'Following the narrative' is a method for doing participatory narrative research which allows for the emergence and co-production of social narratives while bringing the various stories together in a coherent frame for understanding the histories, positionalities and narrative levels involved.

It is a way of creating new social possibilities in the co-production of personal and collective narratives by taking seriously the sentiment that *"it is no longer enough to limit actors to the role of informers … You have to grant them back the ability to make up their own theories of what the social is made of"*[1] and engaging with the possibilities that extended narration create to reveal the contingency of our narratives about the world and *"become freer to imagine other ways of being"*[2].

'Following the narrative' positions the researcher as co-narrator and participants as genuine authorities on their own lives. In a nutshell, it means following narrators down their narrative trails in order to clarify how and where the particular narratives emerged and to create possibilities for transformation in the roles, plots and framings which bound participants' positionalities. It does this through careful attention to the way narrators situate themselves and by exploring points of contradiction or transformation.

The key principles that underpin 'following the narrative' as a research method are:

1) Situating researchers and participants on the same ontological level (by viewing ontology as performative and reality as arising from our 'mode of participation' in it[3]);
2) Ensuring conversational equality and respecting the irreducibility of human experience (and finding appropriate ways to mediate personal experiences);
3) Introducing complete transparency and careful documentation of the co-production of narratives (including building suitable systems for the organisation of data);
4) Avoiding discriminating data until after it is collected;
5) Continually exploring and clarifying particular meanings with participants in order to create openings for new and further readings of a narrative.

The aim of 'following the narrative' is to create a 'virtual reality' that allows readers *"to enter this reality and explore it inside and out"*[4]. The virtual reality is multi-media and can take both digital and physical form – online platforms and spaces are well suited to both chronicle and communicate the narratives investigated. In this way, the multiple perspectives, ambiguities and contradictions that are needed to develop sensitivity to a given problematic can also be accommodated and included.

'Following the narrative' was developed for my doctoral research and you can find out more about the theoretical and ethical considerations behind this method in my thesis where you can also see what form a 'virtual reality' can take in practice.

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1 Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the social - An introduction to actor-network-theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 11.
2 Tamboukou, M. (2008) 'A Foucauldian approach to narratives,' in M. Andrews, C. Squire and M. Tamboukou (eds.), *Doing Narrative Research*, Sage, London, p. 102.
3 Bohm, D. (2004) *On Creativity*, Taylor & Francis, New York, p. 130.
4 Flyvbjerg, B. (2006) 'Five misunderstandings about case-study research,' *Qualitative Inquiry*, p. 238.