Article

THE NARRATION OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA: THE ''TRUE STORY'' OF JASPER, TEXAS

Kalina Brabeck[a] and Ricardo Ainslie[b]
[a]Rhode Island College, Providence, RI, USA
[b]The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, USA

Correspondence: Prof. Kalina Brabeck, Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership, and School Psychology, Adams Library 115, Rhode Island College, 600 Mt. Pleasant Ave, Providence, RI 02908, USA
E-mail: kbrabeck@ric.edu

Abstract

The 1998 murder of African American James Byrd, Jr., in Jasper, Texas, activated narrative strategies within the community that sought to give coherence to, or otherwise appropriate and utilize this trauma for a variety of purposes. Via interviews with community civic and religious leaders, and analysis of their public statements to the media, this article uses psychoanalytic and anthropological frameworks to examine the psychological and structural needs to narrate trauma; struggles over whose narrative holds sway; the emerging ''story'' that Jasper presented to the world in an attempt to define itself and narrate what transpired and why; and implications for the silenced narratives.

Introduction

In the summer of 1998, an African American, James Byrd, Jr., was chained to the back of a pickup truck and dragged to his death in Jasper, Texas. Within 24 hours, local law enforcement arrested the three

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perpetrators: two were Jasper natives, and two had ties to white supremacist Q1 groups. Within 48 hours of the discovery of James Byrd's body, the national and international media descended upon Jasper.

Two days after James Byrd was found, Jasper law enforcement held their first press conference. In both implicit and explicit ways, the press conference represented the first juncture at which "the story" of James Byrd's murder – what had taken place and the meaning of what had taken place – and thus, the story of Jasper, as a community, began to take on a specific, public articulation. The various constituencies present – the media, local civic and religious leaders, and members of the community – participated in an unacknowledged negotiation: How was an account of what transpired in Jasper to be narrated? Whose version of the brutal murder and its meaning should be presented to the world as "true"?

For reasons that we will explore, the murder *required* narration. A state of crisis permeated the community in the immediate aftermath of the murder. From our field research and interviews with Jasper citizens, it became evident that the brutal and racial character of the James Byrd murder ignited many fears and feelings of rage that threatened the viability and coherence of the community. The savage dragging and killing stirred dark memories of lynchings and Ku Klux Klan activity that mar the history of the region, and therefore challenged the community's view of itself. Anxiety and suspicion arose between white and black neighbors, as whites feared retaliation and blacks suspected a broader conspiracy linked to the racist legacy of the region's past. Both white and black citizens had to confront this blatant racial hatred within the community where their children went to school, businesses struggled to thrive, and neighbors generally knew one another by name.

In this article, we address the need for narrative processes in the context of individual and collective trauma, and the functions that narrative serves for organizing responses to trauma and for understanding its meaning. We situate this article in the intersections among different narratives and different theoretical frameworks to understand not only the content of the stories told in Jasper, but, more importantly, the ways in which different narratives relate to one another, the processes and conditions under which they are told, and the consequences for the voices left unheard.

Psychoanalytic and anthropological understandings of narrative

While they share many core assumptions regarding narratives, psychoanalysis and anthropology differ in the emphasis they place on the object of narration. Hence, together, they provide a more complete framework for understanding the narrative process.

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To understand what is taking place, has taken place, and why, psychoanalysis focuses on intrapsychic and inter-psychic processes of individuals. The environment is relevant only to the extent that it influences the making of an individual (Novey, 1968). Through psychodynamic concepts, such as defense mechanisms and intrapsychic conflict, as well as object relations and relational processes, psychoanalysis provides the tools to understand the individual and collective processes that determine how a particular narrative emerges in the wake of a traumatic event or out of a particular life history.

Psychoanalytic readings of individuals' narratives help us to understand how individual identities become embedded with a particular group identity, and to comprehend the formation of an "us" and a "we," and simultaneously a "they" and a "them." Externalization is the mechanism by which a developing child seeks to rid her/himself of unwanted self-images and the feelings that accompany them by placing those attributes onto others. Projection is a means of attributing unacceptable thoughts or impulses to another. In both cases, the unwanted self-representations, thoughts, and impulses are dis-integrated from the child's sense of self and placed onto the "other."

As the child develops, conflicts arise that threaten to damage the integrity of her/his ego. To maintain a coherent sense of self, the child uses externalization and projection to rid her/himself of unwanted aspects of the self. Moreover, the child retains unintegrated *good* self- and object representations. Volkan terms the reservoirs for these unintegrated aspects of the self (good and bad) "suitable targets of externalization" (Volkan, 1988, p 31). He proposes that these targets are the beginnings of the child's formation of the concept of enemies and allies:

> When kept inside, unintegrated bad units threaten the self's cohesiveness; when put out there at a safe distance and used for comparison with good self- and object representations, they can enhance the sense of self… Durable bad suitable targets contain the beginning of the concept of any enemy in a social and political sense and the reservoir of the good is the precursor of the shared ally. (Volkan, 1988, p 33)

When suitable targets for externalization are shared with important others in a child's group, they find commonality. They are bound together in group-specific externalizations that bridge the distance between individual and group psychology.

In the narratives we tell, we externalize the unintegrated aspects of ourselves that threaten coherent identity and summon only the memories that support the identity we claim. Moreover, we project the unsettling aspects of ourselves onto the "other" through narratives we tell about who "we" (those like me) are *vs* who "they" (those not like me) are. The memories we call upon to support these narratives will be selected according to what we defend our self-identity against or as a function of what we wish to be in the sense of the ego ideal (Novey, 1968).

Similar processes of denial and projection function at a collective level (Volkan, 1988, 1997). When a traumatic event threatens a community's sense of self and world, there is an intensified need to shore up the community's sense of identity and control over the world. Communities under the stress of trauma, crisis, and potential regression need to strengthen the center ground and to emphasize the symbols, slogans, and concepts that link their members together. Simultaneously they must externalize and project onto "others" the unwanted demons that reside within. Particularly when centripetal processes threaten to pull the community apart, it becomes necessary to contain these extremes by solidifying the community's common ground, the "center" (see Ainslie and Brabeck, 2003). Narrative is one means of accomplishing this rooting in firm, central ground as opposed to regressing to extremes.

In contrast to psychoanalysts, anthropologists tend to emphasize socio-political conditions in their explanations of why one story is privileged over another, and to call attention to the implications for the story that is not told. While all narratives are ultimately doomed to fail in part, not all fail in the same way. Complex systems of power, class, gender, and racial relations determine the narratives told, identities assumed, and memories claimed (Gillis, 1994). These systems likewise determine what is forgotten about the present and past, making narratives of the past "a bundle of silences" (Trouillot, 1995, p 27).

Trouillot notes that what matters are not so much the facts but what we know about those facts, which is determined by the prevailing worldview of those in power. Trouillot's observation captures something similar to psychoanalytic understandings of denial as a response to trauma:

> When reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs. They devise formulas to repress the unthinkable and bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse. (Trouillot, 1995, p 72)

According to anthropologists, narratives are silenced when they fail to be "thinkable" within the worldview of those in power. The overlap between what history is and how history works exposes the different exercises of power that make some narratives possible and others silenced.

Psychoanalysis and anthropology provide theoretical analytic tools to understand how and why narratives are formed or not. The disciplines share assumptions regarding the incomplete, the subjective, and the inter-subjective creation of any narrative. The psychoanalytic lens sheds understanding on the intrapsychic and collective psychological dynamics and processes employed in the face of trauma and crisis. Anthropologists insist that we recognize the socio-structural elements of gender, race, and power that determine which narratives are heard and which are silenced or marginalized. Together, anthropology and psychoanalysis provide a framework for understanding how and why a narrative is told under specific circumstances, the ways in which that narrative

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is incomplete and contested, and why some narratives are the most successful. Working at the intersection of intrapsychic, subjective experience (psycho-analytic lens), and socio-structural reality and history (anthropological lens), we endeavor here to understand the dominant narrative that emerged within Jasper in response to the James Byrd murder.

The murder of James Byrd activated narrative strategies that sought to structure and give individual and collective coherence to what had taken place, or otherwise to appropriate and utilize the murder and its meaning for a variety of purposes. Along with a strong need to narrate this event, there were also struggles over whose narrative would hold sway when competing narratives emerged from within and outside of the community. Via interviews with the community's civic and religious leaders, as well as an analysis of their public statements to the media, we examined the emerging story that Jasper presented to the world to define itself after the Byrd murder and to give an account of what had transpired and why. Amidst the process of grieving and absorbing the profound shock, Jasper was forced to try to make sense of why this crime had been committed, and to grapple with its potentially violent aftermath.

The dominant narrative as a pragmatic strategy to keep the peace

Jasper's civic and religious leaders became the spokespersons for the community. When the national and international media searched for locals to provide context and understanding for what had happened, these leaders became the primary sources for an emerging narrative about the community. Many of these leaders were aware of the tensions within the community and cognizant that a misstep could yield catastrophic repercussions. They sensed that their interests might not overlap with those of the media, who were outsiders and would eventually leave, while Jasper's citizens would need to rebuild the community and move on with their lives. One African American minister said: "[W]e knew that as a community, we had to live here together after this was over…. There was no need to say anything that would divide us. It was a time for reconciliation."

Jasper's civic and religious leadership aimed to depict their town in a particular light: Race relations were good, and progressive values had transformed a previously Jim Crow-defined reality into something better. The view was: what had taken place was "not us." Such articulations served the immediate and practical aim of attempting to preserve peace in the community. In part, the narrative of reconciliation, depicting Jasper as a community of tolerant race relations and good will, was invoked in hopes of preserving order. The common theme was that the town must be stabilized within itself for

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healing to take place. Referring to an earlier march in Jasper by the Ku Klux Klan, an African American minister stated:

> [W]e knew what Jasper really needed. We've grown up together, White and Black…. Healing and calm began to come and the Klan began to stay away, the media began to stay away, and we slowly came back to being our city.

Within Jasper, powerful centripetal forces created a narrative of unity and solidarity. Community cohesion required cross-ethnic, cross-racial, cross-denominational engagement that concretely or symbolically would break down the racial divide. One black minister described the challenge: "We knew it could not just be a black thing in order to bring the community together; it needed to be the whole community speaking out about what happened." These moments of diverse collaboration took on many forms. In one powerfully symbolic act, the fence separating the white and black sections of the cemetery was removed. Jasper's ministers organized and led several community events, that is, two prayer vigils and a weekly prayer meeting held at a local diner. Members of the Jasper Ministerial Alliance (JMA) agreed to preach the lesson of the Good Samaritan on a designated Sunday. They took turns preaching at one another's churches. The traditional town event, "Sing with one voice," took on special significance in the context of the James Byrd murder. Led by the Byrd family's minister, Jasper's religious leaders also responded together to the Byrd family. A white minister remembered, "So he [the Byrds' minister] made sure every step of the way that we [ministers] were all included. This was a visible sign that we united in our support of the family and against what had happened." Such actions were part of religious leaders' attempts to create unity. It is likely that such efforts contributed to the fact that Jasper did not implode under the stress and fear that the Byrd murder generated. However, such actions also became the raw material from which a narrative about the town – its character, values, and attitudes toward race relations – was given shape.

An African American minister described how the town leaders sought to tell their own story, rather than be defined by outsiders:

> And all of the media…. We never seen anything like that in our lives! …. They're trying to get us to say something that could spark something, so we had to be careful what we said on the six o'clock news. But the Lord was with us. And we were able to keep a positive image at this time and start our healing so it wouldn't affect our city.

In an interview with the *Austin American Statesman* a few days after the murder, Jasper's black mayor promoted this "positive image" to a reporter: "We don't show any animosity here. This town has been about loving each other…. If it was different, I wouldn't be mayor" ("Three whites held," 1998, pp 1–8). Q2 Similarly, one of the community's leading black businessmen extolled the virtues of the community to the press, pointing out that the city government, local

school board, and Chamber of Commerce all had significant African American representation and leadership.

The dominant narrative that emerged from Jasper's civic and religious leadership via statements to the press and local actions was that Jasper had come far since the dark days of Jim Crow; Jasper was a community as horrified and intolerant of the fate suffered by James Byrd as was the rest of America.

Cracks in the ''we-ness'' narrative

Jasper's dominant narrative served both internal and external functions. Its aim (not always self-consciously) was to create a greater sense of solidarity within Jasper itself. Volkan (1988) suggests that one mechanism for creating "we-ness," a shared collective identity that connects individual psychology to group psychology, is to create murals, monuments, or to otherwise use inanimate objects as repositories for a community's shared feelings of "we-ness" and shared positive self-representations. Such a reservoir for positive self-images is available to individuals during times of trauma when they are in need of group strength and identity cohesion. In Jasper, there were numerous illustrations of such processes. For example, a public park was named in honor of James Byrd. However, such impulses also revealed underlying tensions within the community regarding the meaning of Byrd's murder and appropriate responses to it. This was reflected in a controversy that followed a move to name one of the town's schools after Byrd. Significant resistance was directed at the proposal from some quarters, especially (but not exclusively) within the white community. People questioned whether James Byrd was an appropriate "role model" given that he'd been arrested numerous times and had spent time in state prison. While his death was tragic, they argued, the manner in which he had lived his life did not warrant memorialization.

Similarly, over a year after the murder, Jasper's citizens and leaders sought to underscore a narrative of "we-ness" through the construction of a public sculpture. The Circle of Peace would be a testament not only to Byrd's death but also to the community's efforts to heal and to come together. The memorial was partly a self-conscious attempt to strike a rhetorical posture in which racial labels and hatred would be countered by a collective innocence. "Through the eyes of a child," the motif of the sculpture represents a time when differences are more easily reconciled; when categories (good, bad, us, them) are more clearly defined; and when we are, as the minister said, "like children, forgiving." The proposed sculpture was a trope for a utopian worldview, a "suitable target of externalization" (Volkan, 1988, p 31). However, this effort, too, activated differing views. Some believed that the funds being collected to erect the sculpture would be better spent on the concrete and immediate needs of Jasper's poor.

The school naming and the Circle of Peace sculpture, two efforts to depict Jasper as a thoughtful, caring community, each drew dissenting views that threatened the public narrative of Jasper as a unified town that had significantly defused racial tensions.

Competition for narrative space

Throughout our research, it became evident that various forces within and outside Jasper vied for "narrative space," that is, a position of authority in telling Jasper's "true" story and retelling the horrific event that occurred there. Each group competing for narrative space had its own set of priorities, assumptions, and motivations. Exacerbating Jasper's struggle to keep peace within the community and to make sense of what had happened were the external forces that descended upon the town. Groups with an interest in shaping Jasper's narrative included the media, politicians, and extremist groups. These outside voices carried their own agendas and insisted on telling their own version of "what really happened in Jasper," thereby further threatening to destabilize the community.

The national and international media, intent on publicizing the death as a hate crime, arrived in Jasper and remained a presence for almost 18 months (throughout the investigations and three subsequent trials). The media's presence created a national and international stage and audience. In addition to shaping the Jasper narrative, the media created a stage for others to use. The politicians and the extremist groups used this stage to further their own agendas. For example, state and national political figures came to Jasper for Byrd's funeral to speak out against the murder. Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton delivered "look-how-nothing's-changed" racial analyses that were resented by many of Jasper's white and black leaders and were contrasted with their own understanding of the local realities. One African American minister stated that the Reverend Sharpton used Jasper's crisis as a forum for views that misrepresented Jasper's race relations, whether or not they deserved credence in a larger sense. According to someone close to the family, even James Byrd's family refused Sharpton's analysis:

> Al [Sharpton] was trying to say that Black folk are treated wrong in the country … and we needed to speak out against these atrocities. He tried to say a lot of things that were not true about the incident here in Jasper, and [James Byrd's father] stood on his conviction of forgiveness and love.

According to many of Jasper's white and black leaders, Jackson's and Sharpton's message was inaccurate, and worse, their political agendas interfered with the town's mourning and healing. As one white minister described it:

> Jesse Jackson wanted to come in and do the funeral, but [the Byrd family's minister] said, "Rev. Jackson, we'd love to have you here, but these are my

parishioners…. And this is not a political rally for your agenda, this is a funeral for my people."

The local response to Jackson and Sharpton illustrates how Jasper's civic and religious leaders rejected what they perceived as divisive narratives imposed from outsiders (centrifugal forces) that threatened to fragment the community's efforts to maintain stability (centripetal forces).

The community also became a stage for demonstrations and rallies by extremist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan and the New Black Panther Party. These groups proclaimed their own racial agendas. To distance any linkage between Jasper and these groups, the town's civic and religious leaders urged Jasper's citizens to avoid any functions associated with them. This mandate was overwhelmingly obeyed, as one interlocutor recounted, "Our way of handling it was to ignore the fringe voices. When the KKK came, everyone went fishing. When the Black Panthers came, we ignored that." Refusing to associate themselves with these groups was another means for Jasper to strengthen shared identity and to communicate both to itself and to the world that, as one black minister stated, "This was not Jasper."

Thus, Jasper's civic and religious leaders vied with the media, outside politicians, and extremist groups for narrative space within which to render the "true" meaning of the murder and its implications for Jasper and for the entire nation.

Narration and positionality: power and silence

Because narratives are contested and there is competition for position and influence, often it is a few voices that speak the collective story on behalf of the majority. These voices are those of powerful individuals in the community, granted the privilege to narrate by virtue of their position in class, racial, and gender hierarchies (Gillis, 1994). In the emergence of a dominant narrative, articulated by the few, alternative narratives are silenced. Not only competing narratives but also competing identities and memories may be denied voice. In providing a sense of belonging, collective narratives are, necessarily, exclusionary (Mankowski and Rappaport, 2000). Inner cohesion is solidified as boundaries are delineated that distinguish "us" from "them."

The lenses of psychoanalysis and anthropology help us understand the processes and conditions that yielded the dominant narrative of "we-ness" and racial harmony. The murder of James Byrd, Jr., activated powerful intrapsychic and collective dynamics that functioned both unconsciously and consciously to safeguard the community from a potentially overwhelming crisis. Yet who got to tell the story – those with the greater power – had implications for whose voices were silenced or marginalized. When one story is told, inevitably another is silenced.

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In Jasper, the voices that challenged the dominant narrative of unity not only came from outside the town but also emerged within the community. Such voices emphasized the racist intentions behind the murder and expressed anger at yet another injustice against the black community. One black minister, who wished to remain anonymous because of fears of retaliation and was "visibly worried he would be seen talking to a reporter at the funeral," offered the *Austin American Statesman* an alternative narrative:

> There's a slavery mentality here in Jasper…. Blacks will be taking a back seat to the Whites…. It's an unwritten rule…. We have to maintain a certain image that everything is all right, that everything is okay, that we don't have a race problem in Jasper. That is bunk. ("Jasper mourns," 1998, pp 16–17)   Q3

In the process of promoting their particular narrative to fulfill the psychological and practical needs served by that narrative, the authorities of Jasper sought to silence these opposing voices in overt and subtle ways. An African American minister provided one example: "There were some agitators also inside the community who had formed a coalition. We had to somehow overwhelm them." Such "agitators" were described as unable to recognize the progress that the black community had made and were accused of keeping the community "down." These voices highlighted the legacy of slavery and marginalization of African Americans throughout history, and drew an explicit link between the Byrd murder and the American history of racial oppression.

Jasper's leadership refused to support the town's internal dissenting voices. When "negative blacks" asked one of the community's leading African American ministers to give an opening prayer at a meeting, the pastor refused to participate. He believed that his presence would lend support to citizens whose views he believed to be "dangerous." Similarly, pressures were exerted on whites whose actions or political views implied support for the men indicted for Byrd's murder. A white junior high school student who came to school on numerous occasions wearing a "Rebel" belt buckle was suspended because his dress was deemed inflammatory.

While one (powerful) story was promoted, competing narratives that highlighted the racial conflicts and tensions within the community, or expressed solidarity with the racist views that were implicated in the murder, were silenced by the local power structure.

Unwanted aspects of the self threaten identity

The blatant and brutal racism of the Byrd murder sparked a train of painful remembrances. The torture and murder of a black man by three white men, two with ties to white supremacist groups, stirred frightening images from the region's history: lynchings, Jim Crow laws, and the legacy of slaves who cleared the timber and worked in the farms that allowed Jasper County to prosper.

The Byrd murder also called attention to the currents of racial tension that persist today. A white minister described a recent incident in which white customers at a local fast food restaurant were served after closing time, while black customers were turned away. The white minister also recalled that very few whites marched in a recent Martin Luther King Day parade. In this context, perhaps, the Byrd murder was insistently portrayed as so unthinkable precisely because it *was* (shamefully, unfortunately) thinkable. Not only was there a legacy of similar acts against African Americans, but also inequalities and distrust persisted between whites and blacks.

The unsettled feelings regarding race relations aroused by the Byrd murder were woven faintly through the dominant stories of racial harmony. A white minister recounted the shame and guilt of the white community as they were confronted with their history as racial oppressors: "A lot of the white reaction was to go into their houses and shut their doors because… it was a shameful thing." Similarly, an African American businessman spoke about confronting the unwanted aspects of individuals' and the community's identities:

> There's been some people who have been really confronted, head on, with racism…. And the reason why it disturbed Blacks so badly was because they went back in history and said, "You know, that's what they used to do all the time to us." And then they did it again.

Although they tended to be displaced by the more prominent and forceful statements of racial harmony, these statements speak to the simultaneous underlying anxiety and anger regarding race relations – the unwanted, negative self-images that the town sought to expel and that the Byrd murder threatened to expose. Even within the narratives of the local power structure, the competing centripetal and centrifugal narratives managed to surface, although the latter are decidedly more diluted in public articulation.

Dominant narratives in Jasper described a racist "other," which solidified the boundaries around a racially cooperative "us." Thus, while identifying the outside enemy, many blacks and whites in Jasper identified one another as allies. In-group differences (including racial ones) were minimized and unwanted aspects of the community were denied, externalized, or projected onto others.

One illustration of this process is the distanced depiction of the murderers as "non-Jasper" (although two were locals). For example, an African American minister suggested that evil was brought into the town rather than internally located:

> These men had operated individually without any support from anyone in Jasper…. The community was afraid that perhaps it might have been a conspiracy here in our city. Then information came that it was three White boys who had been rooming together and had been in prison together, and that relieved our fear that there was some kind of Jasper connection.

The space between competing narratives

The forums of the Mayor's Task Force 2000 helped contain dissenting voices, while providing a sanctioned, authorized process for the voicing of concerns and for the catharsis of a variety of feelings. (The Mayor's Task Force met in different Jasper neighborhoods, frequently in churches, and was a forum for citizens to talk about their concerns and needs not only related to the Byrd murder but also to broader, more general community issues as well.) One African American interlocutor assessed that the roots of Jasper's tensions and problems were economic, not necessarily racial:

> Because in their minds, they believed they had been discriminated against. I think when you take a look at the economic conditions – I've always said that it's more a matter of economics than it is racism. I think that people feel less disenfranchised in any community if they're doing well financially.

Thus, while he acknowledged the legitimacy of the dissenters' concerns, he minimized the racial element of their stories, thereby helping to maintain the coherence of the narrative and identity of Jasper as a racially progressive, peaceful town. While he ultimately embraced the dominant narrative, this businessman's words move beyond narratives that either completely celebrate or else completely vilify the town. He demands agency and voice for Jasper's African American citizens, but suggests that agency comes through racial and economic reconciliation, not polarization. Together, these different Jasper narratives render a more complete narrative, for no one narrative can make an ultimate claim to be "the truth." Each narrative must be considered in relation to others, with attention paid to those granted more credence and power and to the processes and conditions under which these narratives emerge.

Narrative as cure and symptom: paradox in the narrative function

The need to narrate meaningful, defining experiences is an essential component of our individual and collective psychologies. Complex processes are involved as we claim (and disclaim) narrative threads in an effort to articulate "usable" stories about our lives in relation to those experiences. Freud first illuminated the importance of personal narratives: neurotics not only suffered from their reminiscences, but also their symptomatology betrayed a fractured personal narrative; their biographical accounts were corrupted by repression and other defenses. Freud (1940) maintained that defenses result from events that mobilize intolerable psychic conflicts. The "working through" process aims to reopen the path to remembering by confronting resistance to memory and creating an adequate narrative of one's life (Ricoeur, 1981). Via "working through" the past

in the present, remembering presumably replaces neurotic repetition, avoidance, denial, repression, and other defenses.

From one perspective, the psychoanalyst's main task is to interpret the client's narrative via collaboration that aims to discern the unconscious, that is, the corrupted elements of personal narrative (Kestenbaum, 2003). Ricoeur notes, "Psychoanalysis is interpretation from beginning to end" (Ricoeur, 1970, p 66). The interpretive process clarifies and shapes individual narrative. The psycho-analytic dialogue is assumed curative to the extent that it leads to the analysand's deeper self-knowledge, especially regarding her/his desire (Levy, 1980). Coherence, continuity, and comprehensiveness of the client's story are hallmarks of a "healthy" narrative, and their absence suggests neurosis (Sherwood, 1969; Spence, 1982).

However, narratives also are important mechanisms for managing traumatic experiences. In the aftermath of trauma, individuals may fashion, via unconscious processes, narratives to contain, isolate, or otherwise distance ourselves from the implications of what has transpired, notwithstanding that such efforts actually create a particular personal dislocation (the very kinds of dislocation that Freud viewed as the sources of neurotic conflict and symptoms). Here, the need to narrate is motivated by an effort to make these experiences tolerable, comprehensible, and to gain some degree of mastery over them, albeit temporary.

If one gains therapeutic mastery over trauma through transforming memory and reintegrating into the present that past which externalized, denied, and/or repressed (Herman, 1992), the near-term efforts to avoid conflict may also yield narratives that are problematically abridged. Aron describes retelling one's story in the aftermath of trauma as a verbal journey to the past that "allows an individual to transform past experience and personal identity, creating a new present and enhancing the future" (Aron, 1992, p 174). Survivors of trauma are challenged to reconnect fragments, reconstruct history, and make meaning of present symptoms in the context of past events (Herman, 1992). Yet, trauma itself may result in repression and other disfiguring influences over the subjects' narrative of traumatic memories. This is the paradoxical character of narrative as a psychological force: it is simultaneously an agent in the service of protective falsehoods that insulate one from painful, conflictual truths, while it also potentially functions as the binding force that allows for the transformation and integration of past traumatic memories and feelings, thereby reestablishing a degree of coherence, continuity, and "truth" in one's life story.

Similarly, collective narratives may serve various purposes as well, evident at the socio-structural level of analysis. Following a collective traumatic event, collective narratives can shape the substance of a community. Narratives can contain potential chaos, mitigate desires for vengeance and retribution, and create bridges of solidarity. Alternatively, narratives can polarize communities,

disintegrate unity, and create factions. Such potential to either solidify or to fracture a sense of community speaks to the power of narratives.

Linking individual and collective narrative processes

Volkan (1997, p 48) suggests that members of a group who endure a shared loss or catastrophe share a common mental representation of the traumatic experience: the "chosen trauma":

> The influence of a severe and humiliating calamity that directly affects all or most of a large group forges a link between the psychology of the individual and that of the group. In the wake of such an event, a mental representation of it, common to all members, begins to take shape. (Volkan, 1997, p 42)

According to Volkan (1997), this mental representation includes the consolidated collection of the community's shared feelings, perceptions, fantasies, and interpretations of the event, as well as images of relevant characters and mental defenses against painful or unacceptable feelings and thoughts. Moreover, Volkan (1997) asserts that the group experiences a common mourning process. As with individuals, narration is essential to the group's mourning and eventual resolution of a traumatic experience.

In suggesting that communities share mental representations, symptoms, and healing processes as a result of a shared trauma, we are not implying that every member of the community will similarly partake in this collective experience. In Jasper, for example, whites and blacks clearly did not endure the same experience of the Byrd murder or follow similar paths of mourning. Even within the African American community, there was great variation in experience, based on individual differences such as class, gender, religion, and personal relationship with James Byrd, Jr. In addition, individual psychological factors mediated responses to the murder. Yet, notwithstanding such variations, the Byrd murder affected all members of the community and, in the wake of collective crisis, the bonds of community were in many ways fortified and made more salient, as Volkan (1997) would have predicted. Although not uniformly, Jasper's residents experienced a shared need to gain mastery over and integrate this trauma. The collective narration that emerged – simultaneously imposed upon and created by the community – was part of a powerful impulse to resolve what had happened.

Narrative functions in the wake of trauma

In addition to its adaptive or integrative functions, narrative projects our assumed identity and determines what we remember – those memories that will sustain that identity. Gillis writes,

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> The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity. (Gillis, 1994, p 3)

The memories we use to explain how the present has come to be are a function of the identity we assume and the narrative that allows us to continue to claim it.

Collective narratives are available to community members as a resource to "understand and interpret their experiences and guide the construction of their personal identity or life story" (Mankowski and Rappaport, 2000, p 487). Collective narratives strengthen collective identity and define who belongs to (and who is excluded from) that community, and what is remembered (and what is forgotten) about the collective past (Mankowski and Rappaport, 2000). Such narratives are particularly important for individuals in the wake of trauma: "Group members may turn to shared targets not only to patch up a disturbed sense of self, but also to establish grounds on which to reunite for mutual support and strength" (Volkan, 1988, p 90).

The limitations of narrative and narrative efforts

Various authors (Ewing, 1992; Schwartz *et al.*, 1992; Luhrman, 1998) note the similar endeavors of psychoanalysis and anthropology. Psychotherapists and ethnographers seek to understand the stories of others and immerse themselves in the lives and narratives of the people they analyze or study. Psychoanalysts employ empathy, "a model of understanding another human being by means of partial and temporary identification" (Greenson, 1967, p 382). Ethnographers practice "participant-observation," which presumes that the observer sees more (and more clearly) because (s)he participates in the community life.

Ethnographers and analysts struggle with the inevitable impossibility of completely knowing another person; hence, the projects of ethnography and analysis always partially fail (Luhrman, 1998). The narratives told by respondents and by analysts or ethnographers about those narratives are always destined to be incomplete. Because narratives are always incomplete, they will always be vulnerable to being contested by competing narratives.

Psychoanalysts, working at the individual level, and ethnographers, working at the collective level, recognize that narratives are subjective renderings of the past and the present, depending largely on context. Roy Schafer uses the term "action language" to imply that we are active agents when we talk about events. All subjective experience is a construction of human agency

> The person must select and organize in order to construe reality…. Experience is made or fashioned; it is not encountered, discovered, or observed, except upon secondary reflection. (Schafer, 1992, p 23)

Similarly, at a collective level, ethnographers (e.g., Clifford and Marcus, 1986) recognize the impossibility that one story will encompass the realities of all community members. Collective narratives, too, are actively and subjectively constructed based on context.

Psychoanalysts and ethnographers recognize that narrative acts are inter-subjectively constructed between the person who asks the questions or receives the story and the interlocutor. Psychoanalysis assumes that the analyst's interpretation is central in the act of narration (Novey, 1968; Levy, 1980; Ricoeur, 1981). Inter-subjectivity, transference, and countertransference processes are fundamental to psychoanalysis (Levy, 1980; Spence, 1982; Schafer, 1992). Spence (1982) suggests that we conceive of interpretation of narrative as a *construction* – a creative endeavor – rather than as a *reconstruction* that supposedly corresponds to the "objective" past. The analyst is always an active listener, supplying assumptions, ending incomplete sentences, filling in ambiguous references, and otherwise supplying what the client has left out. Ethnographers (Rosaldo, 1989; Behar, 1996) similarly recognize that the presence of the researcher fundamentally alters the context of the narrative, the narrative itself, and her/his experience of that narrative. The positionalities of both speaker and receiver fundamentally shape the narrative that emerges, thereby subverting the notion of a single "true" account.

Ethnographers and analysts also assume that the *process* of narrating is most interesting, more so than the particulars of the narrative itself. Analysts assert that the main history that emerges from psychoanalysis is the history of the analysis, mutually constructed alongside the history of the life, from which it cannot be separated (Levy, 1980; Spence, 1982; Schafer, 1992). Similarly, examining historical narratives, Trouillot (1995) suggests that ultimately what matters most is not what history *is* but how history *works*, that is, processes and conditions involved in the production of historical narratives.

Importantly, while psychoanalysts generally acknowledge the impossibility of a single, valid account of reality and recognize the multiple influential forces, they do not slip completely into relativism, in which there exists no reasonable claim to authenticity, no viable history, no credible narrative of the past:

> That no history is the single and final one does not mean that each history is a mythic creation which is exempt from the rules of verification, coherence, consistency, and (for the time being) completeness. (Schafer, 1983, p 206)

The existence of various versions of the past does not destroy the credibility of each individual one; rather it begs understanding of the various stories in the context of each other and in relation to the process under which they were told.

Finally, analysts and ethnographers assume that narratives gain their power through joining, thereby creating new meanings and relationships between the past and the present. Ethnographers remind us that excessive focus on the past often diverts our attention from present injustices, and demand we explore ways

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in which past generations paved the way for present oppressions (Trouillot, 1995). In psychoanalytic readings of narratives, the past and the present are intertwined through transference, countertransference, and enactment; the unconscious is made conscious; and a narrator's present relationship to past events is redefined (Levy, 1980; Schafer, 1983). When unconscious or disavowed aspects of the past manifest themselves and are reintegrated into the present, there is opportunity for proper mourning, acceptance, and healing. Therein lies the cathartic and potent power of narratives.

The traditional binary between socio-structural and psychoanalytic-psychological analyses is, ultimately, artificial and limiting. Intrapsychic processes clearly have an impact upon how individuals experience, struggle with, and make sense of social/historical events; moreover, intrapsychic processes function at a collective level, influencing how groups manage and resolve identities, particularly in the wake of community trauma. Yet, we must also be cognizant of the sociopolitical factors that determine the context within which individuals and groups relate to themselves and others. Material and socio-structural realities make it more possible for some individuals to affirm their identities and for some narratives to be granted the authority of "truth." Through inhabiting the tenuous space among competing narratives and theories, we arrive at a more complete understanding of how narrative functions. While Jasper has here been used illustratively, we believe that similar psychological and socio-structural processes are at work in most communities experiencing ethnic/racial tensions and conflicts.

We are aware that this, too, is a narrative exercise and, as such, it is subject to the above noted problems, limitations, prejudices, and biases attendant on any narrative account. We, too, are fundamentally shaped by our context, goals, and the questions we asked; we also have silenced some voices and privileged others; our narrative is also a function of an interaction between ourselves and others; and our positions in power hierarchies fundamentally shaped those interactions. As outsiders to Jasper, our external positions immediately activated a multiplicity of transferences from our respondents. In light of the infiltration of the media, politicians, and others, Jasper's citizens were more likely to narrate the events in a way that preserved their town's good image. Their narratives were created in the context of, and in reaction to, the experience of having stereotypes imposed upon them by outsiders. Moreover, as members of the academic community, whose tenure and advancement depends on publication of scholarly work, our interest in Jasper stemmed in part from selfish motives; we had a stake in promoting a narrative of Jasper as well.

Ethnographers must grapple with the sticky issue of gaining community members' trust, while not thereby alienating others (Emerson, 1983). In establishing trusting relationships with the JMA, our research team gained entrance into their congregations and access to interview congregation members. The ministers gave us interview space and helped the team connect

with various key community players. The trust and relationships established with the JMA made our project possible. And yet, at the same time, our contacts with the JMA may have precluded us from developing relationships with others. Not all churches in the community participate in the Alliance, for example. Thus, in our re-telling of the town's story, some voices have necessarily been silenced, or at least muted.

Similarly, power positionalities fundamentally shape any interaction, albeit covertly. They fundamentally shape the narrative told individually and the story of the collective encounter. We were outsiders, urban academics, and a heterogeneous research team of white, African American, Asian-American, and Latino men and women – these identities and social positions fundamentally shaped the stories that people told us, the story of our interactions, and the stories we now tell about those stories. Our own countertransference affected the questions we asked, how we heard the answers to those questions, and the contextual information we supplied for stories that were incomplete.

As Schafer reminds us, "That no one history is the single and final one does not mean that each history is a mythic creation" (Schafer, 1983, p 206), and as Trouillot reminds us, "positions need not be eternal in order to justify a legitimate defense" (Trouillot, 1995, p 153). As engaged researchers, we recognize the impossibility of any one, single narrative, and question the implications for that which is silenced. At the same time, we respect and learn from the dominant narrative that did emerge, and the important functions – both psychological and practical – it played in maintaining peace, meaning, and coherence for the people of Jasper in the wake of this horrific act of violence.

The world's history is scarred by campaigns of mass murder, torture, and terror that result in individually and collectively experienced trauma (e.g., US genocide of the Native Americans, Chile, Rwanda, to name a few). Psycho-analysts observe that unless unwanted aspects of the self are enacted and processed via narration within the therapeutic relationship, individuals are doomed to repetition of unconscious conflicts and distortion via defensive processes (Kestenbaum, 2003). The same can be said of the world's need to narrate its painful past. There is a political, as well as psychotherapeutic, precedent of healing through testimony, "truth" telling, and both denouncing *and* claiming collectively experienced atrocities (Lykes *et al.*, 1993). Truth and reconciliation commissions (e.g., in South Africa and Guatemala) attempt to stand in solidarity, bear witness to the shameful past, and move forward together.

Events such as the Byrd murder, and the 9,080 hate crime offenses committed in 2006 (US Department of Justice, 2007), are particularly egregious because they are reminiscent of the legacy of US slavery – a traumatic history that is largely unprocessed and is re-triggered and repeated by the continued oppression of African Americans in the United States. In the vein of the truth and reconciliation commissions and the citizens of Jasper, Texas, we face, in the

US, the challenge to create a narrative that bears witness to and owns the unwanted aspects of our racial past and present, *and* provides a space for healing, making amends, and moving forward.

About the authors

Kalina Brabeck is a licensed psychologist and assistant professor in the Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership, and School Psychology at Rhode Island College. Dr Brabeck's research and clinical interests include community trauma, narrative processes, violence against girls and women, and cross-cultural psychology.

Ricardo Ainslie explores the intersection of psychoanalysis and culture through books, films, and photographic exhibits. He teaches in the doctoral training program in counseling psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, where he is also affiliated with the Center for Mexican American Studies and the American Studies programs. He is also an affiliate faculty at the Houston Galveston Psychoanalytic Institute.

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