

In recent years, scholars of public administration, public policy, planning, and related fields have turned to *narrative inquiry* to enhance our understanding of complex social phenomena. Because of an increased interest in this subject, the editors asked Sonia M. Ospina and her colleagues at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University, to write a series of articles explaining narrative inquiry and its contributions to theoretical and methodological developments in the field. The following article by Jennifer Dodge, Sonia M. Ospina, and Erica Gabrielle Foldy is the second in a three-part series; the last installment will be published in the July/August issue of *PAR*. Consistent with *PAR* publication policy, these articles were evaluated by external reviewers. —LDT

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Integrating Rigor and Relevance in Public Administration Scholarship: The Contribution of Narrative Inquiry

A traditional view of scholarly quality defines rigor as the application of method and assumes an implicit connection with relevance. But as an applied field, public administration requires explicit attention to both rigor and relevance. Interpretive scholars' notions of rigor demand an explicit inclusion of relevance as an integral aspect of quality. As one form of interpretive research, narrative inquiry illuminates how this can be done. Appreciating this contribution requires a deeper knowledge of the logic of narrative inquiry, an acknowledgement of the diversity of narrative approaches, and attention to the implications for judging its quality. We use our story about community-based leadership research to develop and illustrate this argument.

The “narrative turn,” already influential in the social sciences, is now making its mark in applied fields such as public administration and public policy (Ospina and Dodge 2005; White 1999). This turn has opened up new pathways for research that focus on *interpreting* social events and understanding the intentions and meanings of social actors, rather than just explaining and predicting their behavior. In public administration, this research often focuses on the stories that people in public institutions tell about their work, illuminating diverse dimensions of public institutions and their administrative and policy problems.

In an earlier article (Ospina and Dodge 2005), we argued that narrative inquiry, as an interpretive approach, can strengthen research in public administration by simultaneously attending to high standards of quality and culti-

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vating authentic connectedness between academics and practitioners. In this article, we extend our argument by exploring the methodological issues associated with doing narrative research and appropriate standards of quality. We argue that narrative inquiry can produce quality scholarship, and therefore it can help public administration to flourish as a pluralistic community engaged in a broad range of inquiry to understand public issues. In the final article in this series, we will further explore the potential of narrative inquiry to strengthen connections between academics and practitioners.

The standards of quality that are commonly recognized in assessing research, such as validity and reliability, are not consistent with the logic of interpretive approaches such as narrative inquiry. Hence, interpretive scholars have developed standards that suit this mode's underlying assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge construction to judge the quality of their work (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Lincoln and Guba 1985, 2000; Miles and Huberman 1994). In this article, we suggest that narrative inquiry's dual concern with rigor and relevance can contribute to the broader debate about high-quality scholarship in the field of public administration.

Early debates about quality in public administration research, which took place during the 1980s and early 1990s, suggested that interpretive forms of research do not meet positivist standards of rigor (Box 1992; Houston and Delevan 1990; Stallings and Ferris 1988; White 1999). Given the broader acceptance of interpretive approaches in the field, this debate has shifted to focus on the standards by which interpretive research—a distinct approach with its own logic—should be assessed (Lincoln and Guba 2000; Lowery and Evans 2004). Nonetheless, some of the earlier assumptions continue to permeate current conversations (Hill and Lynn 2004; Streib, Slotkin, and Rivera 2001).

The traditional definition of “rigor,” which assumes an automatic connection to relevance, is particularly problematic. Because public administration is an applied field, ensuring that findings are relevant for practice is not just a logical imperative, but a critical standard by which to judge its quality: In this sense, attending to rigor and relevance represents a unified challenge. The underlying assumption that they automatically go together undermines the need to explicitly clarify their relationship in the context of the quality discussion for both positivist and interpretivist public administration scholarship.

As a form of interpretivist research, narrative inquiry offers an approach to quality that is more explicit about how to attend to this dual task. Hence, it can make an important contribution to the field's aspiration toward a scholarship that addresses, as Pettigrew suggests, “the double hurdle of scholarly quality and relevance” (2001, S63). We

have confronted the challenges of this double hurdle in the context of our research practice by using narrative inquiry to study community leadership. We offer our insights to advance the conversation about quality, demonstrating how the assumptions and practices of narrative inquiry (and interpretivist approaches in general) address and help resolve them.

We set the stage by introducing our story, reviewing the concerns about scholarly quality in public administration, and briefly discussing the logic of narrative inquiry as interpretive research and the implications of assessing quality. We next map three approaches to narrative inquiry that influence scholars' research design and implementation choices, as well as the ways they address quality. Finally, following our approach in the first article, we use our story to engage an explicit discussion of the way we approached quality standards in our narrative inquiry, illustrating how we addressed both rigor and relevance in meaningful ways.

Back to Our Story

Our research aims to develop new insights about leadership. It is part of a larger program that supports community-based leaders who are engaged in social-change work across the United States. These leaders participate in a variety of activities during a two-year program, one of which is the research and documentation component under our direction. Our engagement with program participants offers us a unique opportunity to learn about successful leadership practices in communities doing social change. It also offers a unique social setting to design and implement research that simultaneously meets high standards of rigor, creates learning that resonates with both academics and practitioners, and engages program participants in ways they find productive and interesting.

These opportunities are directly connected to the nature of our inquiry. Our point of departure was existing theories of leadership that, although rich, are also problematic. Despite the literature's vastness and depth, there is a gap between what practitioners want and what scholars are producing in academic settings (Northouse 2003). Focusing on narrow contexts and populations, scholars are concerned mostly with testing hypotheses intended to refine and add to long lists of features and contingencies for what makes an ideal leader, rather than illuminating the nature of the work of leadership.

Influenced by the narrative turn and encouraged by pioneers who have proposed alternative approaches (Bennis and Biederman 1997; Burns 1978; Crosby 1999; Drath 2001; Fletcher 2002; Gardner 1995; Heifetz 1994; Huxham and Vangen 2000; Meindl 1995; Schein 1990), we chose a novel conceptual lens through which to build on leadership scholarship. This lens frames leadership as the col-

lective achievement of a group of people who are engaged together in action, that is, leadership as meaning making in communities of practice (Drath and Palus 1994).

This shift from traits and behaviors to collective meaning making in action invites a shift in inquiry from explanation to interpretation. This lens helps us to address the gap in leadership studies by focusing on the work that people do and the sense making associated with it. Putting practical knowledge center stage, we invited program participants to be our coresearchers—to do research *with* us, as opposed to thinking of them as subjects on whom the research is focused (Heron and Reason 2001).¹ Our stance, then, is co-inquiry.

Our methodological choices followed from this theoretical work. We used a multimethod design with three parallel streams of inquiry—ethnographic inquiry, cooperative inquiry, and narrative inquiry—to generate practice-grounded products that would help program participants learn something about their own practice, and would help to answer the guiding research question: *In what ways do communities that are trying to make social change engage in the work of leadership?* The theoretical insights and methodological tools of narrative inquiry took center stage in this design.

Following the life cycle of the leadership program, our research project includes five cycles of data collection and analysis, one per program cohort, with integration efforts across cohorts and methods as the program has unfolded. We used an open and grounded approach to data gathering for the first half of the research, largely drawing from the experience of program participants rather than applying predetermined theories. For the second half of the program, we have shifted to a more targeted approach to test and explore emerging thematic propositions derived from our early research, while staying open to new ideas with the incoming groups.²

To implement narrative inquiry, we designed in-depth group conversations with members of each organization and their communities. The purpose was to evoke stories about aspects of the work that are central to the pursuit of their missions. We transcribed the interviews and used them to create “analytic memos” that highlight the uniqueness of each organization’s work. We also used the transcripts to look for patterns across organizations, combining formal narrative analysis and traditional thematic analysis to develop propositions about social-change leadership.³

So far, we have used this material to craft distinct products to report our preliminary findings. From the memos we developed “leadership stories” about each organization that are designed for practitioners and draw largely from the voices of the program participants. These stories theorize about the forces and factors that make the work successful in each context, thereby offering readers a chance

to draw lessons from exemplars of leadership practice. From the cross-site analysis we are producing practitioner-friendly scholarly research products, sometimes coauthored with award recipients. These explicitly link empirical findings to existing theoretical conversations about leadership, and they privilege the voices and interpretations of core researchers from the university. This brief overview of our research story points to our deliberate attention to both the rigor and the relevance of our inquiry, an issue we will return to later.

Quality, Rigor, and Relevance in Public Administration Research

Academic research in applied fields such as public administration, policy science, and organization and management science operates at the intersection of basic and applied social science. Scholars build theory and develop knowledge to advance their field while addressing substantive problems of practice. For this reason, developing knowledge that is relevant to professionals happens at the margin, where the world of academe and the world of policy and management intersect (Huff 2000). Achieving a balance between these two intersections requires researchers to commit to what Hodgkinson, Herriot, and Anderson (2001) call “pragmatic science.” This is scholarship “simultaneously academically rigorous and engaged with the concerns of wider stakeholder groups” (S42). In other words, it successfully addresses two dimensions of scholarly quality: rigor and relevance.

As a starting point, *rigor* traditionally refers to the accurate and systematic application of theory and method. This ensures the research process conforms to a research community’s public standards and agreements about the appropriate ways to create knowledge (Lincoln and Guba 2000). *Relevance* refers to the potential of research (questions and findings) to enable practitioners “to make informed choices about important practical problems and to implement solutions to them effectively” (AOM 2004). It also refers to the extent to which research addresses the challenges that practitioners face in their work and whether the questions and findings resonate with practitioners’ experience, shedding new light on existing problems in ways that are actionable (Argyris, Putnam, and Smith 1985; Hummel 1991; White 1999).

Several stakeholder groups in public administration have expressed concern about research quality and the aspirations of pragmatic science. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the debates included a subtext about the legitimacy of interpretive modes of inquiry (for critiques of this subtext, see Box 1992; White 1986). As interpretive approaches became more widely accepted with the narrative turn, the debate shifted to ask questions about how to as-

sess its quality (Balfour and Mesaros 1994; Lincoln and Guba 2000; Lowery and Evans 2004).

While applied scholars generally aspire to do pragmatic science, two sets of voices have emphasized different drivers of the field's development. Academy-driven scholars emphasize the importance of the scientific method as the key driver (Houston and Delevan 1990; McCurdy and Cleary 1984; Perry and Kraemer 1994; Stallings and Ferris 1988), while practice-driven scholars emphasize the connection to practice (Box 1992; Streib, Slotkin, and Rivera 2001; White 1986).⁴ Academy-driven scholars lament poor research quality in the field and the negative impact on its aspiration for developing cumulative science. They call for more theory-driven, hypothesis-testing studies. Some have explicitly called for a distance from practice to engage in theorizing about the "big questions" of the field, as opposed to the daily urgencies of practitioners, thus emphasizing rigor over relevance (Houston and Delevan 1990; Stallings and Ferris 1988). Practice-driven scholars are more concerned with relevance—because of the observed gap between research and practice—and its negative impact on the field's aspiration toward connectedness between practitioners and academic researchers. They defend practice-oriented research, as well as the legitimacy of action science methodologies. Some have argued that practitioners are a legitimate source of knowledge (Hummel 1991; Schmidt 1994).

The early debates included several implicit assumptions that undermined interpretivist approaches to research because of a misunderstanding of their nature. First, research was assumed to be relevant to practice as a consequence of a steadfast adherence to traditional standards of rigor. Second, only positivist research could claim the label "science," even though interpretivist approaches are firmly grounded in social science traditions. Finally, science was thought to be the only legitimate way to create knowledge. Together, these assumptions supported false splits between theory and practice, research and action, and one paradigm and another.

Narrative inquiry offers a way toward healing these splits. As one approach to interpretive research, our approach to narrative inquiry adopts an interpretivist notion of rigor that includes relevance as an explicit aspect of quality. Our experience with narrative inquiry helps to illuminate ways to balance the double hurdle of rigor and relevance. Appreciating this contribution requires deeper knowledge of the logic of narrative inquiry, an acknowledgment of its diverse approaches, and attention to the implications of judging its quality.

Interpretivism, Narrative Inquiry, and Scholarly Quality

Narrative inquiry has its roots in what philosophers of science call a "constructionist epistemology," a theory of knowledge that suggests we know the world not by objectively observing an external reality, but by constructing how we understand it with others (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Crotty 1998; Gergen 1985).⁵ Proponents make the assumption that "all reality, as meaningful reality, is socially constructed" (Crotty 1998, 54). By implication, narrative inquirers do not claim to document reality, but to capture individual *interpretations* of reality as well as shared social constructions among a given community.

Consistent with this theory of knowledge, narrative inquirers usually adopt an interpretivist rather than a positivist perspective.⁶ This means that inquiry is less about predicting or generalizing behavior, and more about interpreting intention and meaning in context (Lin 1998; Shank 2002). Quality assessments must start from this distinction.

Lin (1998) suggests the basic difference between positivist and interpretivist qualitative research lies in how each defines explanation. Positivist scholars attempt to identify and test causal relationships to predict, with reasonable accuracy, an outcome based on various inputs. Explanation and prediction are closely intertwined: An explanation is proven valid by its ability to predict. The importance of such work cannot be overstated. But this alone cannot account for the broad range of social phenomena that are relevant to the field of public administration. Interpretivist work, on the other hand, can help researchers to explore the mechanisms underlying the causal relationship: the how and the why behind the what (Lin 1998).

Interpretivist research may also illuminate meaning in ways that build, test, and elaborate theories of social phenomena that are not easily captured by positivist perspectives. The conceptual framework of our research on leadership, for example, directs attention to a new area of leadership research: how groups make meaning of leadership tasks and how this manifests in their work. This interpretive approach both complements *and* supplements traditional insights about leadership that are drawn from positivist studies (Northouse 2003).

Even though narrative inquiry shares a common foundation with other approaches to qualitative interpretivist research, it has its own features that need to be taken into account in order to assess its quality. What sets narrative inquiry apart is its grounding in narratives and stories that have a beginning, middle and end (or some sense of temporal progress), that help to organize events into coherent plots with some kind of resolution. Stories have an inherent integrity or coherence: They can be isolated as discrete

units that address some kind of individual or social action, and they reflect the context in which the action took place, including time and place (Riessman 2002). Attention to stories demands attention to the social actors who tell them. This feature offers a unique opportunity to encourage researchers to integrate concerns about rigor and relevance.

Independent of their positivist and interpretivist persuasion, researchers who are committed to pragmatic social science aspire to strengthen the connection between rigor and relevance. Narrative, as one form of interpretivist research, offers insights to pursue this aspiration. Its logic and methodological choices (and the standards that support them) reflect a dual understanding of rigor that goes beyond traditional notions—what Lincoln and Guba (2000) call *rigor as the application of method*—to include the rigor of interpretation. As we will explain, this dual notion of rigor requires that relevance become a more explicit criterion of quality.

Integrating Rigor and Relevance: Standards of Quality in Our Narrative Research

Traditionally, when researchers assess the quality of their work, they are mostly concerned with rigor as the application of method. For positivists, this means whether or not research activities can ensure some level of validity, reliability, and objectivity, so that one can claim to have accurately represented some aspect of reality. Interpretivists also honor rigor as the application of method. But they assume that no method can deliver an ultimate Truth, because no method guarantees an objective approximation of an external, independent reality. Instead, interpretivist researchers aspire to the faithful rendering of some truth (notice the lowercase *t*) from the perspective of socially situated actors. Reframing positivist standards, Lincoln and Guba (1985) develop credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to apply to interpretivist research.

In both modes of inquiry, rigor stresses that relevance *happens* as a result of the precise application of method. In other words, by diligently adhering to research activities and procedures that ensure the sound application of method, research becomes relevant because it accurately captures the Truth or the local truths that are meaningful for people in the world. This approach to rigor is necessary for good pragmatic scholarship, but it is limited because it makes a conceptual leap. The researcher hopes that capturing some part of reality accurately (positivist) or illuminating a part of it from the inside out (interpretivist) that will guarantee the products are useful or actionable. Rigor as the application of method offers a view of relevance that is self-referential: Researchers must assume they are asking the right questions, applying the right theory, and so on.

While we adopted several of these criteria, we also searched for others that addressed relevance more directly. Lincoln and Guba (2000) argue that the application of method must be paired with “defensible reasoning” about the process of interpretation. Researchers, they claim, must also ask whether their *interpretations* are rigorous, and whether these interpretations shed light on some worthy social problem. In this second connotation, rigor refers to an awareness of the types and levels of interpretation that take place in the inquiry, and that findings represent negotiated representations between researcher and researched.

Interpretive rigor takes the researcher outside the academy and into the world. It also motivates the researcher to value moral and aesthetic dimensions of inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 2000). Drawing from this notion of rigor, relevance is not just about capturing a truth or a reality, but pursuing worthwhile human purposes (Reason 2003) that are defined jointly by the research community and by their partners in the world, the subjects who face real and substantive problems. Social actors other than researchers take part in defining what is relevant for inquiry. This reasoning begs for additional standards to ensure a connection between rigor and relevance.

Codified qualitative research practice offers several quality standards that help researchers to become interpretively rigorous (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Miles and Huberman 1994; Reason and Bradbury 2001). Among those, democracy/participation and applicability/practicality encourage strategies that aim to merge inquiry with worthwhile human purposes and to challenge the divide between researchers and research subjects. Another quality standard from narrative inquiry, coherence (Riessman 2002), highlights the concern with representing experience in a way that keeps place and time connected to action. We will explore these standards in more depth using our story in another section of this article.

The Multiple Faces of Narrative Inquiry

In spite of common epistemological and theoretical foundations, narrative inquiry, like other forms of qualitative research, does not represent a uniform approach to social inquiry. Our understanding of the growing literature suggests three broad approaches that differ according to the relative weight scholars give to three foundational assumptions: First, because narratives convey meanings, narrative inquiry is concerned with understanding intentions, beliefs, values, and emotions that reflect situated social reality rather than an “objective reality” (Riessman 2002). Second, narratives carry practical knowledge that individuals have gained through their experience. This view emphasizes the formative value of stories and the importance of crafting and telling stories from experience (Bruner 1986). Third,

narratives are constitutive, meaning they are shaped by individuals for their own purposes, but at the same time, they are forces that shape human beings and help give meaning to the social worlds they inhabit (Gergen 1985).

The relative weights that researchers give to these assumptions help to translate narrative theory into specific methodological techniques for carrying out inquiry, with implications for different stages of research, from data collection to analysis and interpretation and even data presentation. Researchers make choices about how they translate these assumptions into a coherent research agenda based on their purposes and questions. A discussion of how narrativists approach quality requires an appreciation of this diversity because each approach has important implications for how the researcher addresses rigor and relevance.

Scholars who choose to emphasize the first assumption—that narratives convey meaning—highlight the role of narrative as a medium of expression. We call this approach *narrative as language*. Those who give primacy to the second assumption—that narrative is a form of understanding—focus on the role of narrative as a way of knowing. We label this approach *narrative as knowledge*. Finally, scholars who emphasize that narratives are constitutive focus on the symbolic role of narrative to suggest deeper structures and social relations that are unseen at first glance. We call this approach *narrative as metaphor*.

Giving more weight to narrative as language, as knowledge, or as metaphor produces very different applications of narrative inquiry. Table 1 summarizes the three approaches, the primary narrative assumption they emphasize, the implications for how people understand and experience the nature of the world, and the primary purpose of the research. These three approaches are ideal types, each highlighting one assumption over the others while still drawing on all three.

Narrative as Language

This approach to narrative inquiry gives priority to the assumption that narrative is a medium of expression, thus

highlighting the social nature of language and its function in making interaction possible. According to this view, people create narratives to convey meaning about their experience in the world. Because narratives convey meaning about lived experience, they are useful for studying how people understand a topic, such as leadership or organizational change. Narratives help researchers to understand actors' experience, or at least the version of experience the narrator chooses to convey. This way, narratives illuminate something about the constructed reality they reflect and about the experience and intentions of those engaged in it.

An important implication of this assumption is that people are *purposeful* social agents who *create and use* stories to communicate meaning to themselves and others or to put across their worldview (Feldman et al. 2002; Riessman 2002). The researcher's goal, then, is to understand the experience of some phenomenon from the perspective of those enacting it, taking the meanings and arguments embedded in the actors' words to illuminate it. Because language reflects people's understanding of reality, the researcher gets a glimpse of the social world as it is filtered by the meaning-making processes of those who experience it.

Scholars use interviews to elicit and collect stories that serve as windows to the informants' world. These are tape-recorded and transcribed to fully and accurately capture what was said, including nonverbal cues such as pauses. Analysis involves surfacing participants' sense making about the world. Systematic comparative analytical techniques ensure an appropriate distillation of the form, content, and structure of the analyzed stories, reflecting the qualitative orientation that looks for patterns of experience, often across stories and sites. The focus may be on the narrative of one or a few individuals (for example, in phenomenological studies in psychology) or, more common in public administration, on the narratives of multiple people with experience of the same phenomenon (see Rubin 1992 on budgetary processes; or Feldman and Skoldberg 2002 on organizational change). These scholars assume we

Table 1 Three Approaches to Narrative Inquiry

Narrative as	Primary assumption	Implications of primary assumption for the way people experience the world	Purpose of the inquiry	Methods
Language	Narrative is a medium of expression	People <i>create and use</i> stories to communicate meaning	To understand some phenomenon from the perspective of the person/people experiencing it	Systematic Comparative Looks for common patterns
Knowledge	Narrative is a way of knowing	People <i>think and know</i> through stories Narratives contain knowledge	To surface tacit knowledge or share theories in use To enhance practice or draw lessons from practice	Comprehensive Looks for and elaborates exemplars
Metaphor	Narrative is a symbol of deep structures of meaning	People <i>are born into or enter</i> (for example, are socialized into) existing stories or storied institutions	To unveil implicit shared meanings To offer alternative interpretations of accepted views	Deconstructive Looks for taken-for-granted structures of meaning

will learn something new about the nature of institutions by shifting our focus from structural or behavioral aspects of public institutions to the ways that actors make sense of their experience in governance.

The work of Martha Feldman and her colleagues (Feldman and Skoldberg 2002; Feldman et al. 2002) is a good example of this approach. By generating stories from open-ended interviews in two U.S. city administrations, Feldman and her colleagues provide an account of how administrators made sense of change processes, thus illuminating political decision making and organizational change. They used a special type of narrative analysis, rhetoric, which dissects the form and structure of the arguments made in the stories to uncover the meanings behind the organizational realities the narrators describe.

These scholars attend to rigor by engaging in a systematic, comparative analysis process that does not look for exemplars, but for frequently recurring patterns across individuals and contexts. They address relevance by grounding their inquiry in the experience of people with a direct connection to the topic at hand. Any insights the researcher may develop speak directly to that experience, even if they represent a critique of it.

Narrative as Knowledge

This approach also privileges peoples' interpretations of their experiences, but it focuses on the immediate, practical use of experience. While narrative as language gives weight to the purposeful communication of meaning, this approach prioritizes the assumption that narrative is *a way of knowing*: People use stories to draw knowledge explicitly from their lived experience. This view emphasizes the potential of storytelling to generate understanding and individuals' ability to find practical learning through stories (White 1999).⁷

Arguing that we construct the world through narrative, Bruner (1986) describes storytelling as one of two distinct and complementary ways to order experience. In contrast to logical proof, tight analysis, argumentation, and hypothesis-driven discovery, the narrative mode, Bruner argues, focuses on good stories that convince through lifelikeness. Similarly, Gardner (1995) explores how leaders use stories to reach or inspire audiences.

This approach has several common features as an ideal type, though connections to theoretical heritages produce different applications. First, narrative as knowledge draws attention to the learning that is embedded in stories about practice. It links experiential knowing, which is based on practice, to presentational knowing, which is based on narratives, and privileges them over propositional knowing, which is based on concepts (Heron and Reason 2001). Second, it assumes these forms of knowing produce insights *from which to draw generalizations* that can enhance

future practice (Hummel 1991; Schall 1997) and can be accessed through practitioner reflection (Schön 1991).

This view implies that people think and know through narratives. Hence, narrative inquiry is an excellent tool for learning about others' knowledge—and about our own. The immediate goal of this approach is to illuminate tacit knowledge or to share theories in use that are implied in the stories and embedded in the accounts of practice. The ultimate goal is to draw lessons that enhance practice.

Rather than doing a systematic, comparative analysis of bounded stories that are painstakingly dissected, in this approach, the analyst creates a comprehensive story of experience over time, highlighting extraordinary successes or failures or simply insights about practice. Explicit tools help to gain access to the insights embedded in day-to-day practices so they can be made available for others. These tools are reflected in various expressions of this approach in public administration.

One expression encourages reflective practitioners to tell their own story (Schall 1997; Schön 1991; Shalala 1998) or draws from written accounts of those reflections (Dobel 2003) as a way to build theory from practice. Another strand relies on action-oriented forms of inquiry such as action research, action learning, action science, and appreciative inquiry (Argyris, Putnam, and Smith 1985; Cooperrider and Whitney 2001; Reason and Bradbury 2001; White 1999). Through conversation, scholars help practitioners to understand and act on their own environment. For some, the inquiry focuses on problem identification and action planning, giving priority to practical reasoning over instrumental reasoning and seeking to integrate theory and practice (White 1999). For others, inquiry focuses on visioning and promotes generative moments that help practitioners reframe their work (Cooperrider and Whitney 2001).

Finally, another variation combines storytelling with observations and documentation to produce an overarching account with plot, characters, and chronology. The new narrative is neither a typical case study, nor a historical narrative, nor a traditional ethnographic account. It is the product of the analyst's sense-making process around stories told and heard over time, such as Behn's (1991) work on the implementation of large public management reform efforts and Levin and Sanger's (1994) accounts of effective public management.

Regardless of which expression it takes, this approach attends to rigor by faithfully portraying the details of an experience as an exemplar of some phenomena of interest, which can then lend important insights to others who are engaging in a similar practice or building theory. The connection to relevance is direct—the explicit purpose is to surface knowledge and draw lessons from practice, for practice.

Both narrative as language and narrative as knowledge

privilege people's interpretations of their immediate experience. The next approach attends to the influence of broader institutional contexts on people's ability to fully understand the complexities that inform their experience.

Narrative as Metaphor

Narrative as metaphor emphasizes the assumption that narratives are constitutive: People shape stories and, in turn, stories shape people. In this view, as notions of self, existence, and identity are named through language, they begin to feel real in their consequences. People take for granted that they are objective and preexisting realities. Over time, this process becomes automatic and usually unconscious (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Schwandt 1997).

Moreover, our subjective interpretations and the actions associated with them are influenced by historical and institutional contexts that already offer manufactured meanings, manifested in discourses (such as American individualism), in institutions (such as the justice or education system), or even in practices (such as double-entry book-keeping). People contribute to the (re)creation of these external "institutions of meaning" (Robichaud 2003), which then help to stabilize an "order of things." These institutions of meaning can be read as "expressive statements" (Yanow 1996) or as "texts" with a particular grammar, syntax, and structure that send normative messages and regulate social life, similar to what postmodernists call the "grand narratives" of a society.⁸ Narratives that reflect straightforward social practices can be viewed as metaphors that capture deeper meanings about the social order.⁹ For example, the way office space is assigned in an organization is a metaphor for its structures of power. Emphasizing narrative as metaphor helps the researcher to attain a deeper understanding of social practices, organizations, institutions, or social systems.

An important implication of these assumptions is that individuals are born into or enter (through socialization) existing stories or storied institutions. As human creations, these institutions gradually take on a life of their own and affect people without their awareness. Hence, the primary goals of the narrative-as-metaphor approach are to unveil the powerful but invisible meanings embedded in institutional life and to identify suppressed or competing narratives, thus proposing alternative interpretations.

In contrast to the micro perspective of the first two approaches to narrative, narrative as metaphor adds a macro perspective that links the immediate experience of social actors to broader institutions of meaning. The analyst chooses methods for critiquing and deconstructing texts rather than taking them at face value. This demands a constant interplay between meanings that are abstract and concrete, general and particular, evident and hidden. Analysts search for and reexamine claims to authority that are embedded in the

text, and they treat their own point of view as part of the reality under scrutiny (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000).

Scholars of public affairs often use this approach to explore the nature of politics and policy making (Shapiro 1988; Stone 1997; Yanow 1996). For example, Schram and Neisser (1997) view public policies as politically selected stories that narrate social relations among citizens, between citizens and the state, and among states. In management, Czarniawska and Gagliardi (2003) see narrative as a literary metaphor for organizational science. Stories (re)create organizational realities, and thus they are useful devices for understanding them. Czarniawska (1997) reconstructs three stories of public administration management in the Swedish public sector: "A New Budget and Accounting Routine in Big City," "Tax Reform," and "The Rehabilitation Program." She conducts an analysis of each story, looking for narrative metaphors such as paradoxes and interruptions. She links these to the systems of public personnel and communication and to institutional decentralization, computerization, and privatization.

The way that scholars who view narrative as metaphor attend to rigor depends on their theoretical heritage—for instance, a critical theorist and a postmodernist will make different choices—but they all understand the "text" as the reality under examination. Its interpretation demands constructing bridges between the analyst as reader and the text as reality, between the text and its producers, between the historical context and the present text, and so on (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000). Relevance in this approach is grounded in directing attention to unexpected, hidden, or alternative interpretations that change how we view ourselves.

Unpacking the three approaches to narrative inquiry clarifies the logic of this mode of interpretive research and illustrates its potential to illuminate the social dynamics of public institutions and to clarify the link between rigor and relevance in scholarly research. Sharing common theoretical foundations, scholars who use these approaches engage different methodological tools as they emphasize some assumptions over others. For example, Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) collect stories from street-level workers in five agencies across two states. Their study reflects all theoretical assumptions but emphasizes the first: They use stories to capture how street-level workers made sense of their work as public agents, thus taking advantage of an opportunity to see policy implementation from the bottom up.

We also see elements of the narrative-as-knowledge approach in Maynard-Moody and Musheno's insights about the "formative potential of story telling" (161) in helping street-level workers "deepen their moral reasoning and heighten moral responsibility" (163). Finally, and consistent with the view of narrative as metaphor, their contrast-

ing of two distinct narratives—citizen-agent and state-agent—help to unveil a hidden practice. Street-level workers use moral judgments about their clients to make decisions that often reproduce the broader dynamics of social exclusion. Drawing from these assumptions, their study illuminates an important piece of the implementation process, attending simultaneously to standards of rigor and relevance.

We have offered this classification as an analytical device to further clarify the theory and practice of narrative inquiry and to pursue the implications for a discussion of the standards of quality of our research. These approaches offer a rich set of resources to draw on in designing inquiry that meets the standards of rigor and relevance. They directly address rigor—whether through systematic, comprehensive, or deconstructive analysis—and they all attend to relevance, illuminating or challenging given interpretations of experience. We now turn to the story of how we have been able to use narrative inquiry to address the double hurdle of rigor and relevance in our research.

Our Integrated Approach

Our research, like other good narrative research, weaves the three approaches just described. The following assumptions stand out in our design: (1) The stories people tell about their experience with the work of leadership gives us access to the arguments, intentions, and meanings that support leadership (narrative as language); (2) practice is a legitimate source of knowledge from which to draw lessons about leadership, which can then be applied to other contexts (narrative as knowledge); (3) even though leaders may actively resist societal structures of power, those structures may influence their work, producing incongruence between discourse and practice (narrative as metaphor).

These assumptions have guided our methodological choices. Drawing on narrative as language, we used stories about the work as the primary source for exploring leadership practices. In-depth group “conversations” (Rubin and Rubin 1995) with all award recipients and their colleagues facilitated the flow of stories and storytelling. Similarly, to tap into the wisdom of participants’ tacit knowledge—so important to the narrative as knowledge approach—we focused the narrative research on key dimensions the participants identified as most important to their work. We then used these dimensions to develop loosely structured protocols with open-ended questions that encouraged the telling of “extended accounts” of experience (Riessman 2002, 246). Finally, drawing from narrative as metaphor, we asked about participants’ *work*, not about leadership per se, to avoid invoking mental models of leadership that may be embedded in broader institutions of meaning. Integrating elements from all of these ap-

Box 1 Excerpt, *From Constituents to Stakeholders: Building Organizational Ownership and Providing Opportunities to Lead* (Minieri et al. 2005)

Educate Those Impacted By the Issues: The Black AIDS Institute Informs and Activates a Base of Stakeholders¹⁰

“Okay, you’re here now. The fact that we dragged you in here is irrelevant. So how can we structure an approach for you to play a role in the resolution to this problem?”

Board Member, Black AIDS Institute

In the late 1990s, with AIDS tearing through the Black community, the Los Angeles-based Black AIDS Institute launched an ambitious plan to identify Black stakeholders, and to educate and create community-based leadership on HIV/AIDS issues.

With one in 160 Black women and one in 50 Black men diagnosed as HIV positive, Executive Director Phill Wilson is urgent: “We’re talking about saving our own lives.”

The Institute maintains that the source of inaction among its constituents has been lack of knowledge. It does not assume that information about HIV/AIDS is accessible to the Black community, so the Institute addresses critical gaps in knowledge. A cornerstone of its efforts is the African American HIV University, which trains 40 future leaders over a two-year period. The training includes five intensive sessions on everything from the biology and epidemiology of HIV/AIDS, to strategies for community and political action. Fellows bring this information back home through participating in internships between training sessions.

The Institute further educates the community by strategically enlisting the sororities, media outlets, health care agencies and others that already engage African Americans in large numbers. “These are our experiences, our organizations, our churches and our leaders. We are the people we must target,” Wilson says. In addition to working directly with the Black media, the Institute publishes a highly regarded newsletter, *Kujisource*, which circulates to over 20,000 readers. The newsletter includes not only profiles on “everyday heroes” working on or living with HIV/AIDS, but scientific articles and editorials on public policy as well.

The Institute offers no recriminations for past inaction and does not simply push people to add HIV/AIDS to an already full plate. It works with each group, from the smallest community organization to the largest association to help them, as an Institute director describes, “find out where they are in HIV/AIDS work and what they think we can do to help them with the work they are already doing.” For example, the Institute enabled Delta Sigma Theta, the nation’s largest African American sorority, to incorporate a three-session training on HIV/AIDS into their regular meetings, as the sorority did not think people would come to three special sessions.

Wilson says, “It would clearly have backfired on us if we had said, ‘No, you have to have three training sessions and that’s that.’ Instead, you back away and you say, Okay, how can we help you be successful?’ because at the end of the day, that’s what it’s all about.”

proaches, we combined formal narrative analysis, thematic coding, and action-oriented techniques.

The rigorous interweaving of the key narrative assumptions has also helped us to keep the concern for relevance alive in our attention. An excerpt from one of our research products (a research booklet), geared toward practitioner audiences, illustrates this integration. This narrative describes how members of a social-change organization work to gain buy-in from the community they intend to serve, thus managing the leadership challenge of generating commitment for the work.

Applying Standards of Quality in Narrative Inquiry

In this final section, we apply the standards of quality developed earlier to our research project on leadership. The

application of these standards shows how we were able to use narrative inquiry to connect rigor and relevance directly and to address the challenge of doing high-quality research with practical value. We embed this discussion in a broader conversation about the quality of interpretive research, identifying the dual concern with rigor as the application of method and as interpretation.

Reframing Traditional Standards: Toward Credibility, Dependability, and Confirmability

Qualitative interpretive scholars have reframed traditional, positivist standards of quality, such as validity and reliability, to suit the logic of interpretivist approaches. These standards help to ensure research quality in ways that legitimize interpretive research and give account to the larger research community (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Miles and Huberman 1994).

In positivist research, “validity” refers to the goal of getting as close as possible to the essence of reality. But as narrative inquirers, we make no claim to capturing or reflecting the exact record of what has taken place, only a person’s or community’s understanding of (their) reality. Rather than testing the validity of a particular construct or set of relationships against an objective reality, we assess their authenticity—to the individual or to community involved, as well as to other readers. Does the narrative ring true for both internal and external audiences (Miles and Huberman 1994)?

Validity is thus replaced with *credibility* as a test of the plausibility of argumentation (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Credibility is ensured through the extensive documentation of findings and conclusions. Writing “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973) and backing up claims with unprocessed (raw) data, for example, helps to establish that the researcher is deeply familiar with the research sites and participants. It is also ensured by carefully distinguishing data from analysis and informants’ voices from the researcher’s. These perspectives become interwoven to produce a negotiated interpretation of the informants’ world, but they remain distinct.

Triangulation also enhances credibility. In our case, we triangulated data sources by generating field notes and by collecting organization documents in addition to interview data; we triangulated methods by complementing narrative inquiry with ethnography and cooperative inquiry projects. Because we wanted to draw conclusions about a collectivity, we also relied on multiple informants rather than on the leader as a single informant. We conducted interviews in the form of group conversations to develop integrated, multifaceted stories that reflect the collective nature of leadership. The excerpt from “From Constituents to Stakeholders” (see box 1), for example, offers a portrait of one aspect of leadership at the Black AIDS In-

stitute that draws on these multiple sources.

Following action-oriented approaches to narrative, we also asked, credible to whom? Based on our assumptions and purposes, our products should resonate, on some level, with practitioners’ experience, even if they reframe, abstract, or even challenge their understanding (Riessman 2002).

We also reconsidered reliability. Traditionally, this standard ensures the same conditions will yield the same results, independent of who does the research. Yet, the notion of test/retest reliability is almost impossible in real-world settings. Some qualitative researchers argue that a second researcher with the same theoretical perspective as the first, using the same rules for data collection and analysis, and assessing a similar set of conditions, should come up with a similar theoretical explanation (Strauss and Corbin 1998). We do not make such a claim. In fact, we presume that narratives *will* change from telling to retelling because they are heavily context dependent and sensitive to place, time, and even participation in the telling (Riessman 2002).

Dependability and *confirmability* represent the interpretivist counterpoint to reliability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). As narrative inquirers, we ask whether the research process and its products can be judged as fair, unbiased, or coherent by people who are external to the process. Key to this criterion is the transparency of methods, which means clarifying “*how* we claim to know *what* we know” (Altheide and Johnson 1994, 496; italics in original) by documenting data-collection and analysis methods. Further, we try to establish trustworthiness by explaining how we have addressed issues such as biases that result from self-presentation, gaining access to the research site, and methods of documentation.

Reflexivity, the process by which researchers situate themselves in the research context (Behar 1996), encourages us to pay particular attention to the way our identity and experience may influence the research context and our interpretations. To demonstrate the dependability of our research, we are transparent not only about our methods, but also about our personal contribution to the research context, which can be thought of as “interaction effects.” Because the research process arises from “interactions among context, researcher, methods, setting and actors” (Altheide and Johnson 1994, 489), we explicitly situate ourselves by race, gender, class, religion, family background, and personal experience, assuming these factors will influence our interpretations.

Like other interpretivist scholars, we assume that by rigorously applying our methods in these ways, we will generate relevant results because they accurately capture participants’ understanding of their world and include sound *re*interpretations that we provide (through the application of theory or personal insight). Our results can be described

as relevant, then, insofar as they accurately reflect our coresearchers' interpretations. We argue, however, this is not the same as being interpretively rigorous. For this, we need to pay more attention to moral and aesthetic issues: Is the inquiry attending to worthwhile human purposes? By whose definition?

Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest these original criteria remain useful because they "ensure that such issues as prolonged engagement and persistent observation are attended to with some seriousness" (178). Their more recent work on quality suggests, however, that these criteria do not fully or explicitly reflect the logic of "new paradigm" approaches to inquiry (constructivist, participatory, and critical approaches) and their concerns with interpretive rigor (Lincoln and Guba 2000). For this side of rigor, new standards are needed.

Emerging Standards for Interpretation

The most vigorous debates about quality in new paradigms address more serious questions such as, "Are we *interpretively* rigorous? Can our co-created constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon?" (Lincoln and Guba 2000, 179; italics in original). Schwandt (1997), for example, "resituates social inquiry ... within a framework that transforms professional social inquiry into a form of practical philosophy, characterized by 'aesthetic, prudential and moral considerations as well as more conventional ones'" (cited in Lincoln and Guba 2000, 179). While conventional considerations reflect the more traditional criteria just discussed, we see in Schwandt's practical philosophy an opportunity to adopt criteria that address interpretive rigor and fit more naturally with narrative approaches that explicitly address moral and aesthetic issues.

Participatory paradigms, for example, suggest that democracy/participation and practicality/application are important criteria. With respect to *democracy/participation*, the action-research dimension of our approach to narrative suggests minimizing (or eliminating altogether) the distinction between the researcher and the researched; participants are "coresearchers" (Heron and Reason 2001). This position is distinct from the objective distance that positivist researchers maintain. We shared in the process of creating meaning and understanding with the research participants as we strove for consistency between the espoused goals of the research and the enacted research practice. We engaged some coresearchers in every stage of the research process, from identifying critical themes for data collection, reflecting with us during analysis, revising our interpretations and presentations of the findings, and even creating a plan for disseminating practitioner-friendly research products.

With respect to *practicality/application*, we designed the research process and its products to be of practical use, so they would help practitioners to develop new insights, act differently, and even feel a new sense of power (Reason and Bradbury 2001). This criterion has to do with what Reason (2003) calls "social relevance," or pursuing worthwhile purposes. We made a distinction between the usefulness of the research process—what we call *practicality*—and the usefulness of the research products for various audiences. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), we call this second criterion *application* because it has to do with the extent to which practitioners apply research products to their practice.

We intentionally created research processes that would provide reflective and generative spaces for co-inquirers. Inspired by appreciative-inquiry approaches, we encouraged participants to talk about the forces and factors that make their work successful (Cooperrider and Whitney 2001), resulting in materials for practitioner audiences, such as the excerpt that highlights successful strategies for generating commitment among constituents.

Finally, the standard of *coherence* highlights the distinct contribution of narrative inquiry. In data collection, we asked participants to tell stories about their work to illustrate underlying assumptions and implicit practices that could be difficult to talk about in the abstract. We also avoided coding "line by line" (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 57), instead looking for complete narratives with a beginning, middle, and end, or partial narratives grounded in context to keep place and time connected to action. Coding by narratives means identifying a unit in which context and action are fully intertwined, with inherent integrity. Highlighting the importance of interpretive rigor, Riessman notes, "Precisely because they are essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents' ways of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished" (2002, 220).

In our analysis, we were able to tap into the meanings that research participants gave to the critical concerns they face in their organizations. This information became the building blocks for stories and theories about social-change leadership. As the Black AIDS Institute story illustrates, we hope we have found "a social inquiry that 'generate[s] knowledge that complements or supplements rather than displac[es] lay probing of social problems'" (Schwandt 1997).

With respect to relevance, interpretive rigor indicates a greater connection to research participants. In our project, we have been successful in creating a research agenda that reflects the concerns of the community; participants have commented on the usefulness of the research process for

taking the time to collectively reflect on their work and the products for documenting and sharing it. The practical implication of this thinking, in the context of public administration research, is that narrative research can be more directly translated into policy or management insight when it attends to both methodological and interpretive rigor. Only this guarantees the findings will likely resonate with the way people think about the world (Roe 1994), will more directly reflect their concerns and problems, and will aim toward some resolution of them.¹¹

Conclusion

Schön (1991) argues there is only a dilemma between rigor and relevance if we downplay the role of practice and privilege technical rationality as the only legitimate source of knowledge. Whittington, Pettigrew, and Thomas (2001) add that a “greater sensitivity towards practical complexity will prompt a more comprehensive notion of rigor” (cited in Pettigrew 2001, S67). These views integrate the dual-quality criteria of rigor and relevance rather than treating them as mechanically linked, oppositional, or uncoupled. Following the lead of interpretive notions of quality, we go further, suggesting that attending more explicitly to relevance as a key dimension of quality can also help to increase the rigor of research. We believe this reasoning applies equally to interpretivist and positivist scholarly research.

In this article, we have used our experience with narrative inquiry—one form of interpretive research—to illustrate the potential of this mode of inquiry to help researchers engage practitioners’ concerns while ensuring theoretical significance and rigor in their research. We do not mean to suggest that interpretive approaches are the only way to integrate these concerns. Instead, we offer an examination of narrative inquiry—its theoretical assumptions, methodological techniques, and standards of quality—as an invitation to imagine a scholarship that explicitly integrates rigor and relevance. Furthermore, making narrative inquiry more broadly available and known can deepen our understanding of what it means in practice to integrate rigor and relevance in one research methodology.

Traditional ways of thinking about relevance assume the sound application of methods is sufficient to produce useful and applicable research. “New paradigm” scholars who are concerned with quality challenge this notion by suggesting a second form of rigor with its own implications for relevance. *Interpretive rigor* goes beyond the sound application of method to focus on moral and aesthetic dimensions of scholarly quality. It pushes researchers to engage strategies that directly contribute to worthwhile human purposes, not only from their own perspective, but from the perspectives of other social actors involved in the

research. Applying this notion of rigor requires adopting criteria of quality that more explicitly address relevance.

While unpacking the concept of rigor, we have addressed relevance narrowly in this article, exclusively as one aspect of quality. We have not considered, for example, the extent to which interpretive research helps to address the big questions of public administration, an important dimension of the quality debate in the field that is directly connected to the issues we explore here. Pursuing this line of inquiry would demand, for example, that we pay attention to the nature of the relationship between theory and practice in the context of knowledge development. Our final article in this series will address relevance in this broader sense. We will do so by looking more directly at the connections between researchers and practitioners in public administration and how they might collaboratively engage in research to build theory.

We end with a reflection on the particular concern with high standards for interpretive research, given its growing legitimacy in the field. Lowery and Evans (2004) view the proliferation of standards for interpretive research as a problem of quality, and they hope for a convergence of standards to reflect a unified interpretivist science in the field. We propose that, instead, this plurality may reflect a healthy diversity of theoretical assumptions and purposes within interpretive research (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Lincoln and Guba 2000). If this is so, addressing quality may require us to make explicit, consistent, and transparent choices about the appropriate standards that honor the theoretical assumptions and purposes of the research project, independent of orientation (Reason 2003).

We hope we have demonstrated that a fruitful conversation about quality in public administration research requires, first, a deeper understanding of the nature and logic of different modes of inquiry and, second, an acknowledgment of the diversity of interpretive research. Given its internal logic and the variety in theoretical assumptions and purposes of interpretive research, it is not possible to adopt one particular approach to quality, as is the case in positivist research. The criteria that each research enterprise adopts must reflect its own internal logic, the weights the researcher assigns to various underlying assumptions, and the implications of these preferences and choices for methodology. In our particular case, this has meant designing research activities that would help our research to be credible, confirmable, practical, coherent, and participatory. The point, of course, is not to create new criteria for every project, but to draw from the well-developed discussion of quality that already exists for interpretive research and to make the choices explicit, consistent, and transparent throughout the research process.

Narrative inquiry and other interpretivist approaches can offer an important contribution to the flourishing of the

research community in public administration. As the field continues to recognize the legitimacy of different modes of inquiry, and as scholars and practitioners become more familiar with their logic, both audiences will be in a better place to address directly—and perhaps collaboratively—the challenge of doing high-quality research that has practical value.

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Notes

1. Narrativists such as Clandinin and Connelley (2000) and Herda (1999) argue that even when there is no invitation to do coresearch, participants in narrative-inquiry studies are always part of a conversation rather than removed subjects of study. Hence, narrative inquiry is participatory by nature. We merely push this further to engage participants in other aspects of the research.
2. So far, we have engaged 57 organizations and 99 leaders; we expect to engage 40 additional organizations and 60 leaders.
3. We relied on stories, or narrative segments, “that illustrate through exemplar” (Feldman et al. 2002, 8; see also Mishler 1990), but we emphasized thematic relevance over the structure of stories.
4. See the excellent overview of the debate and a brilliant critique of its original narrow focus in Box (1992). An excellent compilation of articles reflecting both sides of the debate can be found in White and Adams (1994). For a more recent summary of the debate, see Streib, Slotkin, and Rivera (2001).
5. Its roots go back to the work of classical thinkers such as Weber and Simmel and continue with several contemporary schools of thought: Blummer and Goffman’s symbolic interactionism; Schutz’s phenomenology; critical theorists such as Gadamer and postmodernists like Foucault (Kivisto 2003); and social constructionists such as Berger and Luckmann (1966).
6. There are some exceptions (Abbott 1992).
7. Case studies of the curricula of public affairs schools, appreciated for their considerable pedagogical value, offer an intuitive grasp of the underlying logic of this approach.
8. In addition to postmodernism, this approach also draws on philosophical traditions such as hermeneutics, critical theory, and poststructuralism.
9. A metaphor is “a figure of speech containing an implied comparison, in which a meaning ordinarily and primarily used for one thing is applied to another” (Neufeldt and Guralnik 1997, 852).
10. This example draws on both the leadership story of the Black AIDS Institute and unpublished research notes.
11. We thank an anonymous reviewer who helped us to see this connection.

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