The Art of Social Change
Community Narratives as Resources
for Individual and Collective Identity

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This chapter is about the relationship between community narratives and individual lives. My intention is to illustrate the proposition that narratives, expressed in various forms, are powerful resources for personal and social change. My examples are from the worlds of art, autobiography, and history, as well as psychology, especially highlighting some ways in which assumptions about race and class are reproduced in the narratives of mainstream social institutions, including universities, children's books, and historical accounts. But I argue that narratives are powerful regardless of their form and that they are powerful, in part, because they cut across levels of analysis, linking individual experience and social process.

Among the most interesting and perplexing issues for the fields of community and applied social psychology are matters concerning levels of analysis. Conceptual, philosophical, methodological, and analytic problems are encountered when a field attempts to cross levels of analysis by examining the mutual influence process between individual minds and social forces (see, e.g., Altman & Rogoff, 1987; Kenny & La Voie, 1985; Shinn, 1990). This is both an interesting theoretical problem and a practical one in the context of identity development and social change, the topic of concern here.

Narratives (as defined below) create memory, meaning, and identity among individuals, even as they are expressions of a social and cultural context. Social context, in turn, is created by individuals who construct rituals, performances, activities, and symbols in language, in art, and in behavioral routines. I argue that psychologists, social scientists, and helping professionals who understand the reciprocal and continuous creation (and re-creation) of cultural context and individual identity can participate as collaborators with artists, writers, and other social activists and citizens in the pursuit of a common interest in social change.

Spanning Levels of Analysis: Theoretical Assumptions

Underlying my analysis are theoretical assumptions about the psychology of identity development and change. Because these assumptions inform my understanding of the artistic, biographical, and historical narratives used as examples here, it is useful to make them explicit. I do not attempt to review the evidence that supports these assumptions, although I do cite considerable relevant literature.

I use the concept of *narrative* as a way to span levels of analysis, making the assumption that all communities have narratives about themselves and that these narratives have powerful effects on their members. For example, the community of university professors, or members of a particular discipline who organize themselves into a professional society, hold a shared sense of what it means to be a professor or a member of a particular discipline, such as a psychologist, a lawyer, a social worker, or a historian. The same holds for graduate students in a particular field. Although no single person is a perfect embodiment of the shared story of the professor or the graduate student, this communal identity is no less powerful than the identity that people experience as members of a particular religious tradition such as Mormons, Catholics, Presbyterians, or, in some cases, a particular church community (see, e.g., Rappaport & Simkins, 1991). The same could be said for membership in an ethnic group (Deaux, 1993) or in a wide variety of social organizations, including self-help and mutual-help groups (Mankowski & Rappaport, 1995; Rappaport, 1993). In the mod-

ern world, many people belong to more than one such community, perhaps crossing ethnic, neighborhood, professional, or religious identities, although this is easier and more likely to the extent that one has the economic, educational, and mobility advantages of higher rather than lower socioeconomic status.

As noted above, I also assume that the influence of social context and individual identity is reciprocal, particularly with respect to local culture (Geertz, 1973). Put simply, people both receive and create their narratives—although again, it is somewhat easier to create a narrative to the extent that one has economic and social capital. Psychology as a discipline has sometimes had difficulty construing social context as more than a confounding variable, or something that exists outside the person and that should be "accounted for" rather than studied. Some psychologists insist that individual personalities are best understood as biological or temperamental stabilities, separate from lived experience in social arrangements. Other social scientists often argue exactly the opposite. But the distinction between levels of analysis is more of a social science fiction than an experienced reality (Rappaport & Stewart, 1997). Although it may be convenient for analytic purposes (a way to remind ourselves of the many different influences on human behavior), this is not the way people actually experience their lives.

For researchers driven by the search for a universal human psychology, individual personality, identity, and sense of self are understood as conveniently contained within the person, quite independent of their changing social and historical contexts. Although sociologists and anthropologists are often better at grasping the power of community and culture to create meaning and personal identity, they tend to ignore individual variation. A somewhat different approach is suggested by Shweder and his colleagues in what they call "cultural psychology" (Stigler, Shweder, & Herdt, 1990). As Shweder (1990) put it,

> no sociocultural environment exists or has identity independent of the way human beings seize meanings and resources from it, while every human being has her or his subjectivity and mental life altered through the process of seizing meanings and resources from some sociocultural environment and using them. (p. 2)

In adopting this point of view, I want to emphasize that communities are resources. They also distribute resources, including identity narra-

tives, to their members. In the modern world, many people belong to more than one community. But like most other resources, the number (and more important, the choice) of communities and stories available to any individual tends to be, for reasons mentioned above, positively related to economic and social class.

The medium through which community narratives operate is cognitive representations of individual and collective identity. I assume that such cognitive representations have both emotional and behavioral implications. This is easily illustrated in everyday life by advertisements that capitalize on depicting celebrity or team identity. Ultimately, identity representations that people choose or acquire without conscious choice have political implications—again visible in everyday observations such as how people respond to a national symbol like a flag or to a school logo or to a gang sign. Even people who do not consider themselves to be patriotic will often be surprised by their heightened awareness of a collective identity when visiting another country.

The general psychological processes involved in this analysis are very well documented (see, e.g., Bruner, 1990). But this chapter is not a review. Rather, it is intended to illustrate how some of these processes operate in the world of social action. Below, I provide a working definition of *narrative* and other related terms, which are discussed in more detail elsewhere (Mankowski & Rappaport, 1995; Rappaport, 1993, 1995; Thomas & Rappaport, 1996). I argue that our knowledge about basic psychology has clear implications for those of us who value progressive social change—the kind that is empowering, in the sense defined below. Consequently, we ought to help amplify the voices of those whom we say we wish to serve; and we ought to point out the negative consequences of oppressive narratives even (or perhaps especially) when they are perpetuated by the most powerful stakeholders in our own communities.

Many psychologists (e.g., Sarbin, 1986) see the concept of *narrative* as a "root metaphor" for psychology. Schank (1990) and Schank and Abelson (1995) argue that all important knowledge is obtained in storied form. Stories told and retold are indexed in memory. These indexes (like headlines in a newspaper) are shorthand devices that enable people to recall many details that would otherwise be forgotten. (See, e.g., Bower & Clark, 1969, for a study contrasting learning by list or in story form.) Similarly, art in its various forms (visual, performance,

verbal, ritual) serves a recall function for the collective: It indexes the important stories of a society. Art is the keeper of a society's memory. What is allowed to be remembered both creates our shared history and provides resources for our personal identity stories. It can also, like other forms of narrative, tell us who is in the group and who is not.

As a practical matter, our knowledge of psychological processes adds up to this conclusion: Stories are powerful resources. How these resources are used by social policymakers, clinicians, social activists, administrators, reporters, teachers, and others to construe "reality" has serious practical and political consequences. Despite our individualistic culture, the experience of collective identity is unavoidable. Everyone adopts community narratives (e.g., religious, fraternal, professional, ethnic, neighborhood) into his or her personal life story. For those of us interested in social justice and the links between personal and social change, this raises certain central questions. Where do community narratives come from? Which narratives will be available to whom? And who gets to tell their own stories? For many people, particularly the least powerful, least well-off economically, or least educated, the only stories available for adoption are those I refer to as "dominant cultural narratives" (see the discussion below). One way that psychologists can contribute to social change is by helping people discover, create, and make available to each other alternative narratives.

Narratives and Stories Are Resources for Empowerment

One of my concerns as a community psychologist has been how to locate, understand, and help create contexts that make it more likely rather than less likely for people to experience genuine empowerment. Because *empowerment* is now a word used by people who hold many divergent political aims, a definition is useful. The one I have adopted was offered by the Cornell University Empowerment Group (1989):

Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process, centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group

participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources. (p. 2)

The part of this definition of interest here is its emphasis on access to resources. I regard stories about me and my community as resources for personal and social stability and change. I intend the word *story* to be understood exactly as it is understood in everyday language. A story is a description of events over time. It usually has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It often has a point. Sometimes the point is obvious; sometimes the point needs to be figured out by the listener, reader, or observer. *Story* may be defined in other, more technical ways that depend on one's purpose and the sort of analysis one is doing (e.g., linguistic discourse analysis, cognitive processes in memory, thematic descriptive analysis), but these details need not concern us here. A story need not be in words. It can be told in a ritual, in a picture, or even in architecture as noted below (see Thomas & Rappaport, 1996, for a broader analysis of the role of the arts in narrative communities). Pictures can "index" a story that is well known; that is, a picture can efficiently remind people of stories preserved in memory (Salzer, 1997; Schank, 1990; Thomas & Rappaport, 1996; Wyer, 1995).

With respect to the link between a community identity and a personal identity, we may use the term *story* to refer to an individual's cognitive representation or social communication of events that are unique to that person's own life history and that are organized temporally and thematically. I use the term *narrative* to refer to a story that is not idiosyncratic to an individual. Thus, a *narrative* is a story that is common among a group of people. A narrative may be shared by the group through social interaction, texts, and other forms of communication, including pictures, performances, and rituals. A group of people with a shared narrative may constitute a community, independent of their physical location. A setting—an organizational or geographic location for a community—however, will often have a clearer narrative, often an archived one, that is preserved and transmitted independently of any individual person. For example, neighborhoods, organizations, or churches (Goldberg, 1985; Hauerwas, 1983; McClendon, 1986; Rappaport & Simkins, 1991) have community narratives about the residents or members, and these are expressed in various ways (often, but not limited to, written documents). These narratives tell the members and others something about themselves, their history, and their future.

Dominant Cultural Narratives: The Stories Behind Our Stereotypes

Dominant cultural narratives are communicated by mass media or social institutions that touch the lives of most people (e.g., television, newspapers, public schools, religious institutions). These stories about others are often overlearned and evoked by words or symbols that call up from memory a prototype incident (Schank, 1990; Schank & Abelson, 1995). For example, a recent study reported that, in 1994, although only 39% of the violent crimes in Los Angeles County were committed by Blacks, 70% of the time a local television station reported the race of the offender as a minority (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1997). The station was not misreporting particular events, but rather the newscasters were reporting an unrepresentative sample of cases. They were helping perpetuate a dominant cultural narrative about "the dangerous Black man." This narrative, however inaccurate, is easily accessible to most people in the United States. Thus, even when no race was reported in a crime story, 42% of those surveyed falsely recalled a perpetrator, and two thirds of the respondents who did so recalled the person as being Black. This finding held for both Black and White respondents (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1997). These reports of crime may have served as reminders that led to recall of accessible narrative memories (particular stories or scripts), a process familiar to cognitive psychologists, especially those who study social cognition (Wyer, 1995).

A Case of Institutional Racism

Through social network gossip, internal communications, and archival records, universities, like other institutions, transmit many dominant cultural narratives to their students and colleagues. In many cases, the transmission appears to be individually unintentional but deeply embedded in institutional practices and unspoken assumptions or in the university community's own narrative practices. This is sometimes the case in my own setting, as the following example illustrates.

For an entire semester, a high-quality glossy poster was seen on the campus where I work. The same poster was reproduced and circulated several times in mailbox size to advertise each individual talk in a series called "Changing Realities in Academic Research." At this large (35,000 students) state university, such mail is not unusual. We are the state's high-prestige graduate research institution. Founded in 1865, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign now sits between two surprisingly urban cities. As a Big Ten university, it is visible throughout the state and the nation, especially for its sports programs. University staff spend much time and money narrating its official story.

Despite recent local business development, mostly in the retail service industry, the university remains the largest and most visible employer in the area. The twin cities, with a population of just under 100,000 people in a county of 173,000, are surrounded by rural, mostly farming or increasingly "bedroom" communities. According to 1995 estimates, more than 14% of Champaign and more than 11% of Urbana residents are African American. St. Louis is about 180 miles to the south, as is one of the most well-known examples of midwestern urban decay, East St. Louis, which is in Illinois. The University of Illinois sometimes advertises its community outreach program in East St. Louis during football telecasts. The East St. Louis program is run by Champaign-Urbana faculty in the Department of Urban Planning. It does excellent work in community development, albeit far from the local campus.

The twin cities are located about 135 miles directly south of Chicago, along the train route traveled by former sharecroppers looking for work in the North. Quite a few of these migrants settled in Champaign-Urbana, creating a strong, historically Black community (there are about 35 African American churches). This community is in a largely segregated part of the cities, still sometimes referred to, even in polite conversation, as "the North End." In the 1920s, a KKK chapter was active on campus. You can still see pictures of their members if you look through old yearbooks. Until the 1960s, the small number of Black students who came to school here usually found lodging with families in the North End. Not until 1974 did the Psychology Department award a Ph.D. to an African American student.

Physically indistinguishable as Champaign or Urbana, the traditional Black neighborhood today abuts the north side of a wide street in a

rundown business district. The edge of the well-groomed University of Illinois campus now reaches just to the opposite side of that street, extending for several blocks along one prominent section. At one time, a baseball field and modest housing were located there. Today, instead, sits what appears from the north, according to many African American residents who live nearby, as an imposing, but uninviting, indeed intimidating, building. That building itself tells a story, and the story it tells was repeated in the poster that was circulating on campus. It is a story about identity, invisibility, and institutional racism. It is not an intentionally told story, but like good projective tests, both the building and the poster are very revealing. They reveal a lot about the university community's narrative about itself and about the personal stories told by the community's neighbors. The building and the poster helped me understand why people benefit from telling their own stories and why one resource for social change is the opportunity to create one's own community narrative.

The widely circulated poster that caught my attention depicts, in what seems to be a realistic photograph, the building that is seen by northside residents as intimidating. It is one of the newest and most celebrated physical facilities on the campus, the Beckman Institute building—a beautiful modern facility where researchers from many departments, primarily in the neurosciences, have new laboratories, offices, a large auditorium, and even a cafeteria. The building was made possible by a $40 million private donation and more than $10 million in state funds. As seen from the north, there are no doors into this building. In addition, the structure is set off by a grassy area, which is itself fenced off from the street that generations of local African Americans have thought of as home. Shortly after it was completed, Alonzo Mitchell, an African American community activist and artist who grew up in the neighborhood, wrote a brief letter in our local newspaper. He said, "if buildings had body language," the Beckman Institute would be telling us what the University of Illinois thinks about the Black Community. Now, years later, the poster tells the same story in starker ways.

As can be seen in Figure 9.1, the apparent photograph of the Beckman Institute is in the center of the poster, sitting on the horizon line. The original poster is in full color, and above and to the sides of the building is a beautiful, sun-filled, blue sky. The foreground, making up the bottom third of the poster, is the green space of cultivated farmland. The building appears to be sitting in the middle of a soybean field, rather

Figure 9.1. Illustration used on posters advertising a series of lectures held on the campus of the University of Illinois (the original is in color). Although the building shown is adjacent to the urban, historically African American community, it is presented here as if it were in a soybean field. Note: Agriculture was not the topic of the series. (Computer-generated composite image courtesy of the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign).

Figure 9.2. Photograph by the author of a mural (the original is in color) that appears on a wall in the historically African American neighborhood referred to in Figure 9.1. The mural was created by a local community organization.

than next to urban North Champaign! In this narrative of the university, the local African American neighborhood does not exist. To the university's Black community neighbors, the narrative says, "You are invisible." This is not a narrative that is beneficial to the African American community! At best, it does not invite their children, who make up about 30% of the students in the local public schools, to become a part of the university community. At worst, it says, "You are of no consequence to us."

Psychology has quite a bit to say about how to understand what this poster signifies and why it is important. There is more here than meets the eye, more than a comment about art and symbolism. Some of the lesson has to do with how a university can inadvertently perpetuate what I call "dominant cultural narratives." It also has to do with how works of art can tell stories and how art and storytelling could be used in the service of identity development and social change.
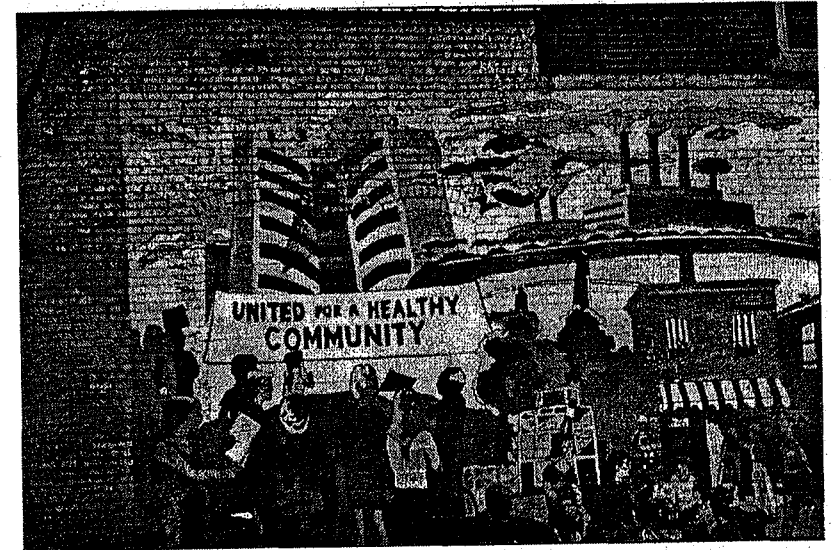
Writing Our Own Narratives: An Alternative Example

In the North Champaign neighborhood that was replaced on the Beckman Institute poster by an empty field, a multicolored mural is painted on the side of a building (see Figure 9.2). The mural depicts the theme "united for a healthy community." It illustrates local people of different races and ethnic groups, including a person in a wheelchair, working and socializing in harmony. The story the mural tells is that people who are different from one another can work together for the good of the community and for each other. This is an optimistic narrative. The individuals who appropriate this narrative and make it a part of their own personal life story are not invisible to one another.

For the past 20 years, a community organization in Champaign-Urbana known as the Champaign County Health Care Consumers (CCHCC) has existed. This is a local grassroots, citizen-involvement organization that has created a viable community narrative for many diverse citizens. That narrative provides a positive social identity for its members, many of whom have changed from isolated individuals to people active in the life of their community. The organization involves minority, rural, economically poor, and middle-class citizens and professionals (including university employees) working alongside one another. It provides roles and niches that make it necessary to add new members continuously, because, by design, there are always more roles to be filled than there are people available. This "under-personed" strategy for growth and development is a major factor identified by Barker and Gump (1964) and others (Wicker, 1987) as important in small schools and organizations. It has been found to be a crucial ingredient, together with a clear and convincing community narrative, for the growth and development of empowering voluntary organizations (Luke, Rappaport, & Seidman, 1991; Maton & Salem, 1995; Rappaport, 1993; Zimmerman et al., 1991).

In 1977, the founders of CCHCC documented a lack of consumer involvement in the local health care system. Some 100 citizens first came together to discuss "birth alternatives" for women interested in midwife services. Since then, they have, among their many other activities, forced a local private hospital that had been built with federal funds to open its doors to economically poor people; challenged a policy that had included a psychiatric notes in general hospital records, leading the Illinois Human Rights Authority to order a policy of confidentiality; helped increase availability of prenatal care; and worked with senior citizens and the U.S. Office of Civil Rights to obtain a consent decree that promoted a variety of changes in policies that had been detrimental to older people. Just this past year, it assisted a small community that was losing its only medical clinic to find a way to maintain it. These are simply examples taken from a much longer list of CCHCC accomplishments.

The organization's most recent activity involved more than 1,000 volunteers in a countywide campaign to establish a public health district that would serve people in the rural areas of the county. This effort required a county referendum that had twice before failed to win a majority of the voters. With renewed effort and persistence that included both door-to-door canvassing and telephone contacts, the referendum has now passed. Public interest advocate Ralph Nader, looking at the

accomplishments of this local organization several years ago, said that the CCHCC "exudes a rare blend of information, a sense of injustice and self-confidence about improving matters. . . . The challenge is to see how this community health group can be replicated in other localities around the nation" (cited in CCHCC, 1987, p. 2).

The CCHCC organization has now grown to more than 7,000 members. It regularly challenges local doctors and hospitals to be responsive to the needs of their community. A quarterly newsletter alerts members to current local issues, problems, and solutions and provides a comprehensive guide to local health care services. The organization operates a health hotline run by trained volunteers who serve as consumer advocates and handle more than 200 calls per month. In the organization's literature, the following identity statement is provided:

> The heart and soul of the CCHCC is a conviction that real improvements in people's lives can be accomplished through collective action. Using consumer task forces to involve those persons most affected by an issue, CCHCC has won its most significant victories through direct action organizing. In the process of these campaigns, the people involved have realized that they personally can take charge of the events that shape their lives. (CCHCC, 1987)

This is a powerful community narrative, available to many of the area's least powerful citizens as a story they can personally join in. The organization does not ask people to be heroes, only to be members of a small group with a clear identity story. Anyone can join a task force and begin to act in concert. Individuals with few resources on their own can benefit from organizing into collectivities with a social identity. No matter how strong or competent one is, sustaining changes in one's life is difficult in the absence of other people who share one's worldview. That is one reason why community narratives are important and why control over the content of the available narratives has social and political consequences.

The Beckman Institute's neighbors have no control over their invisibility to the university unless they find ways to claim and tell their own story. Psychologists interested in social change have a wealth of theoretical, empirical, and practical information that can be of use to ordinary citizens in the service of claiming and giving voice to their own positive identities. One way that psychologists (be they clinical, community, social, or cognitive psychologists) with progressive social val-

ues can contribute to social change is to share with local communities information about how to make use of the powerful effects of narratives on human behavior. Another way is to help these grassroots organizations tell their stories.

Stories Can Create Meaning, Emotion, and Collective Identity

People live their life stories, but they also appropriate the stories available to them through their narrative communities. Powerful community stories are told in multimedia ways: They appear in words, in pictures, and in the performances of everyday life. We live and enact our stories, and sometimes we create and adopt new stories. Where do new stories come from? Are they just made up, whole-cloth, out of individual minds? I think not. Rather, new stories are created from the various social contexts in which we live; in turn, some of these stories change our community narratives, enabling and facilitating social change.

Stories are psychologically (and therefore politically) powerful for at least three reasons: (a) They create memory, as suggested in the theoretical analysis described above, (b) they create meaning and emotion, and (c) they create identity.

With respect to meaning and emotion, I offer two examples, one from the laboratory and one from life:

A now-classic series of studies conducted by Lazarus and his colleagues demonstrated that narratives accompanying a filmed event could change the meaning, as well as the emotional and physiological experience, of those events (Lazarus & Alfert, 1964; Lazarus, Speisman, Mordkoff, & Davison, 1962; Speisman, Lazarus, Mordkoff, & Davison, 1964). These researchers showed two groups of observers the same film of tribal circumcision rites. One group listened to a narrator describe the trauma of the procedure. A second group saw the same film accompanied by an "anthropological" sound track in which events were described in a very matter-of-fact way and their local significance was explained. The researchers found that the first group experienced significantly greater physiological and psychological signs of distress. This effect has many counterparts in our day-to-day experiences, includ-

ing the ways stereotypes serve as powerful indexes to narrative memory, meaning, and even physiological reactions.

Consider the following observation reported in a book by Brent Staples (1994), an African American psychologist. At the time he wrote about it, he was a member of the *New York Times* editorial staff, looking back on his own life experiences. In the mid-1970s, Staples was a new graduate student with a Ford Foundation Fellowship at the University of Chicago. This university community, perhaps more visibly than the one in Champaign-Urbana, has had a tense and long-standing history of separation from, and fear of, its African American neighbors. Staples had grown up in Black neighborhoods and schools in the East, however, with little experience in the White world. Now, exploring his Chicago environment, he discovers with some surprise, during an evening walk in the Hyde Park area where the university is located, that people are afraid of him. On one night, he encounters a White woman walking just ahead of him. She is dressed in a business suit and carries a briefcase. She glances at Staples and begins to run. He wonders what people looking out their window might have thought. What stories would be evoked from their memory? What was this woman thinking?

For some time after that, Staples tries, when encountering White people in similar situations, to look innocent and safe, whistling and avoiding eye contact. Then he describes a change. Staples learns that he can enjoy scaring people by walking toward them rather than avoiding them; he feels his power as they stiffen in fear.

> I held a special contempt for people who cowered in their cars as they waited for the light to change. . . . Thunk! Thunk! Thunk! They hammered down the door lock when I came into view. Once I had hustled across the street, head down, trying to seem harmless. Now I turned brazenly into the headlights and laughed. . . . They'd made me terrifying. Now I'd show them how terrifying I could be. (Staples, 1994, p. 204)

Brent Staples was a graduate student looking for a career. He describes resisting the temptation to go further than he did. His discovery led to a game for him, but it is not difficult to see how other young men with little social power or plans and little to lose might move into making other, more dangerous uses of such knowledge. The point here is that the narrative of the "dangerous Black man" is an accessible cultural story that affects us all, Black and White. That it needs to be challenged is obvious. How to challenge it is something psychologists

may have ideas about, if we are willing to use our knowledge to help construct alternative narratives.

Staples goes on to tell us other personal stories, and these need to be heard by both Blacks and Whites. We all need to have accessible narratives that affirm young Black men. Some functional characteristics of such stories should be discernible from research on social cognition. We can collaborate with other community activists to make these stories known and presented in the most effective ways. But ultimately, it will be African American people, making their own collective narrative more public to each other, who will serve as a resource for ordinary citizens. Empowering narratives require believable stories that can be incorporated into the everyday lives of people who seek to work for social change.

Stories are also powerful because they create identity. Identity is a central construct in psychology. The internal sense of "who I am"—not just now, but who I will be, or what Markus and Nurius (1986) call "possible selves"—is influenced by storytelling. This is true, in part, because stories mimic the ways we actually experience the world—as sequential, woven interrelationships experienced in real time. Stories about our people, our community, and our settings are particularly powerful vehicles to influence our possible selves, as ultimately our behavior is propelled by these internalized and appropriated images.

Historical stories have contemporary effects. One of the most well-known narrative accounts of the 20th century's U.S. civil rights movement is the story of Rosa Parks. This story is told in dozens of children's books well-illustrated by artists. It usually presents a canonical picture of the lone heroic individual, just too tired that day to go to the back of the bus, who sparked a spontaneous boycott of the Montgomery, Alabama, bus service. In this sort of account, Rosa Parks is a remarkable individual, the perfect American hero. In fact, as pointed out by Herbert Kohl (1994), in an analysis contrasting the available children's literature with the actual events and with Parks's own autobiography, she was part of a very well-planned and orchestrated community organization. Kohl suggests that the story needs to be "retitled" to include the African American people of Montgomery. The individualized version needs to be rewritten to place Parks "in the context of a coherent community-based social struggle. This does not diminish Parks in any way. It places her, however, in the midst of a consciously planned movement for social change" (p. 140). It opens the possibility for all children to see themselves as activists.

Like the narrative offered by the local health care consumers organization described above, stories can be told in children's books and in public discourse in a way that makes them far more accessible to ordinary children and citizens. Certainly, they should be told this way to our students. In doing so, we help the stories obtain the power to create new possible selves for current generations, who can adopt the community narrative into their own life stories.

Implications for Method and Action

One way that social scientists can be useful to people who have limited access to resources is to serve as amplifiers of their voices. We can listen and write about what they have to say. To act in this way, one must believe that the process is as important as the product. This is not easy for us. We have been trained to tell people what to do, how to live, rather than to listen to their voices and use our resources as servants, trying to facilitate their discoveries and their creativity. In part, this comes from thinking of ourselves as "health care professionals" or "social experimenters" who want to "fix" things, rather than as educators and observers crafting reflections and contexts to facilitate and encourage others. We do not even know much about how to do this for children in our public schools, let alone for adults. The point is not to give up on our own impulses for making things better and for improving social conditions, but rather to have less hubris about our own ideas and more openness to collaboration, led by people who hold a personal stake in the outcomes of such work.

It is possible to help document and disseminate the work of community organizations, the visions of ordinary people, and the strengths and abilities they possess. Community and applied social psychologists would do well to engage in documentation of the social ecology of everyday life as it is experienced by people living and engaging in home, work, neighborhood, and school settings (see, e.g., Wicker, 1992, 1995). This requires an openness to methods of research that are genuinely empowering (see, e.g., Fine, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rappaport, 1990, 1994; Riessman, 1993), rather than distancing. In such work, the collection of data is itself authenticating and respectful, so as to have

an empowering effect on the participant. The medium is the message. The process is the outcome.

I recently visited South Africa, where I had the opportunity to meet with activists, scholars, and human services professionals, including college professors. Many of these people had been very active in the anti-apartheid movement. They were now patiently explaining to me, as I visited several townships and saw people living in ways that in the North American context would have been regarded as far worse than the least desirable neighborhoods of our cities, how they had encountered remarkable strengths and powerful abilities among people who had been excluded from even the most modest of physical accommodations, let alone from access to the wealth of the country. Although it would be wrong to romanticize their poverty or their suffering, I also saw many people who did not believe that their identity was equivalent to their lack of adequate housing or their history of oppression.

The Nobel prize-winning South African author Nadine Gordimer (1997) has recently made a similar observation in contrasting race relations for Black citizens of the United States (for whom "the history of the country isn't theirs") with the experience of South African Blacks. Despite more than three centuries of oppression and racist exploitation, she notes,

> black South Africans nevertheless have had *their own earth under their feet*. Despite neglect in official education, their *languages have remained intact as mother tongues*. Their names are *their own ancestral names*. Nothing—neither cruel apartheid denigration nor liberal paternalism—has destroyed their identity. They know who they are. (p. 46)

In South Africa, I also saw people who had created community gardens and used found objects to make sculptures that told positive things about their families and their community. I saw people with a vision.

In Cape Town, I encountered a good deal of the official art that had been and remained prominent in statuary aggrandizing the White authorities. But I also now found, prominently displayed in a museum, a strikingly vivid cardboard sculpture painted in bright acrylics, depicting Nelson Mandela's inauguration. A new and celebratory narrative is taking hold in South Africa. It will not solve all of their problems, but it will be an important part of the solutions.

Hopeful narratives take place in our own backyards as well. But without attention, these new stories will not be known. They will disappear without the chance to be a resource for others—before they can create new possible selves. I do not intend to suggest that such narratives are "all" that is needed. Certainly, more material resources, economic opportunity, and a "fair share" in the social policies of government are required for genuine social change. But the stories and ideas of the people themselves are also a part of the resources that are needed.

Many people in South Africa had collaborated with artists to create "resistance art." In this art, one could often see the stories that were being told by people about their own communities, even in the face of official narratives that had tried to rob them of more than their land— had tried to justify dehumanizing and cruel oppression. Post-apartheid, much of that resistance art may disappear, as new directions will be celebrated by younger artists. Therefore, it is valuable that much of this work (and information about the artists) has been carefully documented by Sue Williamson (1989). Her book includes photographs of paintings and sculptures, murals, peace parks, graffiti, T-shirts, billboards, and ceramics produced by women's collectives. In the foreword to the book, Bishop Desmond Tutu wrote:

> it is important that people know that in being creative they become more than just consumers. They can transcend their often horrendous circumstances and bring something new into being. . . . The Bible says, "Where there is no vision the people perish." This anthology says, "We too have dreams, we too have visions." (p. 7)

One way for community scholars to collaborate with activists is to document their work, their visions.

An exhibition of self-taught art was recently installed at our local museum. The catalog (Flanagan, 1997) presents photographs of both the artists and their works, along with brief biographical materials. A few of these artists are well known, but most are not. As I look at the faces and see beyond them in the photographs, I get a glimpse of their modest homes. I want to know more about their stories. I wish that qualitative researchers had interviewed them, spent time with their families, visited their communities. The visions of these people are verbal as well as visual, social and political as well as aesthetic. These visions need

documentation in a social and community psychology concerned with the art of social change, as much as their crafted works need documentation in the art world. This job should be appealing to social scientists who want to understand and help create the future.

Community narratives and the personal stories that follow from individual and collective visions need to be documented. For every Brent Staples (who knows how to do it for himself), there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of individual citizens with life experiences that would be both enlightening for social scientists and inspirational for other, similarly situated people. Those who have access to storytelling equipment—artists, writers, documenters of social reality (psychologists and other social scientists might be candidates)—can play a part in the creation of new visions for social change. The tools we have, or at least can cultivate, are participant observation, ethnographic recording of the rituals and performances of everyday life, detailed open-ended interviews, textual discourse analysis, and interpretive methods that privilege the perspective of the participants. We can be facilitators in the reciprocity of personal stories and community narratives—the stuff out of which new dreams and new realities are born.

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