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Using Literary Ethnography to Explore the Maltreatment of Vulnerable

Populations: An Examination of Verbal Neglect and Abuse in Nursing Homes

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Abstract

Accessing and examining the social worlds of certain vulnerable populations can be highly problematic. This is especially true when they are located in institutional settings with agents of control skeptical of researchers from the outside coming in and observing behavior. When gatekeepers block access and a researcher wants to examine a delicate topic, one ethical, highly feasible way to paint an interpretive picture of everyday life for vulnerable populations involves the use of a literary ethnography. With data from research on the verbal neglect and abuse of elders in for-profit and nonprofit United States nursing homes, this paper details the six-stages of a literary ethnography. Following a tradition of qualitative document analysis, it includes a discussion of identifying sources, reading and interpreting the documents, identifying textual themes, classifying textual themes, developing a set of analytic constructs, and rereading documents for contextual confirmation. The paper concludes with a discussion of literary ethnography weaknesses and directions for future applications.

Key Words: Vulnerable Populations, Literary Ethnography, Nursing Home Abuse

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Populations: An Examination of Verbal Neglect and Abuse in Nursing Homes

A vulnerable population is a group of people a resarcher wants to study that has limited resources and is at risk for encountering a lowered level of health status (Flaskerud & Winslow, 1998). Accessing and examining the social worlds of certain vulnerable populations, such as nursing home residents, can be highly problematic. This is especially true when they are located in institutional settings with agents of control skeptical of researchers from the outside coming in and observing behavior. When gatekeepers block access and a researcher wants to examine a delicate topic, one ethical, highly feasible way to paint an interpretive picture of everyday life for vulnerable populations involves the use of a literary ethnography.

Family members care for a majority of older Americans. However, the United States does have nearly 1.5 million of its population aged 65 and over in nursing homes. Often times, residents in these facilities have a temporary term of stay. Nearly 33% of elderly men and 50% of older women spend at least some time in a nursing home before they die. This type of resident is typically there to recover from a temporary health problem. Others, such as those with serious physical or mental debilitations, stay for longer periods. Many of these residents are 85 years of age or older (Statistical Abstract, 2007).

U.S. nursing homes are notoriously associated with stories of neglect and abuse. Congressional studies find many facilities characterized with bedsore ridden, dehydrated, and malnourished residents. In addition, reports indicate facilities struggle to maintain staff levels adequate to provide quality care (DeFrancis, 2002; Pear, 2002). Regardless,

not all nursing homes are bad. Through the years, an argument has existed that nonprofit facilities are better than for-profit facilities (for a few examples see Elwell, 1984; Fottler, Smith, & James, 1981; Lee, 1984). However, there are studies that indicate for-profit nursing homes have levels of care that are equal, if not superior to nonprofit facilities (see Holmberg & Anderson, 1968; Gottesman, 1974; Winn, 1974).

This paper uses structural ritualization theory to look at the differences between verbal neglect and abuse in for-profit and nonprofit nursing homes using literary ethnography techniques. It focuses on several research questions. Are there differences in verbal neglect and abuse depending on nursing home ownership? What types of verbal neglect and abuse exist in nursing homes? What are some of the causes of verbal abuse and neglect in nursing homes? Though these questions guide this work, one of the paper's main goals is to help readers understand how they can use a literary ethnography to study vulnerable populations and controversial topics like nursing home abuse and neglect.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This research uses a sociological perspective known as structural ritualization theory (SRT). SRT views ritualized symbolic practices (RSPs) as an essential aspect of social interaction. RSPs are stable actions that shape people's thought patterns and structure social environments. Therefore, RSPs involve repetitive actions that take on and express symbolic meaning (Knottnerus, 1997).

Four factors involving RSPs play a part in facilitating social structure - repetitiveness, salience, homologousness, and resources. Repetitiveness involves the number of times people perform RSPs in a specific milieu. Salience involves whether or

not actors in a designated environment view a RSP as highly important.

Homologousness relates to the similarity between actions with symbolic meaning.

Resources include any material or nonmaterial means actors need to participate in RSPs.

With the theory, rank is also a prominent concept. An identified RSP ranks above others

when, based on the previously mentioned factors, it is repeated often, is visible, is similar

to other RSPs, and people have the necessary resources to engage in it. The higher the

rank of the RSP, the more likely it will shape people's cognitive frameworks and set the

tone for behavior in a specific context (Knottnerus, 1997).

Many studies support SRT. They include research on 19th century French elite

schools (Knottnerus & Van de Poel Knottnerus, 1999; Van de Poel-Knottnerus &

Knottnerus, 2002), slave societies (Knottnerus, 1999), experimental task groups (Sell,

Knottnerus, Ellison, & Mundt, 2000), an ancient militaristic social system (Knottnerus &

Berry, 2002), golf (Varner & Knottnerus, 2002), Chinese American ethnic groups (Guan

& Knottnerus, 1999), and organizational deviance (Knottnerus, Ulsperger, Cummins, &

Osteen, 2006).

Literary Ethnographies and Vulnerable Population Research

In the area of content analysis, there is a tradition of using literary records to

analyze social realities (see Allport, 1942; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Denzin, 1978; Geertz,

1973; Glassner & Corzine, 1982; Griswold, 1992; Lowenthal, 1986; Thomas &

Znaniecki, 1918; White, 1986). Some call it narrative analysis (Manning & Cullum-

Swan, 1994). Others call it document analysis or narratology (Bailey, 1978; Marshall &

Rossman, 1995). Analysts in qualitative organizational studies use the term template

analysis (King, 1998). Regardless, they all imply that the ethnographic study of literature is a suitable research method.

Work on literary ethnographies indicates novels, short stories, and plays, while being fictitious in nature, represent material culture. In addition, biographies, autobiographies, and research monographs, being forms of nonfiction, possibly come closer to versions of reality. Commentary on ethnographic methodology argues that the interpretation of literary evidence yields plentiful data for qualitative analysis because it provides valid themes for studying actor experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Similar to any basic content analysis, literary ethnographies are useful for four specific types of research problems. First, they are helpful when the researcher needs to deal with a large volume of text. Second, they are beneficial when a researcher needs to ethically study a topic at a great distance. In other words, techniques involving literature analysis allow researchers to tap into the taken-for-granted social worlds of vulnerable populations that are not easy to survey or observe in restricted settings. Third, they allow researchers to analyze behavior, possibly deviant, that most people would not feel comfortable discussing face-to-face. Finally, literary ethnographies have the ability to unearth messages in documents that are hard to see with casual observation (Hodder, 1994; Neuman, 1991).

Using Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus' (1994) ideas and some of the author's own, this section details six steps necessary for carrying out a successful literary ethnography. It focuses on the details surrounding the use of nonfiction literature to ethically examine themes related to the verbal neglect and abuse of elder residents in for-profit and nonprofit nursing homes.

Step 1: Identifying the Problem and Selecting Literary Sources

The first step in conducting a literary ethnography with Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus' (1994) framework involves defining your research problem and determining a scope of sources. Since you will be analyzing literature, the problem should involve the possibility of studying human interaction displayed in written form. A variety of examples exist. Studies in this tradition use written material to study themes in popular songs, religious symbols in hymns, trends in newspaper topics, and even the tone of newspaper editorials (for elaboration see Neuman, 1991). Sales' (1973) work focuses on comic strips and the presence and symbolic significance of protagonists, while Seider's (1974) research analyzes public speeches of U.S. corporate executives. More along the lines of a traditional literary ethnography, Griswold's (1981) work focuses on a random sample of novels from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It concerns how American novels reflect characteristics of the American experience.

This paper uses structural ritualization theory to focus on verbally neglectful and abusive ritualized symbolic practices (RSPs) in for-profit and nonprofit nursing homes. The topic of resident maltreatment in nursing homes is a precarious subject. To study it from a distance, the use of an unobtrusive method such as a literary ethnography is beneficial because characteristics of abuse might be hard to fully comprehend with a series of observations. A participant observer might witness a form of abuse and not even realize it. In addition, the observer might unethically participate in interaction that unintentionally harms residents. To avoid these dilemmas, it seems more appropriate to compile literature based on multiple observations to tap into abusive rituals in nursing homes.

When developing a scope of literary sources, you should obtain documents that focus on the environment under review. Clear boundaries for inclusion and exclusion of sources should exist. This involves having a specific idea of the topic. The sources should describe the experiences of actors in their social environment (Van de Poel-Knottnerus & Knottnerus, 1994). In this research, the scope of literary sources includes books, book chapters, chapter sections, and articles concentrating on nursing home life. The researcher was aware of several sources at the onset of this project. The few known sources were not an adequate sample. To find additional sources, it was necessary to consult academicians familiar with literature pertaining to nursing homes. Upon their suggestions, additional sources emerged.

With a core of literature on nursing homes, the researcher thoroughly examined the references of each source for more. Then, the researcher scrutinized the references from those sources for even more. Several searches of library and Internet search engines also led to sources. With an intense search for all literature on nursing home life completed, the researcher ended up with 40 sources appropriate for analysis spanning the 1960s up until the modern era of nursing homes - see Appendices. It was a coincidence, and not intentional, that 20 are from nonprofit sources and the other 20 from for-profit sources.

Initially, the researcher identified more than 40 sources. However, with a literary ethnography, it is advisable to only use suitable sources. As indicated, part of this research concerns the examination of RSPs in for-profit and nonprofit nursing homes. In order to compare, it was necessary to know what type of facility the source described. For sources that did not explicitly reveal ownership, the researcher contacted the author

or authors. This proved beneficial in several circumstances. For example, the researcher

had a telephone conversation with the author of the book *Nursing Home Life: What It Is*

and What It Could Be. He clearly indicated that his book concerns his experiences in a

nonprofit government facility (Bennett, 2002).

A similar situation emerged through a discussion with one of the co-authors of

Borders of Time: Life in a Nursing Home. After tracking down the telephone numbers

for over 20 Walter Crandalls, the researcher confirmed through the author that the text

was about a for-profit facility (Crandall, 2002). The researcher was not always

successful. For example, the researcher was never able to locate the author of the article,

"Dying: The Career of the Nursing Home Patient." Though several sources might

provide intense descriptions of the environment of a vulnerable population you are

studying, you should not use them if you cannot obtain the information that will correctly

position them in your study.

Step 2: Reading and Interpretation of the Documents

The second step of Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus' (1994) framework

involves reading the literature. In this project, the researcher found it useful to use

focused reading procedures. In other words, put yourself in a non-distracting

environment in order to obtain a high level of concentration. Read some or all of the

material, depending on your purpose, several times. Because the process involves

interpretation, be familiar with the language typically used in the literature you are

examining. This is critical. You will not be able to comprehend subtle nuances, informal

phrases, and technical jargon without familiarizing yourself to the words used in

everyday interaction in the environment between the people you are studying.

It might be beneficial to carry out a pre-study phase in which you research the social world you plan to analyze. You can do it without focusing on the area you plan to study with your literary ethnography. For example, if you plan to study hospice patients' attitudes toward death with a literary ethnography, before you perform your analysis, volunteer with a local hospice branch. Do not do so in order to collect information for your project, but merely to familiarize yourself with the terminology used. You might interview what observational researchers identify as gatekeepers and ask them questions that will develop your vocabulary of the environment under investigation. You might also heavily read newspaper accounts or government documents in order to familiarize yourself with relevant vernacular (Hodder, 1994).

With this study, the researcher had volunteer experience in long-term care that created a basic understanding of the language used in nursing homes. This helped considerably when reading the documents. In addition, earlier studies conducted by the researcher helped in comprehending nursing home language (for some examples see Paul & Ulsperger, 2001; Ulsperger, 2002; Ulsperger & Paul, 2002; Ulsperger & Ulsperger, 2002).

On a final note, make sure that anyone working with you on the project also gains familiarity with the environment under review. This will enhance the validity of your study in terms of any intercoder reliability issues. The research discussed in this paper is part of a larger project focusing on multiple forms of elder abuse and neglect in nursing homes. The other researcher involved in the data collection and coding had multiple hours of experience in nursing home settings due to family member placement in nursing

homes. Again, if multiple researchers are working on a literary ethnography, make sure they all are familiar with basic terms used in the environment studied (Hodder, 1994).

Step 3: Identification of Textual Themes

During and following the reading of documents, the third step in Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus' (1994) framework involves the identification of themes. These themes should focus on the experiences and features of the environment under review. The investigator should have an initial recognition of elements that are surfacing in the literature. The focus of themes can be on a variety of things. For example, you might explain how actors treat each other. This could allow for a crystallized understanding of interaction patterns. Again, a multiple reading of documents is necessary with a literary ethnography. At this point, you should look back over the documents because themes unnoticed before might emerge. As you move between sources, reread them in a different way intentionally looking for new themes. As this goes on, it is possible that elements first found in only a few documents will appear in several others.

An example of this step involves a study of the world of teachers in the secondary school system of early modern France. It would be impossible for contemporary social scientists to survey or observe a secondary school from this period. As such, Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus (1993) read works by various authors concerning this era. Their research reveals many features that characterized teachers. For example, authors describe teachers having similar social backgrounds. They also describe them as hard working. Another theme revolves around alienation from others due to educational background.

In relation to this research, the reading of literature revealed about 100 themes. In some sources, authors describe meaningful relationships between residents and staff. Others note the importance of staff following rules. Many descriptions of maltreatment exist. Authors note the lack of cleanliness in specific domains of interaction such as living areas, recreational rooms, and kitchen areas. They also describe, among other things, the failure to deliver medicines at appropriate times, staff shoving food down residents' mouths, staff yelling at residents, staff ignoring pleas for assistance, and staff stealing. Themes involving resident abuse of staff also exist.

Step 4: Classification of Thematic Elements

Based on the themes from the third step, the fourth step in Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus' (1994) literary ethnography process involves a classification system to organize all of the loosely existing themes from the previous stage. You simply focus your attention to a theme or themes present in the literature. Analysis indicates that early themes from the literary ethnography for this paper contain a wide variety of rituals related to social dynamics, bureaucratization, physical mistreatment, emotional maltreatment, and verbal neglect and abuse. These rituals concern, but are not limited to, relations between staff, between residents, staff and residents, staff and members from outside of the nursing home, and residents and people from outside of the nursing home. This paper will only discuss the classification of verbal neglect and abuse from residents to staff (for a review of some of the others see Ulsperger & Knottnerus, 2007; Ulsperger & Knottnerus, 2008).

Keep in mind, once you make the decision on what to focus on, you should still be open to topics that emerge. Regardless, when determining the classification for

themes, look for similar patterns in phrases, sentences, parts of a paragraph, or whole

paragraphs. Concentrate on the degree that different authors express themes and the

degree that the theme appears. You might find repeated comments on relationships.

They might give a clear image of how interaction is coordinated. You might define the

interaction as random, distant, or brief (Knottnerus & Van de Poel-Knottnerus, 1999).

Step 5: The Development of Analytic Constructs

According to Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus' (1994) methodology, the

fifth step of a literary ethnography requires using analytic constructs. During this phase,

it is also important to consider developing coding categories, defining recording units,

and using a system of enumeration.

Analytic constructs give a greater degree of structure to the analysis. The

constructs should give better understanding to the loose themes generated in previous

steps. The constructs should link to theoretical ideas external to the study. This makes

for a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and provides classification with

a higher level of academic integrity (Van de Poel-Knottnerus & Knottnerus, 1994).

The theoretical link can come from a variety of disciplines. According to Van de

Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus (2002), the source of the analytical concepts is

secondary to the goal of strengthening your interpretation. For themes on abuse in this

study, the researcher used a previously developed definition of elder maltreatment.

Pillemer defines elder maltreatment as any "deviation from expected standards for high-

quality care" including actions such as verbal aggression and abuse (1988, p. 228). When

applying this definition to the themes interpreted in this research, the researcher defined

categories of verbal neglect and abuse as involving aspects of infantilization, spoken

aggression, and ignoring. As such, this work defines infantilization as condescending staff vocalizations that reduce the status of a resident to that of a young child. It defines spoken aggression as author references to the hostile launching of vocal attacks by staff directed against a resident. Finally, it defines ignoring as situations where nursing home employees refuse to take notice of verbal communication initiated by residents. This includes ignoring requests for personal and medical assistance.

As with the three branches of verbal neglect and abuse mentioned, categories should be exclusive. The overall value of your literary ethnography coding depends on the formulation of specific content categories and consistent definitions for placing units into categories (Singleton & Straits, 2005). With that in mind, intercoder reliability is important to discuss again. Everyone involved in the research process is going to go back and read each piece of literature at this point. While doing so, they should count instances of thematic representation and mark quality examples in case they want to use them as thick descriptions when writing up the research. Make sure everyone involved in the coding process uses the same definitions. In addition, if possible have every researcher involved code the same literature. Once that process is complete, compare coding. Then, debate instances that individuals do not agree on until a consensus for category placement emerges. If a large body of literature exists, it might be a necessity to break sources up between researchers. If this is the case, be sure and have each member of the research team hold questionable instances to the side so the entire team can discuss category placement at a later point.

In terms of intercoder reliability, you should also have clear boundaries for your recording units. The recording unit is the element of the document described by content

categories. This could be a single word, symbol, sentence, paragraph, or other

grammatical unit. It could also be the entire document. As mentioned, Sales' (1973)

work uses character descriptions. Griswold's (1981) research uses character, plot, and

entire novels. Though researchers can code smaller units more reliably then larger ones,

smaller units may not be sufficient to extract latent meanings. Numerous small units

coded from a large collection of documents may be too much for a researcher to manage

(Berg, 2007). However, regardless of your recording unit, try to keep possible context

problems in the back of your mind. Consider the work of Namenwirth (1969). It

describes the editorial orientation of British elite and mass newspapers. He showed that

decades ago British elite newspapers, as opposed to mass newspapers, had an

overwhelming concern with European affairs and not the Cold War. It indicates that the

presence of terms such as Soviet and American indicate concern with the Cold War.

When considering context, there is a problem with this technique. The mere presence of

such words does not mean that an article takes a pro or anti-American position. To take

this stance, you have to think about the larger context unit (Singleton & Straits, 2005).

This study uses paragraphs and larger grammatical recording units. Larger units

include portions of book chapters as themes. This involves a focus on themes related to

the previously described categories. In fact, each theme actually represented the

occurrence of a RSP of verbal neglect and abuse. Larger recording units are necessary

when the focus on descriptions and meanings is key - not just the appearance of words or

phrases associated with verbal neglect and abuse.

As with a basic content analysis, it is necessary in a literary ethnography to define

a system of enumeration. This involves at least a simple quantification of the

information. Careful measurement is important. After all, the researcher is turning

general communication into precise elements of inquiry (Neuman, 1991). Systems of

enumeration involve time-space measures, appearance, frequency, and intensity

(Singleton & Straits, 2005).

Time-space measures involve attention given to a topic. Early content analysts of

newspapers measured the inches of the columns covering topics. Appearance, also

known as direction, involves confirming the presence of a category in a recording unit. It

focuses on the position that it appears to take (Singleton & Straits, 2005). For example,

Sales' (1973) work classifies characters in comic strips as powerful or not. Griswold's

(1981) research measures whether main characters are male or female.

Frequency is the most common system of enumeration. It involves keeping track

of the times a category occurs (Singleton & Straits, 2005). For example, in an analysis of

Democratic and Republican Party platforms, Weber's (1990) research calculates the

proportion of words in a category of wealth. This involves counting the presence of

words such as capital, inflation, and unemployment. Intensity focuses on the values and

attitudes present in an analysis of documents. Instead of focusing on the number of times

money appears in a document, a researcher would focus on the author's passion in

discussing the issue of money (Singleton & Straits, 2005).

This study uses frequency and intensity as systems of enumeration. It counts the

number of times themes related to categories of verbal neglect and abuse appear in the

literature. The research does not use these numbers for statistical analysis. It only uses

them for descriptive purposes. With literary sources being of different length in each

ownership category, frequencies in this research do not warrant quantitative comparison

with inferential statistics (for more on this issue see Berg, 2007). Regardless, this literary ethnography was open to emerging themes throughout the coding process. An open category of "other" for themes not initially discovered supplements the findings while remaining exclusive to the three defined categories.

The use of frequencies implies that all elements categorized carry equal weight. However, this is not always the case. It is possible that the content of a theme in one situation emphasizes an issue to a higher degree when compared to another. In these situations, this work uses excerpts to highlight the power, or intensity, behind comments in recording units.

Step 6: Contextual Confirmation

The final step in a literary ethnography is contextual confirmation. Here, you reread all or portions of your literary sources again. This helps you decide if your established themes correctly relate to the final coding scheme. According to Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus (1994), you are checking to make sure that the final idea of the environment under review corresponds with the original narratives read.

In this study, the researcher and another person helping with data analysis did reread the portions of the sample of documents used. They decided if the final categories fused with the initially reviewed narratives. Again, the rereading confirms that the categories and constructs created accurately represent the major themes found through the portions of the documents examined. However, even at this final stage, it is important, as with this research, you remain open to other themes that emerge. Again, in this study themes that did not exist at previous stages exist in an "other" category.

You should not limit your contextual confirmation to a final reread. If possible, discuss your findings with other people who study the phenomenon under review or discuss them with people who live or work in the area you are studying. They will have the ability to let you know if your findings "gel" with their perceptions. If they do, you establish an even higher level of trustworthiness for your research (Hodder, 1994).

Findings

In this research, ritualized symbolic practices (RSPs) of verbal neglect and abuse include themes related to infantilization, spoken aggression, and ignoring. Table 1 shows the sources reference RSPs of verbal neglect and abuse 328 times. The sources reference infantilization the most. Specifically, 144 references (43.9%) appear. RSPs of spoken aggression appear 96 (29.3%) times. Eighty-six (26.2%) accounts of RSPs of ignoring exist. The research only has two references in the "other" category, both from a nonprofit source.

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Insert Table 1 about here
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Infantilization

RSPs of infantilization involve condescending staff vocalizations that reduce the status of a resident to that of a young child. Table 1 shows the sources reference this category 144 (43.9%) times. For-profit sources have 85 (59%) references. Nonprofit sources have 59 (41%).

In terms of salience, for-profit and nonprofit sources show the intensity of this category. In one for-profit source, Kayser-Jones (1981, p. 39) explains:

At Pacific Manor there were innumerable incidents of staff treating the residents like children. Authoritarian scoldings of the aged by staff were common. For example, one day a nurse aide walked into the lounge and, seeing a puddle of water on the floor, asked loudly, "Who wet the floor?" Pointing her finger at one woman, she inquired in an accusing voice, "Did you wet the floor?" Very embarrassed at being singled out as the culprit, the patient replied, "Why, no it wasn't me."

Staff members do not always intend malice with their comments. From his work in a for-profit facility, Diamond (1992, p. 138) points out:

In this instance [a staff member] was using the term "baby" to ridicule the rule… that bibs had to be tied onto each resident for each meal. "Baby" was often used, and in more than one way. In some contexts it was used to create fictive family roles. Dorothy Tomason put her arm around Joanne Macon when she cried. "C'mere, my baby, now what's the trouble…"

Extending this idea, Savishinsky (1991, p. 75) points out that in the nonprofit facility he observed, there was an "infantilizing habit of addressing residents with unearned terms of endearment: 'honey,' 'love,' 'sweetie,' and 'dear' were patronizing to the ear." Interestingly, residents resist these RSPs when they are condescending. Diamond (1992, p. 138) points out that the use of terms like "baby" often create conflict between staff members and residents as illustrated with the following example:

Bedridden Frances Wasserman protested, "Just cause I have to lay here in this gown doesn't mean I'm a baby." The same protests came up at mealtime in the same tone, in part, because of bibs but also for the reason expressed by Mrs.

Herman, who was blind. "You know, I was a field nurse, too. I'm no baby just

because someone has to help me eat."

It is possible that staff members are trying to negotiate their relationships with

residents when they infantilize. In doing so, they use cognitive frameworks that guide

other relationships where they act as caregivers. Diamond (1992) points out, often these

are parent-child relationships. As an unintended consequence, residents interpret the use

of this cognitive framework as degrading. Other, possibly unintended, RSPs relate to

infantilization in nursing homes. Kayser-Jones (1981) points out one for-profit home,

allegedly cutting corners, only showed movies donated from a child daycare. Metz

(1999) explains another for-profit facility always had Santa Clause come in to hand out

presents to residents on Christmas.

Spoken Aggression

RSPs of spoken aggression involve author references to the hostile launching of

vocal attacks by staff directed against a resident. Table 1 shows 96 (29.3%) references in

the sources. For-profit sources had 45 (46.9 percent) of the references in this category.

Nonprofit sources had 51 (53.1%). Table 1 indicates the number of references to RSPs of

spoken aggression is similar in for-profit and nonprofit sources. References to this

category rank high in terms of frequency, but are not very salient.

Some of the sources indicated that staff use spoken aggression to deter residents

from bothering staff, not to just be despicable. Howsden (1981, p. 76) explains:

A typical encounter includes a complaint of a headache, stomachache or another

patient who has caused them distress. The patient is not ignored, but merely put

off with the typical response, "Oh, go sit down and you will feel better," or

"You… go find something to do like feeding the cat," or "Go help Mrs. C. with her chair." The tactic is one of diversion which if unsuccessful is followed by threats, such as "If you don't leave me alone, I'll send you to your room."

In some sources, administrators favor floor staff ritualistically using spoken aggression. They believed it helped to speed along work tasks. In one source, administrative employees praised a nurse that humiliated and verbally assaulted patients. Few similar examples with such a strong tone exist in the literature. Regardless, her verbal attacks made residents do what upper level staff thought they should. Foner (1994, p. 61) explains:

> When [a resident] complained that she could not eat because her foot hurt, Ms. James screamed, "Shut up you and eat you. Eat. You think I have all day…" And she turned to another woman, "You're such a nasty pig. You hear me, drink..." When a resident Ms. James had put on the toilet complained, she barked, "Sit there. Just sit. I don't care what hurts, just sit there…" As the LPN passed, Ms. James loudly commented so that the [other] residents could hear: "Two dingbats I got here. One has shit coming out of her ass and the other one says her back hurts..." Ms. James humiliated and verbally abused patients out in the open: in front of nurses, administrators, doctors, and visitors. Yet she received the best evaluation on the floor and had privileges denied other aides.

Ignoring

RSPs of ignoring concern situations where nursing home employees refuse to take notice of verbal communication initiated by residents (for more on this process see Goffman, 1967). This includes ignoring requests for personal and medical assistance.

Here, residents make personal or medical requests and employees do not acknowledge them. Table 1 indicates 86 (26.2) references to RSPs of ignoring. For-profit sources had 37 (43%) references in this category. Nonprofit sources had 49 (57%).

In terms of salience, intense examples of ignoring exist in for-profit and nonprofit sources. In a for-profit source, Paterniti (2000, p. 106) explains:

> Staff meet residents, whom they identify as disruptive or incompetent, at the convenience of their own work schedule. By doing so, they sometimes avoid residents whom they believe will reduce control over the work shift. This formula for interaction, however, may have detrimental consequences for "difficult" residents. Hazel Kleweski – a 325-pound, bed-bound resident in her early sixties – often had trouble with her meals, pushing her nurse's call button to alert staff of her digestive complications. Because Hazel rang her call button at each meal, her call light often went unanswered by staff who were trying to assist resident "feeders" during the institutionally designated mealtime.

As one for-profit resident told Gubrium, "You ask them to do something and they ignore you like dirty shit" (1993, p. 144).

With salience in the nonprofit sources, similar details exist. Interestingly, Gubrium (1975) explains, from observations in a nonprofit facility, that residents have various resources to influence work patterns of lower staff. They can be uncooperative or complain. Nurses and aides on the floor know the residents that are uncooperative or complain the most. They see a lack of cooperation or complaining as disruptions of their work routine. Ignoring these residents sends a symbolic, punitive message to others to

not disrupt organizational tasks or they would receive similar treatment. Residents

comply with staff work routines fearing the stigma of being a troublemaker.

Vaughan (1999) explains that routine practices in organizations can have

unintended consequences. This concept is highly relevant to aspects of employees

ignoring residents in nursing homes. Ignoring a resident's plea for help can be risky and

have horrifying results. In one for-profit source, Paterniti (2000, p. 106) explains:

> This afternoon, I talked with a staff member over lunch about some of the
>
> residents at Merimore who had died during my days off. Jessica said, "It was
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> during lunch, ya know, when we're reeeaal busy. As usual, we were still passing
>
> trays, and Hazel put on her [nurse call] light. Naturally, Michele [Hazel's usual
>
> aide] just ignored it." Jessica noted with a certain matter-of-factness: anyone who
>
> had any knowledge of Hazel, her deficiencies, and the work routine would have,
>
> of course, followed the same course of action. She continued, "When Michele
>
> went in [to Hazel's room] to pick up Hazel's tray, she [Hazel] didn't respond.
>
> She wasn't breathing (the aide swallowed). Hazel was dead."

Other

In the "other" category, only two references that did not fit into the previous

categories appear. They concern making loud noises in the halls when residents are

trying to sleep (see Tisdale, 1987). With so few references, a table for frequencies to

examine repetitiveness and a discussion of salience is not of concern in this study.

Conclusion

This study shows that using literary ethnography methods yields valuable data

when studying vulnerable populations. It indicates that rituals of verbal abuse and

neglect in nursing homes are more likely to involve infantilization. For RSPs of

infantilization, more came from for-profit sources. It is possible that RSPs tied to

infantilization relate to cost cutting measures. For example, one source indicates that

instead of buying movies for residents to watch, one home used movies donated by a

local child daycare. Vocal patterns present in for-profit and nonprofit sources reveal that

staff members in most institutions talk to residents as if they were children. This may be

the result of defining relationships with cognitive frameworks staff use in their family

relationships. With RSPs of spoken aggression, similar frequencies exist in for-profit and

nonprofit sources. However, there are not many examples in the sources indicating the

salience of this category. The examples that do exist reveal that staff members use

threats to get residents to comply with the institutional order. These threats send a

symbolic message that organizational tasks are the primary concern, not the resident.

Administrators sometimes reward lower employees who ritualistically use spoken

aggression. Ironically, the least referenced category, ignoring, was the most disturbing.

Here more references exist in the for-profit sources. However, the references indicate

ignoring is a salient RSP in for-profit and nonprofit facilities. Staff members make a

ritual practice out of ignoring those who disrupt work schedules. In doing so, they avoid

situations they should not. From Vaughan's (1999) perspective, we can identify this as

organizational deviance. Staff members deviate from the formal goal of the organization,

caring for residents, and opt to focus on bureaucratic goals instead. It seems that in

nursing homes the completion of organizational tasks is more important than providing

quality care, which oddly many of the organizational tasks are supposed to facilitate. In

turn, unanticipated consequences, even death, occurs. Future research on abuse with

vulnerable nursing home populations should maximize the benefits of literary

ethnography techniques, possibly combining them with traditional quantitative methods.

In addition, future research should not be limited to articles and books. Though this

study did not search for or analyze fiction literature focusing on accounts of nursing

home life, they could exist and be studied. Future research might also involve other types

of nonfiction documents not used in this research. This includes communications from

sources such as testimonies from government investigations or publicly available court

records.

This study focuses on nursing homes, but the use of literature to study social

worlds is not rare. As previously noted, people have been doing it for years (Hodder,

1994). In the case of this research, you can see how using a literary ethnography is

advantageous. It gives order to the study of documents. It provides systematic steps for

studying documents. It even has the potential to accent other forms of research if used to

develop a familiarity with a topic before entering a more intense stage of research. Even

when just using it as an exploratory tool, keep in mind that its steps have the ability to

increase the trustworthiness of a research project (Van de Poel-Knottnerus & Knottnerus,

1994).

As a form of content analysis, it also is an effective unobtrusive method. The

researcher does not need to interview anyone about controversial behaviors. No one fills

out lengthy questionnaires. No one has to enter the high-pressure environment of a

laboratory. Though its focus on reading and rereading can be monotonous at times, it can

be cost effective as well (Berg, 2007). Inevitably, if you use a literary ethnography as a

form of content analysis, you will encounter critiques based on quantitative ideologies. Specifically, you will have to confront issues on validity and reliability.

It is possible to argue that a literary ethnography has a high level of face validity when it, as in the case of this study, uses documents that provide nonfiction, first-hand accounts. However, you must keep in mind that these first hand accounts may actually lower face validity if authors wrote the documents you are analyzing with a biased opinion. In other words, biased authors do not provide objective descriptions of social environments, so try and use as many sources as possible (Bailey, 1978; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Another critique involves possible "reality" lags between when authors observe and later write materials. The survival rate of a document is also important to consider. Certain older documents on a population or environment under review might outlive others due to hyperbolic, entertaining, but exaggerated versions of the topic under review that led to their increased popularity. In addition, historical circumstances influencing the content of documents from different times might produce an inconsistent picture (Berg, 2007). As in the case of this study, the documents used come from a wide time range – the 1960s until the modern nursing home era. Should you treat sources from different decades equally, or might the documents from recent years create a totally different version of reality than those written a few decades ago?

As a form of content analysis, a literary ethnography can concern two types of reliability - instrument and analyst. Instrument reliability involves comparing documents at one or more points in time. As previously alluded, this is often low because of selective survival of documents. Analyst reliability involves cross checking the work of different researchers from the same period. This can be high when several documents

from the same time are available. Regardless, the main reliability issue in a literary

ethnography concerns category definitions. As this work details, you must construct

categories and decide on recording units, context units, and a system of enumeration. It

will be a subjective process, but with a focus on the use of widely used analytic

constructs and intercoder reliability measures, you can produce a legitimate piece of

research (Singleton & Straits, 2005).

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   221-228.

Table 1. Frequencies for Verbal Neglect and Abuse Rituals

Category	Number (% within category)		Overall %
Infantilization	144	(100)	43.9
For-profit	85	(59.0)	
Nonprofit	59	(41.0)	
Spoken Aggression	96	(100)	29.3
For-profit	45	(46.9)	
Nonprofit	51	(53.1)	
Ignoring	86	(100)	26.2
For-profit	37	(43.0)	
Nonprofit	49	(57.0)	
Other	2	(100)	0.6
For-profit	0	(0.0)	
Nonprofit	2	(100)	
Total	328		100.0

Appendix A. For-Profit Literary Sources

Document	Author	Genre
Borders of Time	Crandall & Crandall	Ethnography
Making Gray Gold	T. Diamond	Ethnography
A Nursing Home & Its Organizational Climate	B. Farmer	Ethnography
The Last Frontier	A. Fontana	Ethnography
"Ripping off the Elderly"	A. Fontana	Ethnography
Speaking of Life	J. Gubrium	Ethnography
Television in the Nursing Home: A Case Study	W. Hajjar	Ethnography
"Nursing Home Housekeepers"	J.N. Henderson	Ethnography
"The Culture of Care in a Nursing Home"	J.N. Henderson	Ethnography
"Rosemont"	J. Henry	Ethnography
"The Tower Nursing Home"	J. Henry	Ethnography
Work & the Helpless Self	J. Howsden	Ethnography
Old, Alone, & Neglected	J. Kayser-Jones	Ethnography
Limbo	C. Laird	Autobiography
Maudie: A Positive Nursing Home Experience	R. Metz	Biography
"Micropolitics of Identity in Adverse Circumstance"	D. Paterniti	Ethnography
It's OK Mom	J. Retsinas	Ethnography
"Old Folks & Dirty Work"	C. Stannard	Ethnography
"The Reluctant Consumer"	M. Vesperi	Ethnography
"Life at Lake Home"	C. Wellin	Ethnography

Appendix B. Nonprofit Literary Sources

Document	Author	Genre
Nursing Home Life	C. Bennett	Ethnography
The Caregiving Dilemma	N. Foner	Ethnography
"The Hidden Injuries of Bureaucracy"	N. Foner	Ethnography
"Relatives as Trouble"	N. Foner	Ethnography
Living & Dying at Murray Manor	J.F. Gubrium	Ethnography
"Muni San"	J. Henry	Ethnography
The Erosion of Autonomy in Long-term Care	Lidz, Fischer, & Arnold	Ethnography
"The Head Nurse as a Key Informant"	McLean & Perkinson	Ethnography
Anatomy of a Nursing Home	M. O'Brien	Ethnography
"Social Networks, Social Support, & Elderly…"	B. Powers	Ethnography
"Self Perceived Health of Elderly Institutionalized…"	B. Powers	Ethnography
"From the Inside Out"	B. Powers	Ethnography
"Goffman Revisited: Relatives v. Administrators…"	M. Richard	Ethnography
"Emotional Labor as Cultural Performance"	J. Sass	Ethnography
The Ends of Time	J. Savishinsky	Ethnography
"In and Out of Bounds"	J. Savishinsky	Ethnography
Uneasy Endings	R. Shield	Ethnography
"Ethics in the Nursing Home"	R. Shield	Ethnography
Harvest Moon	S. Tisdale	Ethnography
Internal Order of a Home for the Jewish Elderly"	Watson & Maxwell	Ethnography