14

"Where I Went Today …": Solicited Journals and Narrative Mapping

Sarah Turner

Chapter Overview

Solicited journaling and narrative mapping offer excellent opportunities for the richness, plurality, and fluidity of everyday experiences to be explored and represented in human geography. This chapter introduces a range of ways that solicited journaling has been used by geographers, before focusing on factors to consider when undertaking this method, and outlining possible analysis and writing-up strategies. I also introduce different journaling techniques, before raising a range of potentially sensitive and ethical concerns for consideration. In the final section of the chapter I briefly focus on narrative mapping as one approach to present data gained from solicited journaling or from other qualitative methods, and some tactics for creating such maps.

Introduction

Women's experiences of violence in South Africa, street vendor livelihoods in Vietnam, and Antarctic researchers' emotions during fieldwork—these are all topics that have been studied by human geographers utilizing **solicited journals**. Such journals can help to reveal a participant's experiences, emotions, and daily personal geographies, supporting nuanced understandings of the relationships between people and the environment over time. Participants write their solicited journal entries—on a theme guided by the researcher—in the context of their own space and time, and decide what they want to include and omit. This ability of participants to reflect upon and contemplate their entries allows them to control the narrative; to decide upon the meaning and weight that they attach to different events. Due to these benefits, solicited journaling has been increasingly acknowledged as an important method for understanding the thoughts and experiences of disempowered and marginalized communities.

As one specific way to represent the findings from solicited journaling research, as well as from other projects that produce narratives, **narrative mapping** is gaining popularity amongst human geographers. Narrative maps allow the specific spatial stories and experiences of participants to be represented through a combination of qualitative methods and digital mapping techniques. Examples include narrative maps of refugee life stories, challenges to dominant representations of queer spaces, and the lived experiences of Muslim Americans after the 9/11 attacks in the US in 2001. This form of representation can contest traditional spatial representations, and provide opportunities for marginalized communities to "counter-map," challenging official narratives of the relations between different groups and specific spaces.

What Are Solicited Journals?

> And here I am, writing with my sincere feelings so people who don't vend, and those from other countries can understand about people like myself. (Extract from a Vietnamese street vendor's journal, in Eidse and Turner [2014], p. 245).

Solicited journals (also called solicited **diaries**) have become increasingly popular within the social sciences—albeit only comparatively recently in geography—as a qualitative method that allows researchers to understand a range of opinions, emotions, experiences, mobilities, and circumstances of participants. Researchers utilizing this method provide participants with a blank diary, notebook, or similar tool (sometimes digital), and clear guidelines as to a theme or question to reflect on and write about. In comparison to personal diaries or unsolicited journals (see Chapter 12 on use of archival documents), the solicited journal process is externally structured by a researcher, with participants having a set time period to complete their journals and being aware that the intent of the researcher is to collect their entries as research data. Compared to a number of other qualitative approaches such as **interviews** or **focus groups**, a key benefit of solicited journaling is that it can allow participants more time and space to reflect upon their responses. This can help participants provide detailed and carefully considered entries, which can often include reflections of experiences, emotions, and details of specific events (Hayman, Wilkes, and Jackson,, 2012). Solicited diaries can therefore help researchers to detect the degree of importance participants put on certain events and places. They also facilitate the collection of **longitudinal data** instead of capturing single moments, possibly highlighting changing opinions or responses over time (Jones & Woolley, 2015; Morrison, 2012).

Because participants are left alone to write their thoughts and reflections in their journals, and are given control over the degree to which they share information, this often means that they are more willing to discuss sensitive information, such as details of intimate relationships or violence (Meth, 2003; Thomas, 2007). For example, Meth (2003, p. 201) points out: "Diaries can provide participants a different (perhaps more comfortable) space or platform from which to reveal particular stories about their everyday lives." This sense of privacy can also mean that journaling—even when solicited—can facilitate participant **reflexivity**, providing a space in which participants can contemplate a certain event or circumstance. At times, it has even been argued that such journaling can be therapeutic (Dwyer et al., 2013). Overall, participants have greater control over how their stories get told and their voices are heard, thus challenging standard power relations. Importantly, solicited journals reflect the general tenets of feminist geography, due to the method's ability to access marginalized populations and empower participants (Meth, 2003).

Using Solicited Journals in Geography

While solicited journals have a limited history in geographical research, they have been used fairly extensively in the health sciences and in education research. In the health sciences they have provided a means to gain better understandings of patient behaviours, recovery processes, nutrition and exercise patterns, as well as increasing reflexivity regarding work practices amongst health care providers (Edwards et al., 2011; Milligan, Bingley, and Gatrell, 2005). In education, solicited journals have been employed to gain greater knowledge of student learning processes as well as teacher training (Humble & Sharp, 2012; Ostapuk, 1997).

Geographers have been comparatively slower to embrace the strengths of using solicited journals or diaries, with one proponent of the method noting that "the full potential of solicited diaries to offer insights into participants' embodied and emotional everyday geographies has not been realised" (Morrison, 2012, p. 68). Some of the earlier works within geography included Meth (2003, 2004) who utilized solicited journals to examine how women living in Durban, South Africa, experienced crime and violence, and how they responded to these experiences. Her research used a combination of focus groups and personal solicited journals to collect data. Meth notes that while initial focus groups were useful in eliciting a wide range of themes, the longitudinal approach of solicited journals granted women the space to reflect and intimately narrate their experiences. As a result, data from the solicited journals were deeply embedded with personal histories and many participants reported the process as empowering or therapeutic.

More recently, Morrison (2012) employed solicited journals as part of a **mixed-method** study that aimed to problematize the normalization of heterosexual love and the notion of "home." For a period of seven days, 14 young women in heterosexual relationships were invited to reflect upon the significance of "home" in the experiences and interpersonal dynamics within their relationships, through journaling and photography. Morrison concluded that the use of solicited journals provided rich insights into participants' embodied and emotional spaces, and in particular into the ebbs and flows of their daily lives.

Other examples of solicited journaling being drawn upon by geographers include McGregor (2005) who asked male fishers in camps around Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe, to keep journals regarding their daily experiences, and Thomas (2007) who collected solicited diaries from individuals affected by HIV/AIDS as well as their main caregivers, to better understand how HIV and AIDS shape rural livelihoods, vulnerability, and support networks in Namibia. In addition, Spowart and Nairn (2014) used a diary-interview method to explore the emotions and **subjectivities** of snowboarding mothers in Aotearoa New Zealand, while Filep et al. (2015) asked researchers in Antarctica to journal their feelings regarding their physical and social environments while undertaking fieldwork.

Planning and Directing Solicited Journal Activities

Selecting Participants and Recruitment

During the initial planning stages, it is important to think about how you will find willing participants, and what sampling approach makes the most sense for your chosen topic (see also Chapters 6 and 13). Given that solicited journaling essentially removes the researcher from a central role in data collection, rapport and trust between the researcher and participants are vital so that the journals contain relevant information (and are completed). Your personal contacts can be an effective channel by which to gain participants, although other approaches such as sending advertisements through social media, email lists, radio broadcasts, or flyers in local shops, community organizations, and meeting places are all possible. Journaling usually involves a fairly limited number of participants, therefore **purposeful sampling** is common with potential participants selected deliberately due to the fact that they might be willing participants and rich sources of data in relation to the chosen topic. Often, recruited participants will drop out of the process for a variety of reasons, especially if the journals are to be kept over a long time period, hence over-recruitment can be helpful.

It is also important to consider, given the context in which you are working, what the literacy levels of your potential participants are likely to be. For example, Eidse and Turner (2014) found that some of the street vendors whom they had asked to keep journals in Hanoi, Vietnam, felt uncomfortable trying to write down their thoughts and asked someone else to do the writing for them as they dictated, or they passed the journal onto another household member entirely. Similarly, Meth (2003, 2004) found that some of the women with whom she worked in South Africa passed their journals on to their children to write up, as they dictated. Clearly this approach can raise **ethical** and **confidentiality** problems. Asking participants to audio-record their journals is a possible option in such cases, although this comes with its own set of concerns, as noted below.

Setting Up the Journals

The degree to which you provide participants with specific journaling guidelines can vary, ranging from requesting very specific limited responses to free-form entries. However, it is important that you carefully think through what you wish to achieve with the journaling exercise in advance, including how participants' responses will help answer your research questions (see Chapter 5), and provide clear guidelines as to your expectations, so as not to waste participants' time and energy (see Box 14.1. for a possible example, and also Meth [2003] for her written diary instructions). Generally, provide instructions that give participants a sense of direction and an understanding of what your expectations are, while at the same time allowing them to express their creativity and what is important or valuable to them (Hayman, Wilkes, and Jackson, 2012). Solicited journals can also incorporate approaches other than writing, such as asking participants to add photographs or sketches to the journals.

> **BOX 14.1**
>
> Example of Journaling Instructions for Participants—Motorbike Taxi Drivers in Bangkok, Thailand

Thank you for agreeing to keep a journal! I am specifically interested in your daily experiences as a motorbike taxi driver in Bangkok. For the next two weeks, please try to fill in your diary each evening, reflecting on your day's journeys and other related activities (e.g., meal breaks, motorbike repairs, etc.) including times, places, and any events that impacted your ability to carry out your day's work (e.g., police check points, traffic jams). It would be interesting to also learn about any emotions and any concerns you have about your job. You may write as little or as much as you like.

For each entry please add:

- The date and time of day when you're writing your journal

- Name relevant locations, such as the places where you drove that day, or places you waited for customers.

If there are any experiences that you would like to write about, but that did not take place during this two-week period, please feel free to include them as well, and when they took place.

Please do not worry at all about grammar, spelling, or handwriting!

After 4–5 days I will contact you again to make sure everything is going ok. You can also call me anytime if you have questions or concerns. At the end of the two weeks I will collect your journal. At that time I would also appreciate if you would participate in an interview, which will last no more than 40 minutes, at a time of your convenience.

If you know of anyone else who may be interested in taking part in this project, please let me know.

Thank you for your participation!

Note: A separate consent form also covered what the drivers' journal data would be used for, their right to stop journaling at any time and withdraw from the project, and the confidentiality of their writing.

The length of time that you give participants to complete their journals can also vary greatly from a few days to a few months, although providing participants with a clear timeline and checking in with them periodically helps to maintain participation rates. Likewise, the frequency with which you wish participants to journal can range from a daily request, to writing when a specific event occurs.

It is also important to think through the actual structure of the journal—if participants are presented with a notebook with far more pages than they are likely to be able to fill in their allocated time, this might create stress and anxiety. Alternatively, a notebook with too few pages might curtail writing and creativity. You also need to consider practical elements such as whether to have lines on the pages or leave them blank—lines help with written forms of expression but might hinder participants who also want to draw; one solution is for each page to have half blank space and half lines. Consider if you want participants to use a pen that you provide, so their text or drawings will be dark enough to be reproduced later in a possible representation of your data (if you gain their permission to do so, of course). While the traditional journal is a physical booklet in which participants record their entries with pen or pencil, it is also possible that some may wish to write up their journals on a computer or phone if they have access to one. Sometimes participants can find this more private and reassuring, since a file can be easier to password-protect and encrypt than hiding a physical journal.

Pre-journal Activities, Checking In, and Debriefing

Journals are often integrated with other qualitative methods as part of the overall research process. An interview or focus group just before the journaling process can provide a good opportunity for you to explain the exercise and expectations, while

allowing participants to ask any clarification questions. This provides participants with the opportunity to decide whether to proceed or not after they are fully informed of the process. It is ethically imperative to let potential participants know how their data might be used at this stage. This is also when **informed consent** should be gained, if you have not already done so (see Chapter 2 on research protections). A pre-journal activity can also be used to collect background and demographic information about the journaling participants, such as age, gender, socio-economic background, education or work experience, or a range of other factors, as relevant to your project. A check-in meeting or interview half-way through the journaling exercise can be helpful, if time and resources permit, for you to confirm that the journaling is proceeding as hoped, and to answer any further questions. This can also help maintain participants' levels of enthusiasm and commitment.

An exit interview, focus group, or **survey** can allow you to start to reflect on the main themes emerging from the journals. Because the journal entries are usually written in isolation, this provides participants with a fair degree of freedom to decide what to include in their entries. While this is usually seen as one of the strengths of this method, it also means that information self-selection occurs, without you necessarily knowing why (for example, why a certain event is focused upon more than another). An exit interview therefore provides a great opportunity for you to ask questions regarding this selection process and to put participants' writing in a larger context. Such interviews also allow you to clarify the meanings of certain segments of what participants have written, or to confirm that your initial interpretations of participants' writing are correct. These exit activities can also provide a chance to ask participants broader questions with regards to journaling itself and their experiences with the method and should be reflected upon carefully.

Analyzing and Presenting Results

The analysis of data collected from solicited journals often follows thematic coding procedures, which can help you to draw out the main themes emerging in the data through an iterative process (see Chapter 18 for more on coding). For example, Singer et al. (2000), who were analyzing neighbourhood drug use and HIV risk, coded journal material that they received by locations and drug-use behaviours of interest. Alternatively, Morrison (2012, p. 71) used an "iterative rather than linear process" allowing her to be flexible and change her interpretations as she dug into the journals, so as to "describe, classify, and connect data". It is also possible to draw upon **narrative analysis** approaches that highlight the narrative structures (such as a story-line) within journal entries and that help maintain the participant's voices throughout the analysis process (see Wiles, Rosenberg, and Kearns [2005] and Cope and Kurtz [2016] for more on this approach).

It is important in your write-up to be **transparent** about how the data were gathered and analyzed. You should consider including information outlining your **sampling** procedures and decision-making, as well as the steps that the journaling process took. Also consider adding details regarding the selection criteria used to decide which data were included in your analysis, and how the data were transformed into an interpretative discussion. You need to be able to show readers "whose meanings are represented and why" (Baxter & Eyles, 1997, p. 509). How you approach these different stages of data collection, analysis, and interpretation rest in part on your **positionality** as a researcher, so reflecting carefully on your own positionality and **subjectivity** is important throughout this process (see Chapter 2).

As part of this reflexivity, throughout the analysis and writing-up processes it is important to consider the **power** relations inherent in this method and how best to enable the voices and opinions of participants to be heard. As for many other qualitative methods, while the journal writer has power over what they include in their contributions, the researcher usually retains the power to decide what information is revealed to a broader audience through analysis and writing (see Chapter 19 on writing qualitative geographies and Chapter 20 on communicating with wider audiences). To help in this regard, as well as paraphrasing participant responses where appropriate, it can be useful for you to include direct quotations from journals in your final write-up. This helps readers to see how the evidence and data you collected substantiate your interpretations, and reassures readers that your conclusions are **credible** (Filep et al., 2018).

The written and visual presentation of your findings can be supplemented by scanned images of participants' journal entries to highlight individual voices and narratives while providing visual depth and context to your interpretations. However, it is important that you gain the permission of the journaling participant first, as they might prefer to remain more **anonymous**. A distinctly geographic route to presenting journal results (as well as other qualitative results) can also be narrative mapping, introduced below.

Other Forms of Solicited Journals

Letter Correspondence as Journaling

A slightly different form of solicited journaling from what I have outlined above is letter correspondence. For example, Jennifer Harris (2002) completed a research project with women who self-harm by drawing on letters as a form of journaling. She notes that face-to-face interviews would have been very difficult to arrange given the degree to which self-harm is stigmatized, as well as raising ethical concerns regarding the possible impact on participants. Via a national organization for women who self-harm, Harris was able to contact possible participants and invite them to be part of her study. The women were told that they could write as much or as little as they wanted in their letters, while Harris (2002) reflected that the letters turned out to be extremely detailed and included intensely personal accounts. Harris responded to her participants' letters, attempting to show empathy but avoiding providing any advice; a strategy that she noted was frustrating at times but important with regards to ethical considerations. It is important to note that many Institutional Review Boards/Research Ethics Boards would also require you to provide participants with the contact information of a local support organization or professional, if you decide to undertake research on such sensitive topics.

Email Journals

With increasing access to technology in the Global North, and more and more in the Global South, it is not surprising that email journals are now being considered a useful method to generate research data. The benefits of this approach include the ease by which researchers can check in with participants to make sure the journaling is proceeding smoothly, and the lack of need to **transcribe** data. Nonetheless, depending on your research topic and location, you need to consider "digital divides," since different groups within societies might lack the skills, experience, and/or access to complete such journals with ease and comfort. As with other online approaches discussed in this volume (see Chapters 9, 13, and 15), concerns over confidentiality, privacy, and security are also important, with possible legal ramifications if you are working in a country where emails can be collected and used in court by authorities, or if a participant responds from a work email address. You also need to make sure that participants are who they say they are.

Jones and Woolley (2015) completed an email-diary research project regarding the impacts of the London 2012 Olympic games on commuters in the city. The authors sent participants daily emails with a maximum of four questions each time, asking them to "produce a log of their journey, detail anything they thought was different or significant, and to reflect on issues and news stories provided by the researchers" (Jones & Woolley, 2015, p. 712). Over time, these responses created a journal-like set of data for each participant. They also asked participants to complete a pre- and post-journal **questionnaire** on the research themes and method. Interestingly, Jones and Woolley (2015) sent follow-up emails to only some of their participants to gauge the differences this made to enthusiasm and completions. In the post-journal questionnaires, participants noted that they were encouraged by receiving such feedback.

Sound Journals

Sound journals or diaries can be drawn upon to help understand the nuances of individual engagement with sound, music, and place. Duffy and Waitt (2011) employed this method at the Four Winds music festival in New South Wales, Australia. They noted "how individuals each respond to particular sounds is informed by life histories and what they value" (Duffy & Waitt, 2011, p. 121–2). In this particular study, participants were given mobile recorders and asked to record sounds they deemed meaningful while at the festival. The participants then took part in a conversation with one of the researchers during which they listened to the recordings together and the researcher asked questions regarding what was recorded and why. The authors found the use of sound journals particularly useful to capture the emotions participants experienced momentarily. Or as they put it, the journals were "successful in facilitating access to some aspects of these more difficult-to-articulate, in-the-moment feelings and affects of participants as they recorded, listened attentively and let the festival unfold around them" (Duffy & Waitt, 2011, p. 128). Such sound journals can be used to record people's relationships to a number of specific places, social settings, and events.

Other Kinds of Journals

There is a range of possible journal approaches used in geography that are more functionalist than those discussed above, such as travel journals in which transport geographers ask individuals to track their movements across a city. These journals, often more quantitative in nature, can help geographers to find patterns with regards to pollution exposure, public transit use, travel times, and specific traffic environments, but may also explore participants' qualitative experiences of transportation, sometimes in combination with other methods (e.g., Hansson and Roulston, 2017).

Economic journals, or household income and expenditure journals, can also provide quantitative data with regards to household income and spending patterns. These journals have also been used very effectively by human geographers to gain qualitative, in-depth information. For example, Magalie Quintal-Marineau (2016) asked Inuit women in Kangiqtugaapik, Nunavut, in northern Canada to track and detail their economic contributions to their own households as well as to other households in and outside their community. Participants completed two journals, each a week long. One of these was a week when government transfers were received, the other when no specific income was expected. The participants were asked to record all their income and expenditures, as well as more general information about recurring payments and government funds. Quintal-Marineau visited the women nearly every day to encourage them to complete their entries, sometimes filling in the journal with the participants. This allowed her to gain further information on themes that were of interest to the women at that time. She also completed an exit-interview in which she asked about specific interesting or unusual entries in the journals to gain further clarifications. These discussions, combined with the journals, provided rich insights into women's economic contributions at various scales and the sociocultural meanings of their contributions (see also Wiseman et al. [2005]).

Potentially Sensitive and Ethical Concerns

Sometimes I was too tired to write. I didn't have a lot of time. Usually I get back to my place at 8 pm, then many women take turns to use the only bathroom. The landlord doesn't like us keeping the light on too long in the evening [because of electricity costs]. So by 10 pm, I need to turn off the light. I often used the time when I couldn't sell to write a bit here and there, because I can't really write in the evening. But I get anxious if I spend too much time in one place—I feel like I am missing potential sales in other places I haven't covered, so I take very little time to rest and write during the day. (Street vendor journaling participant discussing the experience of journaling, in Eidse and Turner [2014], p. 246)

A key concern with regards to solicited journaling is the burden that it places on participants since journaling requires a prolonged commitment, unlike standard interviews. As shown in the above quote, this street vendor found it hard to find the time and energy to maintain her journal given her fatigue at the end of a long work day. She also had to negotiate a parsimonious landlord not wanting her to keep the light on at night to be able to write her entries. Other concerns include literacy, as mentioned earlier, and while alternative approaches such as audio diaries might be possible, they carry their own limitations since participants might not be comfortable with the technology needed (Kenten, 2010).

While journaling can offer a space to "download" emotional memories depending on the topic of study, this can be both empowering and emotionally draining or stressful (Morrison, 2012). It is therefore very important to recognize and reflect upon the vulnerabilities involved with journaling. Meth (2003) describes how many of the women in her study regarding violence in South Africa shared painful stories in their journals that they had never revealed before. Morrison (2012) notes that during this process the researcher is not able to provide any immediate emotional support or terminate the data collection, as might be done in a face-to-face interview. For sensitive topics, it thus becomes even more important for you to check in periodically with participants to review the process, and to remind participants that it is their right to withdraw from the project at any time. If working on a sensitive topic, you can also search for possible local resources for interviewees to connect with if the process becomes difficult for them; this may also be an institutional requirement for you to get permission to undertake your study, as noted earlier. It is critical that you weigh up the potentially very significant ethical considerations of undertaking such research before getting started, if the topic could result in anxiety or distressful memories for participants, and determine if the benefits of such research truly outweigh the risks and concerns it could raise (see Chapter 2). Another major concern is protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality since journals contain a written record of personal information. For example, participants in Meth's (2003) study of women and violence in South Africa were often at risk of abusive husbands discovering their diaries. Thus, adequate attention must be given to minimizing such risks. In such a situation, perhaps an option could be to have "meetings" at which participants write their diaries and you store them safely between meetings.

As a researcher deciding on whether to use this method and how, it is also important that you consider the fact that participants are producing their journal entries in isolation from the researcher and hence entries can vary substantially in the degree of personal reflections, coverage of events, and regularity of entries. This means that there might be noticeable differences in the quality of the journal data collected (O'Connell & Dyment, 2011). Similarly, participant efforts might be quite different and, due to the time commitment needed, it is likely that some participants will give up. Some—but not all—researchers utilizing this method have thus decided that journaling is best used in conjunction with other methods. This is your decision to make.

As has hopefully become clear in this discussion, careful preparation is vital for researchers to be able to use this method wisely and respectfully. However, the rewards of doing so can be immense, with powerful accounts of daily experiences, emotions, and personal histories of people–place relationships.

# Narrative Mapping as a Means to Communicate Solicited Journaling and Other Results

Narrative mapping is a type of qualitative cartography that provides a visual representation of relationships between the experiences of individuals or groups and their socio-spatial environments. Narrative maps draw on a combination of spatial data and data produced from qualitative methods such as solicited journals, interviews, sketch mapping, **photo elicitation**, or other qualitative methods. The reasoning for combining these two forms of data is because qualitative data can often provide "a much richer representation of the lived experience of individuals as compared to traditional, quantitative GIS data" (Mennis, Mason, and Cao, 2013, p. 271). This can help to provide insights into individual or group access, restrictions, or usage of specific spaces, fear in certain environments, or historical or contemporary narratives produced about certain locales.

As with solicited journaling, narrative mapping has proved to be successful in highlighting the voices of marginalized communities, as well as demonstrating dissimilar experiences between different groups. Narrative maps can contribute greatly to geographers' understandings of how space and place are experienced and reproduced (Bell et al., 2015; Evans & Jones, 2011). In part, this approach has arisen due to calls from feminist and LGBTQ+ geographers to make GIS and cartography more critically engaged with each other (Kwan, 2002a), with some even calling narrative mapping approaches a form of "countermapping" that can highlight and denounce injustices (Hohenthal Minoia, and Pellikka, 2017). For example, Brown and Knopp (2008), aiming to destabilize the heteronormative logics that underpin map-making and GIS science, produced a map indicating areas of historical significance for the queer community in Seattle, Washington. Their map drew upon a collection of archival material including **oral histories**, community newspapers, and memorabilia to produce a rich spatial narrative that had previously been ignored. Kwan (2008) used narrative mapping to highlight the lived experience of a Muslim woman amidst the Islamophobic atmosphere in Columbus, Ohio, after the 9/11 attacks. After soliciting an oral history and accompanying the participant in her everyday activities, the author produced a visual narrative showcasing which urban spaces the participant frequented and the associated feelings of danger, before and after 9/11.

One key reason to represent data through narrative mapping can be to show a defined chronology of events, drawing on narratives to help express certain sequences (Kwan & Ding, 2008). For example, maps might show precise GPS tracked routes or perhaps outline routes that are drawn from **go-along interview** notes. Complementary data, such as participant quotes, excerpts from interviews, or stories and photographs may then be linked to specific locations on the map (Pearce, 2008: Watts, 2010). See Box 14.2 for an example of such a narrative map created from data collected by an undergraduate honours student who biked and walked alongside a street vendor on her daily route around Hanoi, Vietnam, and interviewed her during their trip.

BOX 14.2

A Narrative Map Illustrating the Daily Mobilities and Concerns of a Young Woman Street Vendor in Hanoi, Vietnam
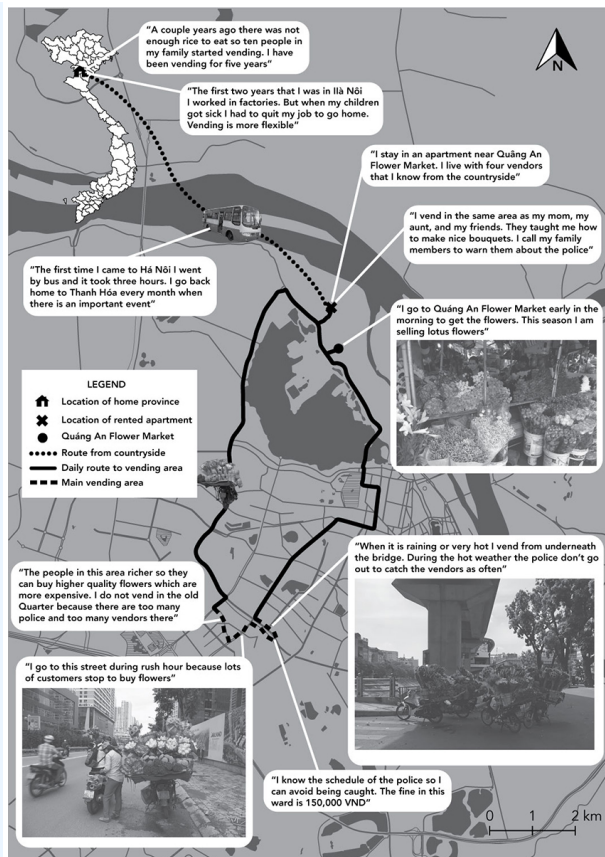
Source: , Honours thesis, McGill University

As well as representing events chronologically, narrative maps can also pin-point specific events in space and time, with data gathered from solicited journals, interviews, or oral histories. A notable example of this approach is Annette Kim's (2015) space-time map of a city block sidewalk in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. She created a map in which coloured bands are plotted in a two-dimensional space, with different coloured bands representing specific spatial uses of the sidewalk, such as motorbike parking, or street food stalls. A z-axis was then added to integrate time into the map as well, representing the changing uses of the sidewalk over different periods of the day.

Another approach is to use narrative mapping to visualize the importance of different locations for specific individuals or groups and the reasoning behind this. Again, data collection can be through solicited journals, interviews, sketch maps, or a range of other methods including participatory approaches. For example, Margaret Wickens Pearce (2014) completed a three-year collaboration with the Penobscot Nation Cultural and Historic Preservation Department to map the traditional Indigenous place names of Penobscot territory in the state of Maine in the US. The aim of this project was to illustrate traditional canoe routes and the surrounding landscapes, while highlighting the narratives that related to these. The maps that were produced had a base map on top of which traditional place names, canoe routes, and stories were mapped as well as community names. The routes and locales noted in stories about Gluskabe, a Penobscot hero, were also added. The resulting maps privileged succinct memories as efficient markers rather than relying on dominant western map-making conventions. As such, this approach could be considered a step towards helping **decolonize** cartography.

Conceptually, narrative mapping can help us to understand the meanings that we attach to specific spaces and how we infuse space with significance. This is what Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) has called "the transformation of space into place" (Knowles, Westerveld, and Strom, 2015, p. 237). Moreover, instead of advancing one uniform narrative, narrative maps are able to

capture "multiple subjectivities, truths, and meanings" ([Knigge & Cope, 2006](#), p. 2035). This provides the potential to challenge top-down and official narratives that tend to exclude the voices of marginalized communities, including queer communities ([Brown & Knopp, 2008](#); [Cieri, 2003](#)), refugees ([Caquard & Dimitrovas, 2017](#); [Fawaz et al., 2018](#)), women of colour ([Bagheri, 2014](#); [Kwan, 2008](#)), Indigenous communities ([Pearce, 2014](#)), and low-income communities ([Boschmann & Cubbon, 2013](#); [McCray & Brais, 2007](#)). Narrative maps are often characterized by their rejection of **positivist** principles of cartography. Some transgress the Cartesian confines of space by incorporating the dimension of temporality, and by mapping various forms of media, including excerpts from interviews, passages from stories or journals, photographs, sketches and paintings, and word clouds ([Knowles, Westerveld, and Strom, 2015](#)). Geographers have also undermined the norms of Euclidean geometry by depicting bodies and their movement at multiple scales ([Kim, 2015](#); [Pearce, 2008](#)). These approaches mean that narrative mapping can "highlight the subjectivities that enter into virtually all representations of geographic space and human interaction" ([Cieri, 2003](#), p. 149). In sum, narrative maps can be a positive means by which "visual images, words, and numbers are used *together* to compose contextualized cartographic narratives in geographical discourse" ([Kwan, 2002b](#), p. 272, emphasis added).

Creating Narrative Maps

There are numerous ways in which narrative maps can be created and therefore the possible final representations take on a wide variety of forms. Most final narrative maps are two-dimensional renditions, but it is also possible to create three-dimensional models or interactive digital maps. There are many different software programs to create maps for this style of representation (however, map-drawing is beyond the scope of this chapter). Some basic approaches can be to work with Google Maps, free tools such as StoryMapJS (see Chapter 1 for example), or other map products found online. You can also often find shareware maps that can be a good starting point. Maps can be imported into PowerPoint as a very simple approach to editing and adding narrative materials, or there are more specialized programs such as Adobe Illustrator or ArcGIS that can be used. Caquard and Dimitrovas (2017) provide an overview of six different story-mapping applications, and detail the benefits and drawbacks of each. I recommend that you talk with your supervisor or cartography experts in your department to seek their recommendations as to the best way to proceed beyond these starting points, and also see Box 14.3 for some other initial ideas.

BOX 14.3
Reflections on Designing a Narrative Map

I experimented with creating narrative maps for my thesis that aimed to investigate the trading practices and livelihoods of Hanoi's young itinerant street vendors. During fieldwork in Hanoi, Vietnam, I completed semi-structured interviews with 35 young vendors who were all migrants to the city. Police regulations and tolerance of street vending fluctuates regularly in the city and is an ongoing cause for concern for these youth. I wanted to highlight their daily routes and routines around the city and the factors that supported or inhibited their mobility. Narrative maps seemed to me to be the perfect medium for doing so, since they allowed me to represent the vendors' relationships to their socio-spatial environments.

To create the narrative maps (including the one shown here as Box 14.2), I used data collected during "walking-while-talking" interviews with vendors, although sometimes I rode alongside them instead. This method provided me with the opportunity to ask vendors about their perceptions of the environment as we travelled through it. By shadowing the vendors along their entire route I became attuned to the spatiality and temporality of their movements. With their permission, I used a GPS tracking application to collect complementary data on their route through the city.

I generated a base-map of Hanoi city using QGIS, a free and open source Geographic Information System. I then imported this map as a PNG file into Photoshop where I added several layers of qualitative data including photos and quotes that I collected during the walking-while-talking interviews. I selected quotes that I felt best highlighted my overall research questions concerning the young migrants' reasons for taking up vending, how they became established, their relationship to public space, their treatment by local residents, and their strategies for coping with city vending regulations. Inspired by Kim's (2015) work in Ho Chi Minh City, I added an insert map of Vietnam and depicted the province from which each vendor migrated, to illustrate the individual trajectories that underpinned their current work. By combining several forms of data I was able to clearly illustrate the vendors' experiences, perceptions, and everyday place-based practices.

Reflections from Honours student Celia Zuberec regarding her narrative mapping process (see Zuberec, 2019).

Narratives can be added via a range of different means such as those mentioned above, including inserting direct links to quotes in a digital project, summaries of interviewee statements, interviewee themes, photographs, sketches, or other art forms, or hyperlinks to similar media. Links are often made to interview excerpts and quotes, as shown in Box 14.2. Narrative maps are also an excellent way to represent data generated in a **PhotoVoice** project (see Chapter 16). Such mixed-method approaches of data representation allow patterns to be revealed that are often not possible when only one medium is used. They also allow understandings and interpretations gained from one method to be clarified and developed further through others (Bell et al., 2015; Knigge & Cope, 2006).

When designing narrative maps, it is important to explain in the accompanying text why particular narratives, in whichever form is chosen, are displayed on the maps (e.g., why specific quotes were used), and what sources they are from. It is also important to be clear as to what activities or events are being depicted in the maps. When designing the maps, also think through what degree of detail is required on each base map and how this will help the reader understand the representations you are creating. Should your base map be black and white or coloured? Will colours add necessary detail or be distracting? What degree of detail regarding buildings, roads, or political boundaries is relevant?

Some familiarity with map-making is required to create narrative maps, and not everyone will feel confident to take on this challenge. However, as noted earlier, it is often possible to start to develop such maps with fairly simple approaches such as a map displayed in PowerPoint and added narratives. GIS-based programs are very powerful but many other tools are available for those looking for user-friendly options.

Conclusion

Solicited journals require careful thought and preparation to make sure that everyone involved is clear regarding what is expected of them and that they are comfortable to proceed. Your overall research aim and questions or objectives will play a large part in how you work with this method, helping you to determine how you select participants, the length of time you will give them for writing their journals, and the style of journal approach (pen and paper or email, for instance). Your project will also direct the key theme(s) or question(s) you will want to ask. Start to think through how you want to analyze and write up your interpretations of results early on, so that you can adjust your research process as a whole if needed. In sum, the benefits from completing a journaling project can be immense, as participants can reveal important insights into your research topic including complexities and contradictions that you might not have even considered, as well as providing detailed understandings of a range of experiences, places, and events.

When you consider the ways in which you want to represent your data, either from solicited journals or other qualitative methods, narrative mapping can be an insightful approach. By simultaneously drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, narrative mapping allows for understandings gained from one method to be further clarified and developed through another (Knigge & Cope, 2006). Low-tech options and open source tools allow for quick and easy representations, while those with GIS skills have even more powerful resources to draw from. Narrative maps allow experiences and practices to be richly represented, and different points of view to be captured and displayed clearly. Pearce (2008, p. 17) sums up this approach nicely as helping advance geography's objective of "uncovering place."

The examples and suggestions that I have outlined here and in Box 14.4 are just a fraction of an exciting possible range of ways to both gain qualitative data via solicited journals, and to represent qualitative data in narrative mapping approaches. Both approaches allow you to create nuanced empirical and conceptual reflections regarding complex situations. While doing so, it is important to carefully reflect on the power relations and ethics involved and your own subjectivity as a researcher. If you are interested in gaining a deeper appreciation and knowledge of people's experiences of everyday life, and how these are shaped by places, social and political structures, and history, then these approaches can be extremely valuable.

BOX 14.4
Selected Geographers and Some of their Narrative Mapping Projects

Geographers / Authors	Focus of narrative mapping projects
Nazgol Bagheri (2014)	Visually representing Iranian women's experiences, preferences, and usage of public space in Tehran
Eric Boschmann & Emily Cubbon (2013)	Spatial narratives of working poor individuals and the experiences of fear among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community members
Chris Brennan-Horley & Chris Gibson (2009)	Determining and mapping where unstructured forms of creativity are located in Darwin, Australia
Michael Brown & Larry Knopp (2008)	Creating maps to highlight spaces of historical significance to members of the lesbian and gay community in Seattle, Washington
Sébastien Caquard & Stefanie Dimitrovas (2017)	Mapping narratives regarding the life story of a Rwandan refugee

Julie Cidell (2010)	Mapping content clouds to compare how environmental issues are perceived and discussed according to location
Marie Cieri (2003)	Drawing upon qualitative mapping to challenge mainstream representations of lesbian and bisexual spaces
Sarah Elwood (2006)	Investigating the work of two community organizations to produce spatial narratives that advance different agendas for an inner-city Chicago neighbourhood
Jaes Evans and Phil Jones (2011)	Using GIS and walked interviews to capture the relationship of "what people say" to "where they say it"
Annette Kim (2015)	Investigating how the use of a sidewalk (pavement) changes over space and time in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
LaDona Knigge and Meghan Cope (2006)	"Grounded Visualization"—developing an integrated method for analysing both qualitative and quantitative data through geographic information systems (GIS) and ethnography
Mei-Po Kwan (2008)	Representing the lived-experiences and narratives of Muslim women in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the US
Anne Kelly Knowles, Levi Westerveld & Laura Strom (2015)	Creating GIS-based visualizations and inductive visualizations regarding the geographies of the Holocaust and survivor testimonies
Talia McCray & Nicole Brais (2007)	Exploring the relationships between transport and social exclusion for low-income women in Quebec City, Canada
Margaret Wickens Pearce (2008)	Mapping the historical geography of fur traders in the eighteenth century, in eastern Canada
Paul Watts (2010)	Mapping human actions and eyewitness accounts during the 1992 Los Angeles riots

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Journaling has been suggested to help researchers gain information on topics that might be particularly sensitive. Give some examples of how journaling could be a positive qualitative method option for potentially sensitive topics that you can think of.

2. What are some of the key concerns that researchers need to think about when planning a journaling exercise? Consider how these might vary in different parts of the world, or with different groups within a specific society.

3. What are some of the strategies that researchers can use to make sure that the journaling process goes smoothly for participants and researchers alike?

4. What are some of the main challenges associated with narrative mapping? Can you think of possible solutions or work-arounds to still utilize this approach?

5. Find an example of a narrative map. Did the authors manage to represent their data in a way that made it easier to understand and interpret their results than a written text? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not? Could they have improved their narrative map?

REVIEW EXERCISES

1. **Solicited journals** Find a scholarly geographical article that explains a research project that you think could be undertaken using a solicited journal approach. Consider how you would recruit participants, and who these participants would ideally be. Create the information sheet that you would provide for participants, and design the process of keeping in touch with them pre-, during, and after journaling. Think through ethical and logistical concerns as well.

2. **Narrative mapping** Create a base map of your campus (for example a screen shot from google maps or the official campus map, then copied onto a PowerPoint slide). Create a brief interview schedule or journaling exercise that asks another student to reflect upon how the campus could be made more inviting and enjoyable—even fun—for users of diverse backgrounds. Add comment boxes in the appropriate locations on the map with the other student's key reflections of how these could be changed. Then go and find these sites and take photos of them to add to your narrative map too. Take your finished narrative map back to the interviewee and ask them whether they think the map is an accurate depiction of their reflections. If not, how could it be improved?

USEFUL RESOURCES

On solicited journals

Latham, A. (2003). Research, performance, and doing human geography: Some reflections on the diary-photograph, diary-interview method. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, **35**(11), 1993–2017.

Meth, P. (2003). Entries and omissions: using solicited diaries in geographical research. *Area*, **35**(2), 195–205.

Morrison, C.-A. (2012). Solicited diaries and the everyday geographies of heterosexual love and home: reflections on methodological process and practice. *Area*, **44**(1), 68–75.

Thomas, F. (2007). Eliciting emotions in HIV/AIDS research: A diary based approach. *Area*, **39**(1), 74–82.

On narrative mapping

Brown, M., & Knopp, L. (2008). Queering the map: The productive tensions of colliding epistemologies. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, **98**(1), 40–58.

Caquard, S. (2011). Cartography I: Mapping narrative cartography. *Progress in Human Geography*, **37**(1), 135–44.

Kim, A.M. (2015). Critical cartography 2.0: From "participatory mapping" to authored visualizations of power and people. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, **142**, 215–25.

Kwan, M.-P. (2002a). Feminist visualization: Re-envisioning GIS as a method in feminist geographic research. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, **92**(4), 645–61.

LIST OF KEY TERMS

anonymous

confidentiality

credible

decolonize

diaries

ethical

focus groups

go-along interview

informed consent

interviews

longitudinal data

mixed-method

narrative analysis

narrative mapping

oral histories

photo elicitation

PhotoVoice

positionality

positivist

power

purposeful sampling

questionnaire

reflexivity

sampling

solicited journals

subjectivities

survey

transcribe

transparent