

# Restructuring structural narrative analysis using Campbell's monomyth to understand participant narratives

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In this paper, we describe a method for performing structural narrative analysis that draws on narratology and literary studies, moving structural narrative analysis from a focus on examining linguistic parts of narratives to understanding thematic structures that make up the whole narrative. We explore the possibility of constructing participant narratives using Campbell's monomyth as a coding and structuralizing scheme. The method we describe is the response to the question, "How might we find a reliable way to construct 'smooth' stories (with attention to the structures of stories) so that we might compare trajectories of student experiences?" To answer this question, we use narrative interviews from a larger study to show how this method can make sense of interviews and construct accessible and useful participant narratives. We close by providing an example narrative constructed using the monomyth coding scheme and discussing benefits and difficulties associated with this method.

**Keywords:** structural narrative analysis, Campbell's monomyth, hero's journey, narrative smoothing, narratology, literary studies

## Introduction

Narrative smoothing has been described as a "necessary method" used to make a "participant's story coherent, engaging, and interesting to the reader" (Kim, 2016). It occurs, generally, when data is disjointed, and the researcher attempts to develop an organized, often chronological narrative from the data (Polkinghorne, 1995). Researchers suggest a need for caution when smoothing narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Spence, 1986); smoothing is an interpretive act that can create a romanticized or un-nuanced story that misrepresents events or participant stories. Thus, before engaging in the process of smoothing, researchers must consider

the degree to which personal interpretation should inform a study, what elements of data can (or should) be left out of the story, and how personal motivations may affect the smoothing process of the narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016).

We struggled with these concerns raised by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and Kim (2016) when performing narrative research on undergraduate engineering students at a Southeastern research university (Kellam, Gerow & Walther, 2015). The larger research team interviewed 21 students about how they came to identify (or not identify) as engineers, asking questions about experiences that they had before and during their post-secondary careers that they saw as formative of an engineering identity. We then planned to understand these transcripts through narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995), which “is the procedure through which the researcher organizes the data elements into a coherent developmental account. The process of narrative analysis is actually a synthesizing of the data rather than a separation of it into its constituent parts” (p. 15). We further planned to do a paradigmatic analysis with a focus on structural elements of the constructed stories as a means of comparing the trajectories to determine if there were recurring themes or events in the timelines of students becoming engineers.

Interview transcripts, which ranged from ten to forty pages, included areas of redundancy, uncertainty, hearsay, conjecture, intro- and retrospection, and interruptions from interviewers. In short, the interviews were not structured in any predictable or coherent way. Before analyzing, we would have to smooth student narratives, but a review of the literature provided few suggestions for ways to reliably do so. How might we find a reliable way to construct smooth stories (with attention to the structures of those stories) so that we might compare trajectories of student experiences? In this methodological paper, we explore the possibility of smoothing/constructing participant narratives using literary critic Joseph Campbell’s monomyth as a coding and structuralizing scheme. We begin with a review of structural narrative analysis, focusing on how it was both useful and limiting to our project of thinking about student narratives. Then, using the narrative interviews from our study on engineering students, we show how the monomyth might be used to develop “smooth” narratives, developing accessible and useful participant narratives while preserving participant voice.

## Literature review

Because of our interest in the trajectory and structure of student stories, we first turned to structural narrative research, hoping to find a theory to help us provide a structure for the smoothing process of our student narratives. Structural analysis

is concerned with the ways that participant stories are structured, rather than the content within those stories (Daiute, 2014). Reissman (2008) likens structural analysis to a musical analyst who “slows the composition down and notices the relations (of parts to each other and to the whole) thus determining how the composition achieves its effects” (p. 101). Further, structural narrative research has its roots in literary theory and narratology, a branch of literary studies that theorizes the nature of narrative. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, (1998) state that “psychological inroads into the analysis of narrative structure have adopted a number of strategies from the field of literary criticism” (p. 88), and Webster and Mertova (2007) argue that most approaches to narrative methods “have tended to treat the stories of human experience in terms based on those used in traditional approaches to narrative, such as literary criticism,” particularly those approaches that seek to describe “event, character, and *structure*” (p. 73, italics ours). In describing a method that Daiute (2014) calls plot analysis, she employs much terminology from literary studies, including “initiating action,” “setting,” “climax,” “resolution,” and “coda.” She too claims, “literary study shows that plot elements may be included and organized in flexible ways according to cultural, personal, and sociopolitical norms” (p. 116). Similarly, Riessman (2008) believes that “structural [narrative] analysis is tied to theorizing in narratology that initially interrogated literary texts” (p. 78); this suggested to us that literary theory was a fruitful field to begin looking for theories of structuring narratives.

### Structural narrative analysis, narratology, and linguistics

Although several scholars suggest that structural narrative analysis has its roots in literary theory, these scholars spend a small amount of time discussing this idea, do little to support it, and often turn to linguistics when describing its actual inception. This is likely because the first to develop structural analysis is William Labov, who, in 1972, studied the linguistic elements that structure narratives (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003; Riessman, 2008); this marks the first time that structures of “everyday” stories had been studied. Labov (1972) examined self-reported narratives about personal (often physical) altercations that black children, adolescents, and adults experienced in Harlem, New York. Labov looked specifically at the linguistic qualities of the various clauses that comprised the narratives, and found that clauses may take on one of six roles in a narrative: (1) abstract, an introduction which frames and summarizes the entire narrative, (2) orientation, or necessary context to understand the full narrative, (3) complicating action, or the “meat” of the story that leads to the resolution, (4) evaluation, various statements that justify the telling of the story, (5) resolution, or the final event in the story, and (6) the coda, a concluding

statement that ends, summarizes, or establishes the significance to the audience of the narrative. This attention to the linguistic structures in narrative set the stage for structural narrative analysis as it exists today.

It should be noted that the narratives in Labov's (1972) study are generally short, and for this reason, he was able to focus his analysis on the structure of clauses, phrases, and words: for instance, a word such as "yesterday" signifies orientation as it explains when an event happened, or a phrase such as "and that was that" might fall into the category of coda as something to "wrap up" the narrative. For Labov, the kinds of words used in the narratives determined the narrative structure. In his study, particular attention was paid to parts of speech, tense markers, conjunctives, and phrasal and clausal orientation, among other linguistic factors; these determined what role each line of narrative played in the overall structure of the narrative. While this explains why Riessman (2008) and Daiute (2014) immediately turn to structural linguistics to explain structural narrative research, it does not explain why or how such analysis is rooted in literary theory or narratology.

Mitchell and Egudo (2003) and Kim (2016), on the other hand, provide brief historical outlines explaining how this structural-linguistic approach to narrative analysis may have been informed by literary study. A major concern of literary theory has always been determining *what* constitutes literature. Kim explains that in the 1960s, a number of literary theorists began examining the language used in pieces of literature, searching for invariant, universal units of language upon which a coherent theory of what constitutes literature might be built. This theory was referred to as narratology. Mitchell and Egudo further explain that this was a move to make the study of literature more systematic and scientific. They claim that "literary theory, in a move to a more scientific approach, borrowed from structural linguistics to attempt to uncover a narrative grammar that would generate all possible narratives" (p. 4), and it is for this reason that structural linguistics and narratology are well suited for Labov's method of studying language use and narratives of Harlem residents, now referred to as structural analysis. However, like Kim, we found such a focus on language to be unproductive. Further, given the length and disjointed nature of our interviews, we found such a linguistic approach to be impossible to apply. Further, the examples of stories that Labov (1972) provides suggest that the stories were already put together smoothly by the participants. Continuing in the field of literary theory, we began searching for other theories of story structure and current advances in narratology.

## Cognitive narratology

A recent move in the study of narratology is cognitive narratology, “the study of mind-relevant aspects of storytelling practices, wherever – and by whatever means – those practices occur” (Herman, 2007, p. 307). According to Sommer (2009), cognitive narratology suggests that there are certain structures within stories that follow particular narrative schemata and are activated by textual cues. Thus, after hearing a series of stories and developing a prototype of various forms of narrative (Fludernik & Olson, 2011), individuals have an innate ability to follow similar structural conventions as they develop narratives of their own. While the cues for activating these schemata might differ from culture to culture (Riessman, 2008; Labov, 1972), it has been suggested that overarching structural themes cross cultural borders (Daiute, 2014; Herman, 2009). More recently, Garcia (2015) corroborates this idea, arguing that the creation of high level narratives is the result of lower order, innate happenings in the brain, and that archetypes in stories themselves “represent patterns of [neural] activity that are more likely to evolve than others” (p. 30). According to Garcia, stories follow patterns because the average human brain is wired to think and build information using these particular patterns. If this is the case, then most stories we encounter will follow a fairly predictable trajectory.

Though the content of every story may be different, cognitive narratology tells us that stories follow eventful patterns that allow us to make sense of stories – without such patterns, we would struggle to interpret these stories. It is important to note that the patterns occur beyond the linguistic level observed by Labov (1972); the events themselves fit into predictable thematic patterns that constitute the overall narrative. In this case, the content (or events) of the story fall into place based on a common structural pattern; at the same time, the content “makes” the structure of the story. Under the purview of cognitive narratology, structure and content are difficult to separate, and inform one another. If this is the case, Lieblich et al. (1998) are correct when they note, “the content of the plot or its segments is essential for characterizing and understanding its form. The separation of ‘whole’ from ‘category’ is, in reality, not clearer than that between ‘content’ and ‘form’” (p. 169).

### Rethinking narrative structures: The monomyth

Thus, narratological considerations seemed useful for us when developing a smooth structure in our transcripts and for our project of narrative analysis. We simply needed to find a theory that more specifically described what kinds of thematic and structural patterns stories follow. During our research on narratology, we found that while the term “narratology” arose in the 1960s and “cognitive narratology”

in the new millennium, the *concept* of narratology has existed for at least 70 years. Specifically, in Joseph Campbell's *Hero with 1000 Faces*, he introduces the monomyth, a theory claiming that all epic myths, regardless of when or where they were written, follow a universal structure (Leeming, 2010). Throughout the work, he describes over 100 stories from different cultures and eras, showing that all stories follow generally the same trajectory. Ultimately, for Campbell, stories can be broken into 17 different stages, which we might refer to as an archetypal trajectory.

Campbell (2004) does not only describe hero-myths, however; drawing on the work of Carl Jung, he argues that the monomyth structure is universal because it is subconscious and collective; humans naturally develop narratives within this structure. Using dreams as an expression of human subconscious, he claims "there can be little doubt ... that myths are of the nature of dream, or that dreams are symptomatic of the dynamics of the psyche" (Campbell, 2004, p. 237). He compares human dreams to various world myths in an effort to show that we naturally think and build stories using the monomyth structure. This suggested that the monomyth is a template that we use, if sometimes unconsciously, to build stories, in line with theories of cognitive narratology (Herman, 2007; Fludernik & Olson, 2011) and Garcia's (2015) theory of the brain and narrative. As such, it seemed that the monomyth would lend itself to research as a useful way to construct and smooth narratives from interview transcripts.

## Method

In our initial study on engineering identities, students were asked, starting as early as they could remember, to describe events that led them to their current respective levels of engineering. Some students mentioned early childhood, some mentioned high school experiences, and others described various extracurricular experiences in college. The first phase of the interview was focused on narration where the interviewer encouraged storytelling from the participant – the following phase of the interview transitioned into a conversation phase where the interviewer asked questions or provided prompts to encourage the participant to elaborate on ideas introduced in the narration phase (Kim, 2016). As such, the interviews themselves did not provide coherent, chronological narratives. As mentioned earlier, interview transcripts ranged from ten to forty double spaced pages.

In the initial study, interviews were rewritten using critical incident analysis (Webster & Mertova, 2007) as a way of structuring the narratives. Using this method, researchers look for major turning points in transcripts – points where the participants' outlook, experiences, or plans undergo a radical transformation – and (re) build the story around those "critical incidents." After such story building, we were

curious about what other models of story building might reveal in the interviews, and we were particularly curious about how incidents may have occurred in similar or dissimilar ways over the course of student stories. Due to our inexperience in narrative smoothing and limitations in Labovian methods described above, we turned to Campbell's (2004) monomyth as a way of reconstructing, or "smoothing" the student stories. The smoothing process occurred in three steps.

### Step 1. Familiarization with transcripts and pre-coding

Before attempting to smooth the narratives, it was necessary to develop a general "feel" for each story and to understand what kinds of events and themes existed within them. This made it easier to develop and interpret the coding scheme (described in step 2) because it gave us an idea of where monomythic archetypes and student stories might converge. We were already familiar with these transcripts from our larger study in which we examined critical incidents in student narratives. Had we not been familiar with the transcripts, however, we would have needed to parse out the events that occurred in each transcript, separating them from other, noneventful aspects of the interviews (e.g. introspection, reflection, reiteration). Having initially identified events made it easier to later determine how to code these events and place them in the monomyth structure.

### Step 2. Development of the coding scheme and application of codes

While the monomyth structure provided a useful framework for building stories, we needed to take interpretive liberties before we felt it was useful for student narratives. For instance, much of Campbell's monomyth is dated in that it maintains sexist or ethnocentric language. This does not change the broader idea of the monomyth itself, and it did not reduce the potential of the monomyth as useful for building participant narratives; however, it meant that for our study, we needed to determine what elements of the monomyth should be used, what should be let go, and what should be "re-written." In short, we needed to interpret ways that the monomyth might apply to more contemporary stories such as those of our participants. Kim (2016) argues that there is no narrative research without interpretation, and that interpretation is generally comprised of five strategies: focus, omission, addition, appropriation, and transposition. She further explains that these interpretive acts tend to lead to "smoother" narratives that are more "coherent, engaging, and interesting to the reader" (p. 192). While she refers to smoothing as necessary for creating narratives, we found that this smoothing was also necessary for our interpretive lens, the monomyth.

Here, we provide some examples of omission, addition, and appropriation/re-writing as we attempted to “smooth” Campbell’s work for our purposes. Campbell (2004) observed that in many classical myths, gods or supernatural powers exist. We understood gods and supernatural powers to be authoritative forces outside of the hero’s control; therefore, gods and supernatural powers were reinterpreted to refer to institutional powers or forces outside of the participant’s immediate control. Additionally, certain elements of the monomyth are sexist, for instance, the concept of “woman as temptress,” a trial that most heroes/heroines experience according to Campbell. In this case, we understood the concept of temptation to be more important than gender, and smoothed this category into “meeting with temptation,” instead of the original “woman as temptress.” In general, we chose to interpret gender roles loosely; men might act as “goddesses,” and women might take on fatherly roles. Finally, we found that one theme described in Campbell’s monomyth (magical flight) did not apply well to student narratives. This is unproblematic because Campbell (2004) did not insist that all archetypal categories be present in every myth; rather, they are common elements across all myths when considered as a whole. Table 1 provides a detailed description of the codes used to write participant narratives and how they were understood in the study.

Using Campbell’s descriptions and our interpretations of how these descriptions might apply in the context of student narratives, we coded each transcript by noting events as they occurred and applying one of the 17 stages of the monomyth to each event. Additionally, we provided a note for each coded event, describing rationale for its application.

### Step 3. Compilation of narratives

After applying codes, we took the coded events and listed them in order based on the unfolding of Campbell’s monomyth. For instance, those events coded representing the “call to adventure” were removed from the transcript and rewritten as the beginning of the story. Those events coded as “refusal of the call” were then removed and rewritten as the next part of the story, and so on. Typically, one paragraph sufficed for each of the stages coded in the student narratives, although when little information was given for a particular stage, we occasionally collapsed two stages into one paragraph, or when large amounts of information existed, we broke that section into two or three paragraphs. When restructuring student narratives based on this coding scheme, we attempted both third- and first-person accounts of the events. We ultimately concluded that first-person accounts provided a more empathetic and action-oriented story. First-person accounts also allowed us to use large blocks of direct speech from interview transcripts, preserving participant voice. We created 21 stories using this method.



Table 1. Description of monomythic codes, our interpretation of those codes, and an exemplar event for each code

Monomythic code*	Campbell's description	Our interpretation	Exemplar event
The call to adventure	"This first stage of the mythological journey – which we have designated the "call to adventure" – signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (p. 53).	This provides the opening for the narrative: it addresses how and why the entire story starts. It may be a motivation or affinity within a participant, or a more external force that drives the participant in a particular direction. In the case of our study, it was anything that began the participant's engineering career.	The student discovered an interest in engineering by playing with Legos as a child.
Refusal of the call	"... we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible to turn the ear to other interests. Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative" (p. 54).	The participant has misgivings about their initial desire. In our study, this meant anything that prohibited them from following their desire to major in engineering.	The participant decided to major in a different field because engineering seemed too difficult, or a different field seemed more lucrative.
Supernatural aid	"the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (p. 63).	The participant received unexpected help or advice regarding their career trajectory.	The student received a STEM scholarship, or a particular advisor suggested engineering to the student, spurring/validating an interest in engineering.
The first threshold	"The hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the "threshold guardian" at the entrance to the zone of magnified power... Beyond them is dark less, the unknown, and danger" (p. 71).	This is the first trial encountered by the student. Typically, there is an awareness that the first threshold will be a challenge, and so it is often something that does not come as a surprise to the student.	A "gatekeeper" (or threshold guardian) course proved to be particularly difficult for the student.
Belly of the whale	"The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died... This popular motif gives emphasis to the lesson that the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation" (p. 83–84).	This is the lowest point in the student's experience of school. We looked for a negative experience that was transformative (annihilating an existing self).	The student failed their first test and began considering whether he/she belonged in an engineering program.

Table 1. (*continued*)

Monomythic code*	Campbell's description	Our interpretation	Exemplar event
Road of trials	<p>"The original departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiator's conquests and moments of illumination. Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed – again, again, and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies, and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land" (p. 100).</p>	<p>This is the "meat" of the narrative. It is comprised of all the things that happen to the student after passing the initial trial, but before resolution of the ultimate goal is in sight.</p>	<p>The road is composed of classes that the student took, relationships that the student forged, and family issues; much falls into the category of road of trials, and the experiences may be positive or negative.</p>
Meeting with the all-knower (Meeting with the goddess)	<p>"The meeting with the goddess (who is incarnate in every woman) is the final test of the talent of the hero to win the boon of love (charity: amor fati), which is life itself enjoyed as the encasement of eternity" (p. 109).</p>	<p>The all-knower is a figure who passes knowledge to the student that is crucial to the resolution of the journey. Without this relationship with the all-knower, the journey would have ended radically differently.</p>	<p>The student published a paper with a professor, which helped secure a position in a graduate program.</p>
Meeting with temptations (Woman as temptress)	<p>"...[the hero] turns from the fair features of the world to search the darkness for a higher kingdom than this of the incest and adultery ridden, luxurious and incorrigible mother. The seeker of the life beyond life must press beyond her, surpass the temptations of her call, and soar to the immaculate ether beyond" (p. 112).</p>	<p>This is a particularly abstract idea for Campbell, but the core of the idea is that something keeps the hero from attaining a higher ideal. The student is tempted by something that does not help fulfill the journey's goal and that becomes, overall, a negative experience.</p>	<p>The student started a business that they thought would get them rich quick and may replace the need to finish their engineering degree, but they quickly discovered that the business was time consuming and not fulfilling.</p>

Table 1. (*continued*)

Monomythic code*	Campbell's description	Our interpretation	Exemplar event
Atonement with parent (Atonement with father)	"The center of belief is transferred outside of the bedeviling god's tight scaly ring, and the dreadful ogres dissolve" (p. 120).	The parent is a powerful and intimidating figure that in some way held sway over the students' life. During atonement, the student comes to terms with this power; retains autonomy, and internalizes some of the parent's power.	The student decided to work with a professor that in the past had been difficult to take a class with. Armed with new knowledge, the student was able to work well with the previously difficult professor.
Apotheosis	"This image stands at the beginning of the cosmogonic cycle, and with equal propriety at the conclusion of the hero-task, at the moment when the wall of Paradise is dissolved, the divine form found and recollects, and wisdom regained" (p. 140).	The student reaches a new stage of understanding; the journey becomes routine, and the academic experience is no longer an exercise in naive discovery, but an informed rhythm.	The student now has a scheduler and uses it as though it is second nature, successes are regular, and failures can be renegotiated, becoming useful.
Ultimate boon	"The supreme boon desired for [is] the Indestructible Body... To this very day, the possibility of physical immortality charms the heart of man" (p. 174).	While immortality doesn't happen in real life, the student may feel immortal for various reasons, particularly as the journey reaches resolution.	The student completed an internship and returned to their engineering program with insight and confidence in their journey to become an engineer.
Refusal of the return	"When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. But the responsibility has frequently been refused" (p. 179).	If graduation or working in an engineering position represent the end of the journey, the refusal of the return represents something that the student consciously does to defer graduation or work.	The student, instead of graduating, decided to complete another internship "for more experience."

Table 1. (*continued*)

Monomythic code*	Campbell's description	Our interpretation	Exemplar event
Magical flight	"If the trophy has been attained against the opposition of its guardian, or if the hero's wish to return to the world has been resented by the gods or demons, then the last stage of the mythological round becomes a lively, often comical, pursuit" (p. 181).	N/A	NA
Rescue from without	"The hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by assistance from without. That is to say, the world may have to come and get him" (p. 193).	If the student is refusing the return, some sort of event must bring the student back, causing the resolution of the journey (graduation).	A parent suggested that the student apply to different jobs, and suggests that the student may always go back to school later.
Return threshold	"That is the hero's ultimate difficult task. How render back into light-world language the speech-defying pronouncements of the dark? How represent on a two-dimensional surface a three-dimensional form, or in a three-dimensional image a multi-dimensional meaning? How translate into terms of "yes" and "no" revelations that shatter into meaninglessness every attempt to define the pairs of opposites?" (p. 202).	After spending so long in college, people change. The return threshold is an attempt to communicate with the "real" world what happened during the journey and to reconcile the new identity with the world that the student left behind.	A first generation student returned home and discovered that his/her family did not understand the importance of earning a college degree and encourage the student to start working instead of finishing their degree.
Master of both worlds and Freedom to live	"Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division ... not contaminating the principles of the one [world] with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other – is the talent of the master" (p. 212–213).	The student is able to exist in both the "real" world and the world of academia. The student may be able to shift identities, using the rules of academia when necessary, but dropping the academic identity when a different identity is called for.	The student found a job that speaks well to the skills learned in college, but the job itself allowed for the student to live independently and comfortably, golfing on the weekends.

\* Campbell's original descriptor, if different from code name.

Below is an example of a narrative created using this approach. At the beginning of each paragraph, we have included in parentheses the corresponding stage of the monomyth. Italics indicate words added by the researchers to help transition or situate the story. Brackets indicate words added to the sentence to clarify a pronoun that was used by the speaker with no antecedent. Otherwise, all words are directly from the interview transcript.

(Call to adventure) I think ever since I was young I loved playing with Legos and stuff like that, and it just escalated. I took a pre-engineering or engineering class in high school. It was just learning how to use AutoCAD and computer programs like that. I guess that just progressed with me to college. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and then on the [the college] application page I put "engineering" because I was kind of interested in that; more interested in that than other stuff.

(Crossing the first threshold) *In my pre-engineering class*, my teacher was pretty good. It was mostly just messing around. It wasn't anything serious. It was just playing around on the computers, just getting familiar. I think it was mostly to pique your interest in engineering or architecture subjects. *But even with that background*, last year was kind of awkward because no one knew each other, so you're just trying to figure out who you are, and how you work with other people. It's a whole different experience than high school, because you're with people you don't know. You just have a bunch of classes with random people, because [it's] is kind of a big school, so it's hard to build those relationships. It's hard meeting people and finding study groups and trying to balance your time and know what you're supposed to do because there are so many different things to do on campus and just figuring out what you'll enjoy, what you need to do, what will help you in the long run, but knowing you're in college so you should enjoy the time. I grew really close with the people that lived on my hall last year, and that was really nice.

(Road of trials) Now, I've got involved on campus, and I'm pretty busy. I've been pretty busy this whole year. There's so much, it's hard to just put a few words to it. I'm an RA [*residential assistant*]. Me and a couple other civil students are starting the new branch of ASCE, and we've been working really hard on that this year, which is "American Society of Civil Engineers." We've been working a lot with that. I had an internship that started December of last year. It's really hard; especially this year, being an RA takes a lot of time, and judiciary, that takes a lot of time, too, because you have meetings. I have three or four meetings every week. I think it kind of showed on my GPA last semester, too, because I took a lot of hard classes then, and it's kind of overwhelming with classes and schoolwork. Sometimes I get frustrated when teachers assign too much work, which seems kind of silly, but sometimes it's hard to ... you know you have all this work for other classes, but it seems like teachers think that's all you have to do. You need to spend so-and-so hours on this. I'm in a class with Dr. S. right now, and he's like, "For every day of class, you need to spend like, three hours outside of it." I just feel like it's not possible, I guess. Not NOT possible, but not realistic. *Another* thing that is kind of frustrating is, I feel

like we have 7 or 9 more hours than a lot of other majors do, engineers, and on top of that, some of our classes ... I'm in a 2-hour numerical methods class right now, but it meets Tuesday-Thursday for an hour-and-fifteen minutes, which is the same as 3-hours, so not getting that credit. Same with thermodynamics last semester; it met for the time you're supposed to get 3-hours credit. I think that will be all throughout college, because I had one my freshman year, where it was a 1-hour class, but we met for three hours on a Friday morning. Engineering is notorious for being one of the most rigorous, but it's one of the most rewarding when you get out of college.

(Belly of the whale) *My hardest experience*, I took Statics, Physics II, Thermodynamics last semester, and just having that, having the rigor of all the courses and the homework and still trying to get a balance of a good ... just having time for other things, that's been challenging. That's really something that's come to light this year more so than last year. Last year, classes weren't that bad, but just having all engineering classes, and not just classes you can study for the day before: learning how to deal with that kind of stuff.

(Atonement) I took [*statistics*] with Dr. M., and at the beginning of class, he was like, "People always are like, your teachers have always been telling you, yeah, this might be, like what I'm teaching you now might be easy, but wait until you get to middle school, to high school, to college." Then he was like, "Well, this is the class they were always talking about." That's really intimidating going into as a freshman, you always hear people talking about how they have a statics test and how a fourth of the class dropped because their scores are so low. Going through that experience allows you to think differently and be a better critical thinker. It's an enjoyable subject. Going through the class, it wasn't fun, but looking back on it, it was kind of fun. I'm in Strength and Materials now, and just using the things we've learned in Statics, learning those concepts were so hard, but now it seems so basic.

(Meeting the All Knower) The one I researched with, Dr. C., *she's* really into student learning and getting involved. I feel like I learned a lot from her. When you hear about all the things she's done and all, like the projects she's worked on, and her resume, or curriculum vitae, I don't know what you call it, you'd think it would be someone that's not easy to approach, but she's really approachable. She really wants to help the students. I really enjoyed researching under her, because I wasn't afraid to ask questions, which I think helped both of us learn more.

(Apotheosis and ultimate boon) *Because of all their help*, I am able to take a subject and not only understand it and know what the teacher's doing, but be able to take other things and apply it to that subject. Understand the inter-connectedness and the relationships between things. *And now that I can do that*, I'm in a better place to get involved, because a lot of people go through college focusing on themselves and having a good time. I think it's really important because getting involved, you're able to help others while growing yourself.

## Discussion and conclusion

The monomyth created a simple-to-follow structure with which to reconstruct student stories, and once coded, it was easy to follow the course of the monomyth structure to create coherent and meaningful narratives. Kim (2016), Connelly and Clandinin (1990), and Spence (1986) caution that when smoothing, we must consider how our interpretations color the final narrative. We feel that the monomyth, although acting as a template that appropriated and re-organized information presented in interview transcripts, ultimately preserved the integrity of student stories while giving us a way to manage them as data. It acted as a way to break events into common chronological “pieces” that occurred for all students, making the data easy to manage and compare across two- to three-page student stories. However, it also allowed us to retain students’ first-person accounts of events. We expect that this method of narrative smoothing would be helpful to apply when researchers are interested in participant’s life stories, coming of age stories, or identity development. One potential problem with this approach is that the monomyth is concerned only with events. Thus, instances of introspection and conjecture, two potentially important sources of data, were excluded from final student stories. Given that narrative inquiry focuses primarily on storied events, however, we do not suspect that other methods of smoothing sufficiently address this problem.

When engaging in this method, some level of critical thinking and deviation from the monomyth structure was necessary. For instance, in Campbell’s scheme, “belly of the whale” (the hero’s most difficult experience that ultimately reforms or “rebirths” the hero) occurs between the “first threshold” and “road of trials;” in the reconstructed stories, we chose to highlight this event directly after the road of trials because students’ most negative and vulnerable experiences usually occurred during this period, and treated it as a “special” trial to highlight. In another instance, a student experienced “meeting with temptations” during the road of trials, and this temptation was described within the paragraph focused on the road of trials. In some instances, forcing student narratives to fall into a rigid monomyth structure would have upset the chronology of their own stories. When this was the case, we took liberties with Campbell’s structure to preserve the integrity of the students’ stories. Even when taking such liberties, applying such codes helped us to differentiate events, and we rarely needed to do this as many of the events naturally followed the monomyth structure.

Perhaps the largest limitation of this method is that the monomyth structure focuses on an *individual* hero’s journey. In nearly every myth that Campbell examines, the hero makes the journey alone; at best, companions exist at certain points in the narrative. While Campbell’s monomyth accounts for others in stories, these others play very specific roles (aid, goddesses, fathers). There is little room in the

monomyth structure for extended family interactions or friends, which many of our participants discussed. In some instances, friends were coded as “aid” or specific kinds of “trials,” but this often did not capture the dynamics of different relationships that the students described. Thus, we would not recommend this method for narrative studies that seek to explore aspects of participant relationships.

Literary study is generally considered an insular field, rarely crossing into social science research (Heinen, 2009). Recently, Netolicky (2015) published a piece describing how specific pieces of literature, namely, Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, might be used as extended metaphors for comparing and thinking through participant narratives. Our monomyth method of structural analysis further demonstrates that literature and literary theory can be used to inform qualitative methods. Kim (2016) describes the need for more fictive approaches in narrative analysis, in which participant narratives become a kind of creative inspiration for researchers to develop narratives. Using the monomyth to code events in participant narratives lends itself well to this fictive writing and could be used in conjunction with Netolicky’s method of literary metaphor. For instance, while failing a test might be coded as “belly of the whale” in our analysis, fictionalizing and dramatizing the event might hyperbolize the stakes of the test, even comparing the test to one of the labors of Hercules; many courses might become various heads of a hydra; a difficult teacher may become an ogre or cyclops. In this way, the journey becomes a kind of allegory for participant experiences. Future studies using the monomyth method may borrow from stories that Campbell analyzes in his *Hero with a thousand faces* (2004), using the images in those stories to rewrite participant events. Such a method allows the stories to become entertaining but also, if Campbell and cognitive narratology are correct, relatable. It is easy to minimize the experience of a student’s self-loathing after performing poorly on a test; however, when we liken it to the guilt of Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov or the unnamed narrator of *The Tell Tale Heart* – or when we suggest that a student feels the need for penance like the ancient mariner – it may be easier to internalize and empathize with the experiences of our participants.

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