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Coming to Narrative: A Personal History of Paradigm Change in the Human Sciences (Writing Lives: Ethnographic Narratives)

By Arthur P Bochner



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Reflecting on a 50 year university career, Distinguished Professor Arthur Bochner, former President of the National Communication Association, discloses a lived history, both academic and personal, that has paralleled many of the paradigm shifts in the human sciences inspired by the turn toward narrative. He shows how the human sciences?especially in his own areas of interpersonal, family, and communication theory?have evolved from sciences directed toward prediction and control to interpretive ones focused on the search for meaning through qualitative, narrative, and ethnographic modes of inquiry. He outlines the theoretical contributions of such luminaries as Bateson, Laing, Goffman, Henry, Gergen, and Richardson in this transformation. Using diverse forms of narration, Bochner seamlessly layers theory and story, interweaving his professional and personal life with the social and historical contexts in which they developed.



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- Sales Rank: #1139628 in Books
- Published on: 2014-04-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.00" w x 6.00" l, 1.20 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 350 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“The book is a knock-out, a powerful, at times shattering painful narrative. Carefully crafted, its words are chiseled in my brain. It maps a journey many before have taken, but few have had the courage to tell. The best part of reading it is not wanting to stop. There is no in-between here, you're either in all the way, or there is no beginning. But if you are an honest academic, or an honest soul, there is no turning back.”

—Norman K. Denzin, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

“This is a brave book. C. Wright Mills would put it on his reading list if he were here, for Art Bochner's ability to connect the personal with the social/cultural/political is astounding.”

—Laurel Richardson, Emerita, The Ohio State University

“When one of the founding masters of autoethnography writes his own memoir, you can justifiably expect something so compelling that the novel you are reading might pale by comparison.

—David Epston, co-Director, Family Therapy Centre, Auckland, NZ

“This is a must read for all aspiring scholars in the social sciences, and indeed a touching and thought provoking book for those who have lived through the turbulent intellectual times of recent decades. In this thoughtful, eloquent, and lively account of his professional and personal life over these decades, Bochner takes us on an openly revealing journey. Personally speaking, I was thrust into into a richly rewarding reverie by this absorbing and insightful work. In living these years through Bochner's writing, one comes into a much deeper understanding of oneself within the relational matrix of our existence.”

—Ken Gergen, Author of Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community

“This book is truly one-of-a-kind — as is Art Bochner. Part social scientist, part philosopher, and part 'true novelist,' he is, most importantly, all human, and this book testifies wonderfully well to the depth and integrity of his vision.”

—Mark Freeman, College of the Holy Cross

"I recommend this book to anyone teaching a research methods, theory, or history of the communication discipline. Furthermore, it is essential reading for anyone who wants to experience the journey of ethnography and qualitative research methods. Our teaching team at Arizona State University assigned this book in our doctoral level communication theory course. It was a huge hit, generating thoughtful reflection, probing questions, and an openness to the journey that we as researchers and human beings travel through a lifetime. Rather than placing a defensive or anxious stakes in the ground, the book sets a tone that

encourages readers to ask questions and try on new ideas as part of the academic journey--which is exactly what many of us want to create in the classroom."

—Sarah Tracy, Arizona State University

"I couldn't put it down - such a wonderful mix of my academic life (the positivist/constructionist split), family dynamics, romance....[it] pack[s] just about everything in there! It was totally engaging. It meant so much to me to be able to reflect on my own academic trajectory..."

—Sheila McNamee, University of New Hampshire and The Taos Institute

About the Author

Arthur P. Bochner is Distinguished University Professor of communication and co-director of the Institute for Interpretive Human Studies at the University of South Florida. He is coauthor of *Understanding Family Communication*, coeditor of two influential edited volumes on interpretive ethnography—*Composing Ethnography* and *Ethnographically Speaking*—and coedits the *Writing Lives* book series. He has authored over 100 refereed articles and book chapters on personal relationships, personal narrative, and philosophy of communication. Bochner served as president of the National Communication Association in 2008 and has won numerous awards for his teaching and research.

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