and the reporting of results represent promising tools for the study of social identity. Although the frequency counts, percentages, and long tables are somewhat cumbersome, they help to show the multiple groups with which organizational members identify. They also show the common out-groups constructed by storytellers. For example, the researcher expected to find that the employees would be

commonly mentioned by residents as an out-group. Unexpected out-groups, however, were assisted living residents and nursing homes. The frequency counts from the content analysis helped to bring these out. The quantitative analysis also helped to show the targets of positive and negative references. An intuitive prediction may have been that residents would make negative references about employees, and employees would make negative references about residents. The frequencies, however, show that the latter was much more prevalent than the former. Brown and Williams (1984) suggest that those who see their group identity essentially the same as their organizational identity may be less likely to view other out-groups negatively. This perspective may explain the infrequent negative out-group references of residents to employees and to the organization. Some of the narratives provide evidence that the residents often referred to the organization in the same way that they referred to the resident group.

The quantitative analysis also confirms a central thesis of Reichers (1985) in his review and critique of organizational commitment studies. He argues that organizational commitment can be best understood as “a collection of multiple commitments to various groups that comprise the organization” (p. 469). He further notes that organizational members also have multiple identifications with social groups outside the organization. The analysis of employees’ and residents’ group references in research question five is a significant step in identifying those multiple commitments. Residents expressed identification not only with the residents, but also with the overall organization, family groups, friends, and specific groups within the resident group (e.g., independent living, new residents, committees, etc.). Employees also made distinct identity references to subgroups of employees. This result was also found by Oaker and Brown (1986) in a

study of nursing groups in a hospital. Nurses expressed identification with their profession, the organization, and also different groups of nurses. The researchers used social identity theory to explain how social comparisons serve to heighten differences between groups and emphasize positive distinctiveness of in-groups.

One of the conclusions that really stands out from the quantitative analysis is that the largest number of group references were about residents. This communicates a very strong message about the retirement center organizations: They are about residents. The residents talked about residents, and the employees talked about residents. Even employees who told stories about themselves almost always included residents as characters in the story, whereas many residents told stories that did not reference employees. This is a seemingly obvious point, but the relationship of residents to the retirement center organization is not really comparable to the business/client relationship. The predominance of group references to residents in the interviews confirms the unique structure of retirement center organizations and the central role of residents.

Equally important to the study of social identity is the qualitative analysis of the organizational stories and the group references. Whereas the quantitative analysis shows which groups and how many, the analysis of participants' discourse illuminates how the references are made and the manner in which group identity is constructed. The analysis confirmed Och's (1993) conclusion that communicators are "actively constructing themselves as members of a community or professional organization, as persons of a particular social rank, as husbands and wives, as teachers, as foreigners" (p. 296).

Especially meaningful in the retirement center context is the use of "we" and "they" pronouns as membership categorization devices. The qualitative analysis was valuable in

demonstrating how the use of such identity markers positioned one group against another, whether residents to employees, older to younger, or independent living to assisted living. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), “awareness of out-groups reinforces one’s awareness of one’s in-group” (p. 25). For example, the narratives from the interviews showed how participants reinforce their own identification with the retirement center by comparing it to other centers and to nursing homes.

The narrative analysis also indicated that speakers sometimes distance themselves from their own in-group by avoiding personal pronouns. This was seen, for example, when residents referred to moving to assisted living areas or being dissatisfied with management. This distancing strategy was also seen in college students’ narratives about groups responsible for AIDS in the Pittam and Gallois (1996) study. In many instances, the strategy was nothing more than a subtle change in pronoun usage. These language strategies, and others demonstrated in this research, are integral to the expression of social identity but will not be captured by single-method research. Qualitative analysis must be a part of any study exploring the construction of social identity in narratives.

### Assessment of the Integrative Approach

A primary impetus for this dissertation was to provide a bridge between macro-level and micro-level approaches prevalent in the organizational storytelling literature. By way of review, the macro-level approach has contributed the most significant number of studies to this literature. It was criticized, however, for treating stories as artifacts or “symptoms” of organizational culture, ignoring storytelling theory from other communication contexts, failing to address the uniqueness claims of organizational stories, and primarily, for focusing too narrowly on the organization, rather than the story

and storyteller. The micro-level approach has also neglected to integrate theories and research from other contexts, suffers from too much disparity and a lack of synthesis, and focuses too narrowly on the event or storyteller with little said about the organization.

In response to these criticisms, this dissertation has offered an integrative approach to the study of organizational stories. The literature review in the first chapter outlined the four characteristics that describe this approach: the use of multiple research tools to learn about the organization, its members, and the content of stories; the provision of contextual information about the organization to serve as a framework for interpreting the stories; the inclusion of narratives in the report; and a demonstrated connection between the storytelling, the storytellers, and the organization. Each of these characteristics was exhibited in this dissertation.

First, multiple research tools were used both in the collection and analysis of the data. The OCQ is a self-report, quantitative measure and was used to assess the psychological construct of commitment. The group interview format then allowed for open-ended response and interaction among participants. This facilitated the collaboration of stories and the social construction of group identity. The results from the OCQ were analyzed through statistical means, as well as the objective coding results from the content analysis. A qualitative analysis of the narratives provided insight into participants' discourse and allowed for comparison to the quantitative results.

The second characteristic of integrative research is the provision of sufficient information about the organizational context to serve as an interpretive framework for the stories. The research in this dissertation took place in three retirement center organizations that were as similar as possible. Information has been provided not only



about these three centers and their populations, but also about the broader industry of continuing care centers. Contextual information is also found in the exploration of social groups within the organizations. Understanding the relationships between residents, employees, and management aids in interpreting the functions and content of the organizational stories.

An integrative approach also calls for including narratives in the reporting of results. This researcher included excerpts or full text from over 30 stories told by employees and residents. While most integrative studies will not be able to devote as much space to the narratives, the inclusion of the stories in this dissertation was important to the analyses. The stories also permit the reader to hear the voices of those who live and work in retirement centers and provide more cultural knowledge about their practices and language use than paraphrases or summaries would.

Finally, an integrative approach must demonstrate connections between the storytellers, the stories, and the organizations, rather than narrowly focusing on any one element. This dissertation has done so by examining the expression of organizational identification in stories. The storyteller's connection to the organization is made through the identification process, and the narrative was the device used to construct and express that connection. Using the group interview process to elicit stories also emphasized the storytelling event, rather than isolating stories by collecting written accounts or conducting individual interviews. Examining storytelling functions also served to connect stories to the tellers and organizations. Many of the sensemaking and proof by example stories showed how the storyteller constructed personal meaning in the organizational

context; social prescription, system maintenance, and value expression stories often served to connect the storyteller to organizational practices.

### Limitations

Although this dissertation makes appreciable contributions to the study of organizational storytelling and social identification, it does have some limitations. A discussion of these limitations will enhance the interpretation of its findings and suggest areas of improvement for replication or future adaptation of the research procedures.

The first limitation is the use of the convenience sample of residents and employees. As explained in the methods section, the researcher worked with activities directors from the three retirement centers, and the consensus was that a random sample may be problematic. The concern was that not all residents chosen at random would be willing to participate, and a convenience sample would allow the directors to recruit communicative participants who would contribute to the interviews. They also felt that this was the best method for recruiting employees because of their busy work schedules and limited available meeting times. Using a convenience sample limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts and violates some of the assumptions of statistical tests.

Having recognized the limitation of a convenience sample, however, it is important to point out that the participant groups represented a close approximation of a stratified sample. Resident groups closely matched the average age and the proportion of males and females in the retirement center populations, and employee groups represented a cross section of staff levels and age groups. Both groups included members with a variety of tenures in the organizations, ranging from newcomers to those who were there when the centers opened.

The resident sample also has the limitation of its homogeneity. The population of these independent living and continuing care centers is comprised of predominantly affluent, Caucasian residents. Although the findings could arguably generalize to other large, church-affiliated retirement centers, no conclusions can be applied to other organizational contexts.

Use of the convenience sample also introduces the possibility of a biased participant group. As noted above, the high OCQ scores raise the question of whether only the most committed members were volunteers. While this is, of course, a reasonable concern, two aspects of the data may refute it. First of all, some participants did score below the midpoint on the OCQ, so not all volunteers were biased in the direction of high commitment. Also, the interviews yielded many negative stories, indicating that participants felt free to voice disagreement with the organization and unpopular attitudes toward its groups.

Another possible limitation is the use of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. While this scale and other similar scales have been used with voluntary organizations (e.g., Dornstein & Matalon, 1989; Lathan & Lichtman, 1984), the OCQ has not been tested with tenants. Adapting the questionnaire for residents may have changed the nature of the questionnaire in a way that disallows comparison with employees.

The questionnaire also caused some degree of confusion when it was administered in the group sessions. Residents frequently commented that they were having a hard time answering some of the questions for two reasons: they had not considered any other residences besides the one they were in, and leaving the organization was not really a reasonable option due to the buying or leasing arrangement. Another problem with the

questionnaire that caused confusion with both residents and employees was the reverse wording on items 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 15. Mowday et al. (1979) intended for the negatively-worded statements to prevent a response bias, but many participants complained about the items being confusing. The problem does not seem to have significantly impacted the mean score results, because scores would be lower if the six reverse items were answered in the wrong direction. A solution to this problem would be to use only the 9 positively-worded items in the short form of the questionnaire. Besides being more efficient and less confusing, the short form has been demonstrated as an acceptable substitute for the 15-item scale, with essentially the same internal consistency (Mowday et al., 1979).

A final limitation relates to the content analysis and its results. In preliminary phases of the procedure, the researcher was concerned about categorizing stories according to function because of the possibility that the five storytelling functions might not be mutually exclusive. The coding could have proven rather difficult if stories had not displayed a predominant function or if the definitions of the functions were unclear to coders. This potentiality was not realized, but the problem emerged with the coding for group references.

With several narratives, coders had a difficult time deciding whether the speaker was making a group reference or simply referring to an individual without meaning the group. For example, many employee stories were about resident behavior, but storytellers were often focusing more on an individual and his or her characteristics without making a general statement about a social group. If a speaker told a story about "one of the residents," the coder's tendency would be to classify the group reference, but it was

impossible to judge the exact intention of the speaker. Although intercoder reliabilities were relatively high for coding group references, many difficult coding decisions came up after the reliability sample had been completed. As a result, some coding decisions may have been too liberal in counting group references and some too conservative, which means some references may have gone unmarked. With such a large number of references, a few coding errors on this category would probably not alter the overall results, but future use of this methodology should take into account the difficulty of this coding process.

To summarize, this dissertation's limitations are the use of the convenience sample, problems with administering the OCQ, and the difficulty of coding group references. These considerations should not be overlooked when assessing the overall meaning of the results, but they do not appreciably decrease the contributions. The strengths of the dissertation and implications for future research are outlined in the following section.

#### Implications for Future Research

This dissertation makes a noteworthy contribution to the study of communication because of three strengths of the research. First, it adds to our understanding of the retirement center context as an organization of multiple groups. This unique context broadens current perspectives on defining the organization and its members. Second, it provides a needed bridge between social identity theory and organizational studies, as called for by DeWine and Daniels (1993). Finally, a strength of the dissertation is its treatment of narratives. The stories were collected as they were sequenced in conversation between peers, reasonably approximating a naturalistic context for organizational storytelling. In the analyses, the stories were not treated as simply artifacts of culture but

as strategic forms of discourse that recreate experience and construct identity (Langellier & Peterson, 1993).

While this dissertation addresses some of the gaps in the organizational storytelling and social identity literature, it also points to additional areas that need investigation. Four areas for future study are apparent now that this research has been concluded. The first area is the need for more research in the retirement center context. The quantitative findings in this analysis regarding organizational commitment were not statistically significant, but other avenues are available for the study of commitment in retirement centers. A wider, randomly selected sample in an individual organization would be a starting point in assessing potential differences between residents and employees. Further development of measurement techniques for residents' commitment is also warranted, given the problems noted above with administering the OCQ. Future research in this vein should examine differences in commitment levels between employees of different types of retirement centers. This researcher used three organizations whose missions were similar, but we may learn more about retirement center organizations by comparing the commitment of individuals in different health care levels of centers, centers with clients of varying socioeconomic status, and centers run as for-profit operations.

A second line of research suggested by this dissertation is further investigation of storytelling functions. Now that the classification of five functions has received some initial support, more stories need to be collected and analyzed from other organizational contexts. Future studies could examine the stories told in more traditional organizations to assess whether or not these five functions are valid. It would also be valuable to compare these results to other organizations with distinct social groups in the

membership, such as universities, hospitals, and organizations that include both volunteer and salaried workers. The typology should also be tested in family and small group contexts and in comparisons between different age cohorts.

Third, this dissertation suggests the need for continued development of methodologies for analyzing stories and the expression of social identity. The content analysis procedure was successful in this case, but it does have limitations when dealing with subjective data. Coders can only code what is manifest in the transcripts, and therefore, the procedure may be too regimented for all storytelling studies. Discourse analysis is a promising methodology for this study, but integrative research calls for the use of multiple methods. Many useful methods are in use that can be applied to this area of research, and other methodologies have yet to be developed.

Finally, future studies of storytelling should examine not only the function of organizational stories but also the subjects and themes of the stories. Potential results of such research would be increased understanding of a particular organization's culture and the provision of a context for interpreting other variables under consideration, such as identification. Thematic analysis would also permit storytelling theorists to assess the "uniqueness paradox" described in the literature review. It may be that many organizations have a rightful claim to uniqueness, related to their stories. However, it is also likely that some story themes are common to many organizations. In these three retirement centers, several narratives emerged that were similar in plot to stories from another center. Sometimes residents from different retirement centers would narrate the stories using the same words as a resident in another center, telling essentially the same

story. An investigation of story themes may help to develop a body of literature about story content.

To summarize these suggestions, future research should continue to investigate the retirement center organization as a context for communication study, further examine storytelling functions in other organizations, develop additional methodologies for analyzing stories and social identity, and analyze the content and themes of organizational stories.

### Summary

This dissertation has provided an extensive interdisciplinary review of storytelling literature, including the defining properties and functions of stories and the two predominant approaches to their study. The macro-level approach was shown to be insufficient for storytelling research because, among other limitations, it focuses so narrowly on the organization that it largely neglects the communicative act of storytelling. The micro-level approach was also deemed insufficient in that it typically analyzes the storytelling event without addressing its broader organizational impact. An integrative approach has been suggested as an alternative, and six research questions were targeted at examining the nature of storytelling functions, organizational commitment, and social identity in the retirement center context.

Based on data collected from 89 participants in three retirement centers from questionnaires and group interviews, results are summarized as follows:

1. Organizational stories from participants served the following functions: value expression, proof by example, sensemaking, system maintenance, and social prescription.



2. Resident and employee storytellers demonstrated differences in their uses of storytelling functions.
3. Participants' scores on the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire were high, relative to established norms, but did not differ significantly between residents and employees.
4. No significant relationship was found between OCQ score and the frequency of telling shared stories. However, the narratives of participants with high and low scores revealed their degree of identification with the organization.
5. Residents' and employees' stories showed evidence of identification with social groups and positioning of out-groups through the use of membership categorization devices.

### Conclusion

The problematic nature of studying stories in organizations is perhaps common to most topics in organizational communication. If we analyze symbolic processes at the interpersonal level, we may easily lose sight of the organizational context and its weight upon the interaction; yet there must be something different about interpersonal communication inside the organization, or our discipline is redundant. On the other hand, if we study organizational symbolic processes at too far a distance from interpersonal interaction, we are in danger of treating the organization as an entity that communicates and acts, forgetting about the storytellers and listmakers who continually create it.

An integrative approach to storytelling, and to organizational communication as a whole, requires us to take a stance between the individual and the organizational. Standing in the middle means never losing sight of either periphery and never considering

one without hypothesizing about the effect of the other. Organizational stories are always about the organization, but they are always told by storytellers. A complete consideration of organizational storytelling requires an approach that tells the story of both.

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>The term “narrative” is used synonymously with “story” in this dissertation (as in Mumby, 1987; Santino, 1978; Wood, 1992, to name a few), although many theories of narrative are not specifically about conversational stories.

<sup>2</sup>All other references to J. Martin are Joanne Martin. The two authors have the same initials.

<sup>3</sup>All names of organizations and participants have been changed to protect confidentiality.

**Appendix A**

**Institutional Review Board Approval and Informed Consent Statement**





# *The University of Oklahoma*

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

September 14, 1998

Ms. Penny S. Eubank  
2304 Lytal Lane  
Edmond OK 73013

SUBJECT: IRB-NC Review of Proposal

Dear Ms. Eubank:

The Institutional Review Board-Norman Campus has reviewed your proposal, "An Integrative Approach to Stories and Storytelling: The Expression of Organizational Commitment and Social Identity in Retirement Centers," under the University's expedited review procedures. The Board found that this research would not constitute a risk to participants beyond those of normal, everyday life, except in the area of privacy, which is adequately protected by the confidentiality procedures. Therefore, the Board has approved the use of human subjects in this research.

This approval is for a period of twelve months from this date, provided that the research procedures are not changed significantly from those described in your "Application for Approval of the Use of Humans Subjects" and attachments. Should you wish to deviate significantly from the described subject procedures, you must notify me and obtain prior approval from the Board for the changes.

At the end of the research, you must submit a short report describing your use of human subjects in the research and the results obtained. Should the research extend beyond 12 months, a progress report must be submitted with the request for re-approval, and a final report must be submitted at the end of the research.

Sincerely yours,

Karen M. Petry  
Administrative Officer  
Institutional Review Board-Norman Campus

KMP:pw  
FY98-231

Cc: Dr. E. Laurette Taylor, Chair, IRB  
Dr. Jon Nussbaum, Communication

Informed Consent

for the study titled

An Integrative Approach to Stories and Storytelling:  
The Expression of Organizational Commitment and Social Identity in Retirement Centers

This study is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma--Norman Campus. This informed consent is to be used by participants in the above named study.

The Principal Investigator and Person Responsible for this Project is:

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The purpose of this study is to examine how organizational commitment and identification with social groups is expressed through stories told about the organization. Participants in this study will complete a two-page questionnaire and participate in a group discussion about living in the retirement center. Participation will take approximately thirty-five minutes.

This study is completely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time. All information and records that identify participants will be kept confidential and secure. However, the researcher cannot guarantee that other members of the group will honor confidences. The possibility of gossip about topics discussed within the research group is a risk of participation in the study.

By agreeing to participate and signing this form, you do not waive any of your legal rights. If you have a problem, complaint, or concern about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Administration at (405)325-4757. For general questions about the study, contact me at the above phone number, or Dr. Jon F. Nussbaum, at the same address above or (405)325-3111.

I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate in this study.

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Signature

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Date

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

These questions will help the researcher classify the information provided in the other questionnaire and today's interview. All information will remain confidential and anonymous.

Please check the appropriate blank next to your answer to each question:

1. Are you a resident or an employee of this retirement center?

\_\_\_\_\_ Resident

\_\_\_\_\_ Employee: What is your position? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How long have you lived/worked at Terrace Inn? \_\_\_\_\_years \_\_\_\_\_months

3. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_years

4. What is your marital status?

\_\_\_\_\_ Currently married

\_\_\_\_\_ Currently not married (single, widowed, or divorced)

Appendix C

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) for Employees  
(adapted from Mowday et al., 1979)

Instructions

Listed below are a series of statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about their organization. With respect to your own feelings about Terrace Inn, please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking one of the five alternatives below each statement.\* As a reminder, all information for this study will be anonymous and confidential.

1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help Terrace Inn be successful.
2. I talk up Terrace Inn to my friends as a great organization to work for.
3. I feel very little loyalty to Terrace Inn.
4. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for Terrace Inn.
5. I find that my values and Terrace Inn's values are very similar.
6. I am proud to tell others that I am part of Terrace Inn.
7. I could just as well be working for a different organization as long as the type of work was similar.
8. Terrace Inn really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.
9. It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave Terrace Inn.
10. I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined.
11. There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely.
12. Often, I find it difficult to agree with Terrace Inn's policies on important matters relating to its employees.
13. I really care about the fate of this organization.

- 14. For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.
- 15. Deciding to work for Terrace Inn was a definite mistake on my part.

\*Responses to each item are measured on a 5-point scale with point anchors labeled as follows: (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) neither disagree nor agree; (4) agree; (5) strongly agree.

Note. Items 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 15 are negatively phrased and reverse scored.

Appendix D

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) for Residents  
(Adapted from Mowday et al., 1979)

Instructions

Listed below are a series of statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about their organization. With respect to your own feelings about Terrace Inn, please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking one of the five alternatives below each statement.\* As a reminder, all information for this study will be anonymous and confidential.

1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help Terrace Inn be successful.
2. I talk up Terrace Inn to my friends as a great organization to be part of.
3. I feel very little loyalty to Terrace Inn.
4. I would accept almost any type of housing assignment in order to keep living in Terrace Inn.
5. I find that my values and Terrace Inn's values are very similar.
6. I am proud to tell others that I am part of Terrace Inn.
7. I could just as well be living in a different place as long as the type of residence was similar.
8. Terrace Inn really inspires the very best in me as a tenant.
9. It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave Terrace Inn.
10. I am extremely glad that I chose Terrace Inn to live in over other residences I was considering at the time I joined.
11. There's not too much to be gained by staying here with this organization indefinitely.
12. Often, I find it difficult to agree with Terrace Inn's policies on important matters relating to its residents.
13. I really care about the fate of this organization.

- 14. For me this is the best of all possible organizations at which to live.
- 15. Deciding to live in Terrace Inn was a definite mistake on my part.

\*Responses to each item are measured on a 5-point scale with point anchors labeled as follows: (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) neither disagree nor agree; (4) agree; (5) strongly agree.

Note. Items 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 15 are negatively phrased and reverse scored.

Appendix E

Codesheet for Content Analysis of Stories

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Codesheet number
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Story number
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Retirement center location (1, 2, or 3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Storyteller code number
5. Membership status (check one)  

\_\_\_\_\_ (1) Resident  
\_\_\_\_\_ (2) Employee
6. Is the storyteller a character in the story?  

\_\_\_\_\_ (1) Yes  
\_\_\_\_\_ (2) No  
\_\_\_\_\_ (3) Cannot be determined
7. Is the storytelling a significantly collaborative effort of more than one speaker?  

\_\_\_\_\_ (1) Yes  
\_\_\_\_\_ (2) No (skip to question 9)
8. Has story already been coded on another codesheet?  

\_\_\_\_\_ (1) Yes (skip to question 11)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (2) No, this is the first codesheet.
9. Function of story: Choose the predominant one (see codebook for definitions and examples).  

\_\_\_\_\_ (1) Value expression  
\_\_\_\_\_ (2) Proof by example  
\_\_\_\_\_ (3) Sensemaking  
\_\_\_\_\_ (4) System maintenance  
\_\_\_\_\_ (5) Social prescription  
\_\_\_\_\_ (6) Cannot be determined  
\_\_\_\_\_ (7) Other function \_\_\_\_\_



10. Is the story a time-specific incident or a recurring incident?

- ☐ (1) Specific  
☐ (2) Recurring  
☐ (3) Cannot be determined

11. Does the speaker use apparent social identity markers?

- ☐ (1) Yes  
☐ (2) No (end coding for storytelling)

12. Complete this set of questions for each group referenced by this speaker in the story:

Group	Positive or negative reference			Is teller a member?		
	<u>positive</u>	<u>neutral</u>	<u>negative</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>unknown</u>
___(1) Retirement center -gen.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(2) Residents - general	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(3) Independent living residents	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(4) Assisted living residents	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(5) Employees - general	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(6) Employees - nonprof.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(7) Employees - prof. staff	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(8) Management	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(9) Owners/controllers	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(10) Older people	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(11) Younger people	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(12) Ill/disabled people	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(13) Nursing home residents	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(14) Nonmembers/outsideers	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(15) Family	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

<u>Group</u>	<u>Positive or negative reference</u>			<u>Is teller a member?</u>		
	<u>positive</u>	<u>neutral</u>	<u>negative</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>unknown</u>
___(16) Friends/social circle	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(17) Church/religious group	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(18) Ethnic group	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(19) Men	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(20) Women	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(21) Prospective residents	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(22) Type of group unknown	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
___(23) Other _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

\_\_\_13. Number of different groups referenced

## Appendix F

### CODEBOOK FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STORIES

All participant names and organization names have been changed to protect confidentiality. Any name that resembles the name of an actual resident or employee is purely coincidental.

1. Codesheet number: Each coder will use a different range of 3-digit codesheet numbers, either 100-399, 400-699, or 700-999. Each codesheet will be assigned its own number. The codesheets used in training will be numbers 1-7. Codesheets used for determining reliability begin with 100, 400, and 700, respectively. Continue consecutive numbering after all reliability codesheets are completed.
2. Story number: Between 1 and 371. Individual stories are marked on the transcript with consecutive numbers. Each coder has been randomly assigned a set of stories. In some instances, a story is broken into two segments with unrelated discourse between them. Code these cases as one story number. Some stories will be coded on more than one codesheet when the storytelling is a collaboration of more than one speaker.
3. Retirement center location: 1, 2, or 3. Each transcript begins with a notation of the retirement center number. Also, participant numbers begin with the retirement center code. For example, participant 321 is from Center 3, participant 246 is from Center 2, etc. Center 1 is Terrace Inn, Center 2 is Candlewick, and Center 3 is Eagleton.
4. Storyteller code number: Between 111 and 355. List the number of the speaker found in the left margin of the transcript. If a story is being told by more than one speaker in a collaborative effort, complete a codesheet for the predominant storyteller first. The predominant storyteller will do most of the talking and be responsible for most of the telling of the plot of the story. If unsure about which speaker is predominant, complete a codesheet first for the speaker who begins the story's plot.
5. Membership status: Either resident or employee. Each transcript begins with a notation of the group's makeup, whether resident or employee. See the "Guide to Participant Numbers."
6. Is the storyteller a character in the story? Answer "yes" if it is apparent that the speaker was a part of the story being told, either a major or minor character, not simply an observer of the event. Answer "no" if the speaker is telling the story about others, not self, or the speaker was an observer but not a participant in the action of the story. Answer "Cannot be determined" if there is not enough information in the story to make a judgment, but please use this category sparingly.
7. Is the storytelling a significantly collaborative effort? This questions determines whether or not the story will be coded on more than one codesheet. Answer "yes" if any of the following conditions are true:

- a. Besides the predominant speaker, another speaker adds details to the action of the story that were not provided by the predominant speaker.
- b. Besides the predominant speaker, another speaker makes reference to a social group (see questions 11 and 12).
- c. Besides the predominant speaker, another speaker is helping to tell the story in a significant way that goes beyond simply agreeing with the first speaker or asking questions about the story.

If you answer “yes,” complete an additional codesheet for each speaker who significantly collaborates in the storytelling. Answer “no” if none of the above conditions are met. Do not complete a codesheet for a speaker who does not meet at least one of the conditions.

- 8. Has the story already been coded? If you have already completed a codesheet based on the predominant speaker, answer “yes” and skip to question 11. If this is the first codesheet for the story and no other speakers have been coded, answer “no” and continue to question 9.
- 9. Function of story: The storytelling function represents what the storyteller accomplishes by telling a particular story. Choose only one function for each story. If a story seems to have more than one, choose the one function that seems predominant.
  - a. **Value expression:** This type of story is one that may express a shared value of an organization and/or its members. Some examples of values expressed in stories are as follows: caring for people, friendliness, a family feeling, putting in a hard day’s work, staying true to religious beliefs, accepting newcomers, etc.
  - b. **Proof by example:** This type of story is used to prove or illustrate some claim that has been made either by the speaker or another group member. An observation or statement may have been made, and the speaker offers the story as proof that such a statement could be true in this organization. For example, if speakers are discussing the community’s perceptions of their organization, one speaker might tell a story of being in the mall and having a salesperson compliment the organization. The story would be a form of proof of what community perceptions might be.
  - c. **Sensemaking:** Sensemaking stories help speakers organize past experience and give meaning to past events in personal or organizational life. A sensemaking story might be told to help make sense of such experiences as losing a loved one, leaving one’s home, or making a blunder of some kind. A sensemaking story helps to tie a past event to a present sense of what “life is like” in the organization. It may also help sequence and organize a chaotic event such as moving, getting married, planning an event, etc. A story that reflects more of one’s personal experience rather than the organization’s values or events may best fit this category.
  - d. **System maintenance:** This type of story reinforces the power, practices, and policies of an organization. The story may express explicit or unwritten rules of the organization or organizational customs sanctioned by management. Some

examples of system maintenance stories might be telling about how a policy was created, about the impact of management on community life, about community events sponsored by management, about union or association activities, or about the history or beginnings of an organization.

- e. **Social prescription:** A social prescription story tells how things are done in a particular group so the listener will know how to get along, fit in, or avoid making mistakes. The story may give advice on individual behavior or suggest desirable behavior for the organization. The story might show how failures or successes came about in the past and forecast what might happen if similar events should recur. The social prescription story helps listeners know what is expected of organizational members or the organization as a whole. Examples might be stories about breaking a rule and suffering the consequences, how new residents took initiative to make new friends, how someone changed a policy by voicing discontent, how someone saved money by changing their leasing agreement, or what a group of residents decided about making recommendations to management.
  - f. **Cannot be determined:** Use this category only if the story provides too little information to make a decision.
  - g. **Other:** Use the “other” category for a story which seems to have some other obvious purpose or function. Write what that function is as clearly and concisely as possible, using universal terms that might apply to many stories. For example, a function might be “presenting one’s perception of self to others” through a story, but not “showing how she had succeeded in her career.”
10. Time-specific or recurring incident: Determine whether the story is about a single event that has occurred or a recurring event that seems to happen frequently.
    - a. **Time-specific:** In a time-specific story, the speaker usually tells the events in past tense and includes details or a sequence of events that seems to have occurred only once.
    - b. **Recurring:** In a recurring story, the speaker may use present tense or include terms such as “always” or “usually.” The story recalls an actual event, but the storytelling indicates that the speaker is speaking more in general terms of something that has happened more than once.
    - c. **Cannot be determined:** Use this category only if the story provides too little information on the time context to make a decision.
  11. Does the speaker use social identity markers? A social identity marker is a reference by a speaker to social groups. Sometimes those references are explicit; for example, some speakers may refer to “residents,” “employees,” “staff,” “management,” “those in assisted living,” “the church,” or “the men here.” Many times the references are more subtle and use the pronouns, “we,” “they,” “us,” “them,” “our,” “their,” etc. Sometimes a speaker uses an adjective that describes a group when referring to a person. For example, a speaker may refer to “a German accountant,” when being German is seemingly not important to the story. If a speaker uses a term that refers to some social group, whether or not the speaker is a member, answer “Yes.”

If no references are made to any group of people, either explicitly or with the use of pronouns, answer “no.” If the speaker is focusing on a particular member of a group but no conclusions could be drawn about the group, answer “no.” If you are unsure whether or not a reference has been made, answer “no” because the reference evidently was not apparent. If you answer “no,” do not complete page 2 of the codesheet. Answer this question only for the speaker whose number was coded on the codesheet for question 4.

12. Groups referenced by the speaker: Answer this question only for the speaker whose number was coded on the codesheet for question 4. You may “check” as many groups as were referenced by the one speaker during the story. Check any group that was mentioned explicitly by the speaker and also any groups that were understood by the use of pronouns (see question 11). Be as accurate and complete as you can without going beyond the intention of the speaker. Not every reference to “we” or “they” implies a social group. If the speaker is focusing on a particular member of a group but no conclusions could be drawn about the group, do not mark that group. For example, a speaker may tell a story about a person who happens to be a minister but is not speaking about ministers or religious people as a group. For each group referenced, check the group name and answer the additional questions on positive/negative reference and teller’s membership.

a. Group names:

1. **Retirement center—general**: The speaker refers to the organization by name or uses terms such as “the people here” but does not designate specific groups within the retirement center.
2. **Residents—general**: The speaker refers to residents as a group but does not designate members of a certain living area.
3. **Independent living residents**: These are residents that live in their own apartments and do not require much assistance in daily living. At Terrace Inn (Center 1), all residents are independent living except for a few in D Wing. At Candlewick and Eagleton, independent living residents are only one group but live in a separate area from those in different levels of care. Most independent living residents move into the center some time after retirement while they are still active and relatively healthy. Some independent living residents may require health assistance for a time but still are considered independent living residents as long as they keep their apartments.
4. **Assisted living residents**: These are residents that are still able to carry on functions of daily life but may need health assistance for specific problems. Most are able to get around on their own, although some use a wheelchair, walker, or electric cart. Most centers expect these residents to spend the day out of bed and eat in the dining room. Some retirement centers use the assisted living area for independent living residents who are experiencing a temporary illness or are recovering after a hospital stay.
5. **Employees—general**: The speaker refers to people who work for the organization but does not designate which level of employee or distinguish a

- department. Use this category if the reference is not specific or if there is not enough information to make a judgment about the employee group.
6. **Employees—nonprofessional:** The nonprofessional staff includes dining hall workers, housekeepers, drivers, maintenance workers, and grounds keepers. These would typically be employees who do not require a specific degree or professional certification for their position. These employees might be more likely than professional staff to wear a uniform on the job.
  7. **Employees—professional staff:** The professional staff includes activities directors, nurses, social workers, marketing personnel, admissions coordinators, and accountants. These workers may require special certification or degrees for their jobs and probably dress professionally for their work. They are not likely to be in positions of making policy for the entire organization.
  8. **Management:** Management includes chief executive officers, center directors, associate and assistant directors. Employees at this level set policy and make decisions for the entire organization and are held responsible for its success or failure.
  9. **Owners/controllers:** Some retirement centers are owned or managed by a larger organization that operates more than one center. These owners are often in other cities and seldom interact one-on-one with residents.
  10. **Older people:** A speaker may refer to things that “old people” or “elderly people” do without specifically mentioning residents. The reference is usually to people over age 60. A speaker might also refer to his or her generation as a group.
  11. **Younger people:** This refers to any age groups not generally considered elderly. For example, it could be a reference to middle-aged people, adolescents, or young professionals.
  12. **Ill/disabled people:** This may be a reference to people who cannot perform important functions for themselves or who must be institutionalized because of an illness or disability. It might also refer to groups of people who are handicapped in some way or the terminally ill.
  13. **Nursing home residents:** This is a reference to people who live in nursing homes or a reference to an actual nursing home, if mentioned as a group or organization. A nursing home is a facility that offers health and personal assistance to elderly or disabled individuals who require professional care they may not be able to get by living in their own home or with family. Nursing home residents typically live in individual or shared rooms rather than apartments.
  14. **Nonmembers/outside:** This refers to groups of people whose only commonality may be that they do not work or live in the retirement center; for example, community members, visitors to the center, neighboring residents or businesses.
  15. **Family:** References to family might include immediate or extended family. A married couple would not be considered a social group.
  16. **Friends/social circle:** A speaker might reference a group of individuals he or she spends time with on a personal level. Some examples are clubs, those one eats with regularly, and neighbors one interacts with frequently. Those

referenced might be members of the organization or those one knows outside the organization.

17. **Church/religious group:** This is a reference to a religious denomination, specific church congregation, or another religious organization. It might also refer to groups of people who attend a particular religious event.
18. **Ethnic group:** This is a reference to a group with a common national heritage, common language, or a racial group.
19. **Men:** A speaker may refer to men as a group rather than distinguishing other characteristics they may have in common. For example, a story might describe how men were treated in a certain decision-making process, generalizing across the entire group.
20. **Women:** A speaker may refer to women as a group rather than distinguishing other characteristics they may have in common.
21. **Prospective residents:** This is a reference to those who are “shopping” for a retirement center, those who inquire about life there, and/or those taking tours of the facilities.
22. **Type of group unknown:** Use this category when it is apparent that the speaker is referring to a social group, but too little information is available to classify the group. Do not use this category when the group is known but simply does not fit the above classifications.
23. **Other:** Use this category for groups which are referenced by a speaker but are not listed above. Write the name of that group as clearly and accurately as possible, using universal terms when appropriate. For example, if a speaker refers to the Red Cross, write “volunteer organizations” rather than “the Red Cross.” If a speaker refers to Democrats, write “a political party or organization.” If a speaker treats residents who live upstairs as a different group than those who live downstairs, write “different residential areas of the center.”

b. Positive or negative reference:

For each group that is selected, determine whether the speaker’s reference was positive, negative, or neutral toward the group.

**Positive:** The speaker shows positive regard for the group and/or its members and is complimentary toward the group, its members, and/or actions. The story is one that sheds positive light on the group and/or its members. The event in the story is one to be held in high regard.

**Negative:** The speaker shows negative regard for the group and/or its members and is derogatory toward the group, its members, and/or actions. The story is one that sheds negative light on the group and/or its members. The event in the story is one that is to be criticized rather than complimented.

**Neutral:** The speaker shows neither positive nor negative regard for the group, its members, and or its actions. The event in the story would not be generally viewed as either positive nor negative. Use the “neutral” answer if unsure of whether the story is positive or negative.

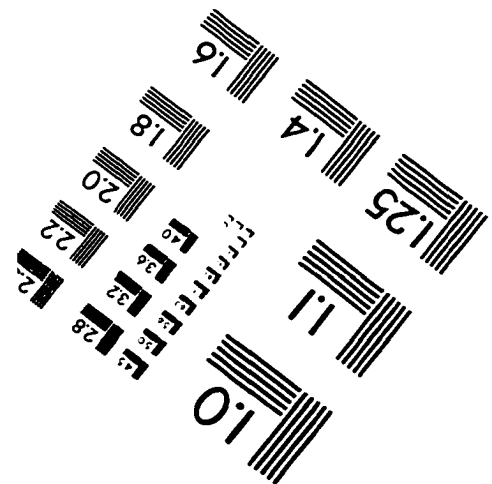
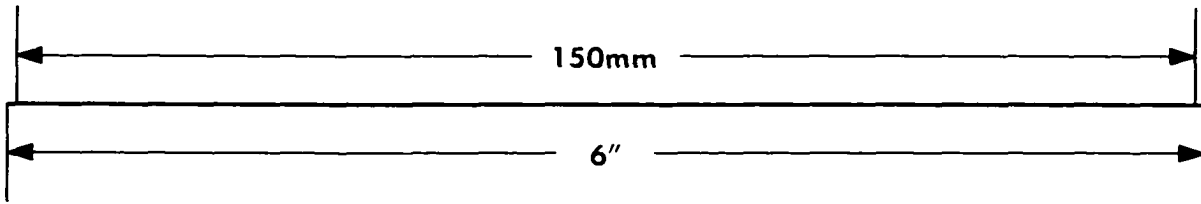
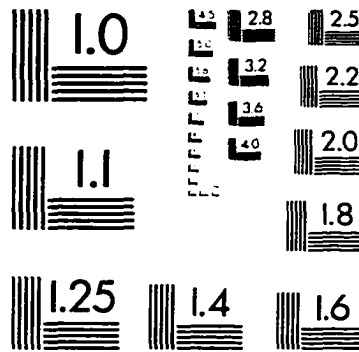
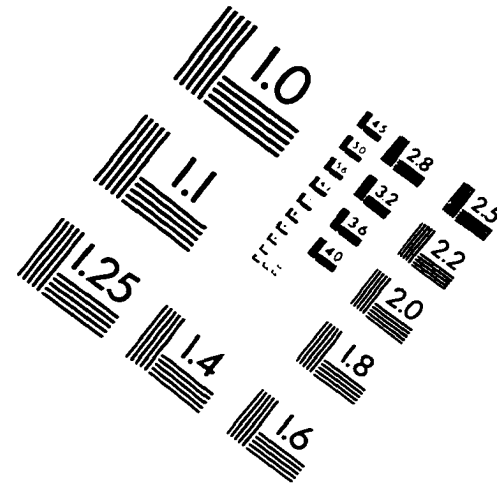
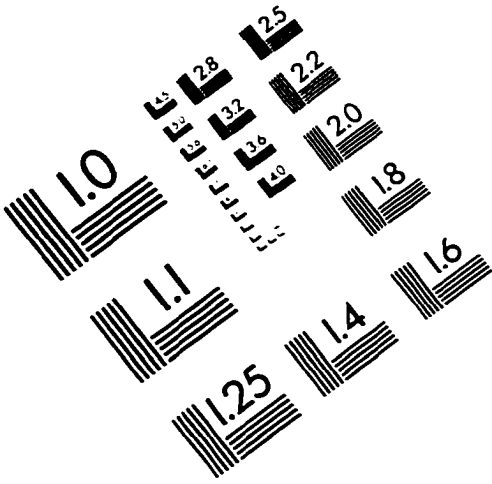


c. Is teller a member?

Answer “yes” if you can reasonably conclude that the speaker is a member of the referenced group. Answer “no” if you can reasonably conclude that the speaker is not a member of the referenced group. You may have to read other parts of a transcript to determine what the referents are for such terms as “we” or “they.” It may also help to refer to the “Guide to Participant Numbers” to determine the speaker’s position in the organization. Answer “unknown” if too little information is available to make a judgment.

13. Number of different groups referenced: Count how many groups are “checked” in question 12 and write that total. This total is for only one speaker, whose number is in question 4.

# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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