

# Narrating a fall: A secondary data analysis of older adults' stories of falling

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## DESCRIPTION

- **Background:** Parent study paired 12 older adults with university students to produce written narratives about their fall & document how the older adults experience, talk, and write about falls
- 30% of community-dwelling older adults fall each year

## METHODS

- **Study Design:** Narrative study, phenomenological approach
- **Participants** 3 older adults, 6 students
- **Data:**
  - The fall
  - Oral stories
  - Written stories
  - Transactional situation with students
  - Student reflections
- **Analysis:** Non-paradigmatic narrative-type narrative analysis, identifying action units, turning points, emplotment, narrative configuration, drafting lyric poem

*"You earnest students at my door,  
age of my children's children  
(how can that be!), have come  
to gather anecdotes from me,  
fruit from a leaning tree, from what  
to you appears the distant land  
of Elderly. Please understand  
that I was a whippet once,  
built of sturdy timber, and,  
what's more, hardy as a mule.  
Sanguine about aging as a rule,  
I give myself into your hands, aghast  
to see what has befallen me at last:  
the most unwelcome fall of all, to fall  
into this research category!"*

-Felicity, **older adult participant**

*"Speaking with them has  
crystallized in my mind the need to  
reframe the experience of older  
adulthood in a more positive light,  
highlighting the opportunities  
made available by living a longer  
life..."*

-Lola, **student**

*"It did make me wonder how we  
ended up at a place where people  
do not think they can have a  
conversation like that with an older  
adult..."*

-Hester, **student**

Burns, E., Stevens, J.A., Lee, R. (2016). Special report from the CDC: Direct costs of fatal and non-fatal falls among older adults. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Journal of Safety Research*. 58:1, 99-103.

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8:1, 5-23, DOI: 10.1080/0951839950080103

## RESULTS

### "Welcome falls"

Agency & Narrative in action:

- Older adults took action as a result of their fall into agency
  - Using a curb cut
  - Selecting social support
  - Wearing a personal emergency alert device
- Students re-framed the experience of aging

### "Un-welcome falls"

Loss & Unknown Territory

- Older adults experienced loss as a result of their fall into unknown territory
  - Loss of consciousness
  - Loss of family members
  - Loss of identity: Falling into a research category
- Students fell into researcher role

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. Potential exists for systems level intervention with young people surrounding the perception of older adults.
2. Fall experiences alter routines, occupational choice, and the meaning of related occupations.
3. Occupational therapists can foster agency through narrative
4. Occupational therapists can honor the value of different modes of sense making.

