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Social Impact and Storytelling and Hollywood:

Public Health and Social Justice Advocacy in Popular Media

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Anthropology

by

Jennifer Austin Walton-Wetzel

2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Social Impact and Storytelling and Hollywood:

Public Health and Social Justice Advocacy in Popular Media

by

Jennifer Austin Walton-Wetzel

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Elinor Ochs, Co-Chair

Professor Christopher J. Throop, Co-Chair

Social impact entertainment advocates and participants in Hollywood's nascent 'social impact storytelling' scene attempt to leverage the cultural influence of popular media on behalf of prosocial and public health causes: they promote, facilitate consultations on, and attempt to integrate social impact content into entertainment programming. The central questions of this dissertation, based on sixteen months of ethnographic fieldwork, involve what kinds of ideologies of social change and theories of communication shaped participants' everyday practices, structured advocate-industry relationships, and influenced the popular narratives that emerged from advocate-Hollywood collaborations. The project sought to understand how so-called "social impact" topics – primarily issues regarding public health and the social determinants of health -- were being formulated, resisted, transformed, and articulated through

and alongside popular narratives. Of particular interest were how the practices and ideologies operating in these contexts might relate to larger cultural discourses about social justice and social change, the potentialities of narrative, contemporary humanitarian ideals, and ideas about responsive ethical subjectivity in relation to others' stories. Through an ethnographic investigation of social impact media advocacy in contemporary Hollywood, this dissertation explores the landscape and configuration of contemporary social impact media/social impact storytelling movements, their antecedents, recent evolutions, and some of the implications of their current trajectories.

The dissertation of Jennifer Austin Walton-Wetzel is approved.

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2018

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to my co-chairs, Elinor Ochs and Jason Throop. You are both incredible at taking ideas seriously while also finding ways to play -- it has always been a pleasure to see how you think and an honor to have you think with me. I am so grateful for your particular steadiness and patience with me over the past decade. Thanks also to Doug Hollan, Linda Garro, and John Heritage for the way you have given so freely to me and to your intellectual communities. I have been deeply influenced and inspired by years of conversations between and with you all at Mind, Medicine and Culture, Discourse Lab, and the Center for Language, Interaction and Culture. I can say unequivocally that without your generosity, I never would have finished this project.

To my dear friends Dr. Hadi Deeb, Dr. Misa Dayson, and Dr. Megan Bayles, I am so glad you wrote your dissertations before I did. Thank you sincerely for your routine real-talk. You are all formidable taskmasters. I love you so much. Now lay off me! Dr. Anna Corwin and Dr. Rachel George, thank you also for your gentle and consistent knowingness, openness, and support. Dr. Sampada Aranke, you offered some of the biggest signal boosts in the final stages. Thank you.

Thanks to my parents, Dr. Marsha Walton and Dr. Chris Wetzel. You taught me to think flexibly, to always revere humanness but to always practice irreverence when it comes to humans' dogma. I am pretty sure that our family culture accidentally socialized me into an anthropological stance. I love you very much.

Finally, Laurie, thank you above all. I know that I am insanely lucky to be married to my favorite person, but I am especially lucky that you are brilliant, steadfast, wild-minded, and manage to summon belief when I am full of doubt. I love you and look forward to you every day.

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CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

This dissertation is based on sixteen consecutive months of fieldwork conducted in Los Angeles, California. Fieldwork principally involved ethnographic participant observation at a nonprofit organization that was involved in social impact media advocacy in Hollywood, as well as participant observation in Hollywood's nascent "social impact storytelling" scene. Professional social impact entertainment advocates and others participating in this community attempt to leverage the cultural influence of popular media on behalf of prosocial and public health causes; they promote, consult on, and attempt to integrate social impact content into entertainment programming. I followed advocates as they designed and conducted outreach to the entertainment industry, collaborated with Hollywood professionals, courted funders, and went about their everyday work.

The central questions of this dissertation involve what kinds of ideologies of social change and theories of communication shaped participants' everyday practices, structured advocate-industry relationships, and influenced the popular narratives that emerged from advocate-Hollywood collaborations. The project sought to understand how these so-called "social impact" topics — primarily issues regarding public health and the social determinants of health — were being formulated, resisted, transformed, and articulated through and alongside popular narratives. Of particular interest to me was how the practices and ideologies operating in this ethnographic context might relate to larger cultural discourses about social justice and social change, the potentialities of narrative, contemporary humanitarian ideals and responsive ethical subjectivity in relation to others' stories. Through an ethnographic investigation of social impact media advocacy in contemporary Hollywood, this dissertation explores the landscape and configuration of

contemporary social impact media/social impact storytelling movements, their antecedents, recent evolutions, and some of the implications of their current trajectories.

The organization that was home base for my research (hereafter, "the Center") asserted that its goal was to change the world by advocating for more, more "accurate," and more "compelling" popular depictions of issues related to public health and "social value." The general idea was that certain kinds of public narratives could foster positive social change, securing audiences' orientation to the "social good" and their commitment to public "well-being." The Center's practices and its underlying logics, at least at their most basic level, have a fairly long and well-established history. Since the 1970s, public health professionals have actively attempted to influence groups of people by harnessing the reach and persuasive power of mass media. Public health communication and "communication strategies for social change,"[1] collectively referred to as "entertainment-education" (E-E), have been diverse in form, content, and path to production, ranging from programs conceived specifically for this purpose, to direct appeals such as Public Service Announcements, to health topics embedded in existing television shows. E-E capitalizes on the broad appeal of entertainment media in order to show the public ways that they can live better and more safely, or, increasingly, ways that they might help marginalized communities do so.

E-E is commonplace all over the world and has been shown to enhance knowledge, change attitudes, and impact the behaviors of audiences in diverse cultural settings.[2] In South Africa, for example, nonprofits produced TV youth dramas saturated in messaging about HIV

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[1] Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers, *Entertainment-Education: A Communication Strategy for Social Change*

[2] Martine Bouman, Loes Maas, and Gergo Kok, "Health Education in Television Entertainment — *Medisch Centrum West*: A Dutch Drama Serial," *Health Education Research* 13, no. 4 (1998): 503-518; Heidi Nariman, *Soap Operas for Social Change: Toward a Methodology for Entertainment-Education Television* (Westport: Praeger, 1993); Singhal and Rogers, *Entertainment-Education*.

transmission and safe sex.[3] In Brazil, health advocates produced short narrative broadcasts on vasectomy.[4] In India, health officials designed dramas that addressed themes such as family planning, domestic violence, and reproductive health.[5] E-E work in the United States, however, has followed a different model and has tended to target different kinds of issues such as smoking, drunk driving, and drug abuse.[6] Perhaps because the entertainment production industry is so powerful and well-established in the United States, American E-E professionals have tended to avoid generating or producing content themselves and have made use of more indirect approaches.

Public health organizations, for example, have made use of "entertainment lobbyists" who have targeted network executives or executive producers; these individuals ideally mandated that writers focus on a health issue in a single episode, or had characters make mention of a target topic during programming.[7] These topics were then emphasized in PSAs that aired during commercial breaks, with airtime funded by governmental or nonprofit entities.[8] More recently, however, E-E professionals in the United States have moved away from approaching networks

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[3] Liza Aziz and Veslemoy Lothe Salvesen, "Voice Out – An Entertainment-Education Approach?" *Visual Anthropology* 21, no. 3 (2008): 217-230.

[4] D. Lawrence Kincaid, Alice Payne Merrit, Liza Nickerson, and Sandra de Castro Buffington, "Impact of a Mass Media Vasectomy Promotion Campaign in Brazil," *International Family Planning Perspectives* 22, no. 4 (1996): 169-175.

[5] Suruchi Sood, "Audience Involvement and Entertainment-Education," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 2 (2002): 153-172.

[6] E.g. Deborah Glick, Emil Berkanovic, Kathleen Stone, Leticia Ibarra, Marcy Connell Jones, Bob Rosen, Myrl Schreibman, Lisa Gordon, Laura Minassian & Darcy Richardes, "Health Education Goes Hollywood: Working with Prime-Time and Daytime Entertainment Television for Immunization Promotion," *Journal of Health Communication* 3, no. 3 (1998): 263-282; Singhal & Rogers, *Entertainment-Education*; Jay Winsten, "Promoting Designated Drivers: The Harvard Alcohol Project," *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 10, no. 3 (1994): 11-14.

[7] Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[8] Winsten, "Promoting Designated Drivers"; Kathryn C. Montgomery, Montgomery, Kathryn C. "The Harvard Alcohol Project: Promoting the Designated Driver on TV," in *Organizational Aspects of Health Communications Campaigns: What Works*, ed. Thomas E. Backer and Everett M. Rogers (Newbury Park: Sage Press, 1993) 178-202.

and executives and have backed off from the use of PSAs and supplementary campaigns. Since they early 2000s they have instead focused their energies on professionals at lower rungs of the entertainment ladder, approaching writers of successful on-air programs and attempting to inspire them to voluntarily integrate public health topics into ongoing narrative arcs.[9] This new way of working has required that advocates mobilize a different set of strategies for contact, collaboration, funding, and program evaluation. Given the need to nourish and protect free and friendly relationships with Hollywood professionals (who have no particular incentive to cooperate with advocates' agendas), American entertainment advocates have had to develop new skills and renegotiate relationships with collaborators and funders.

My fieldwork demonstrates that in today's contexts, E-E advocacy is undergoing even more significant transformations (and, in fact, no longer tends to claim the E-E label). On the one hand, the entertainment industry appears to be more amenable to advocacy than ever; Hollywood support of prosocial causes is a growing trend in what some have deemed the "New New Hollywood" that increasingly features "socially relevant films anchored in causes and calls-to-action."[10] It was clear, over the course of my research, that new ideas were circulating about what popular entertainment could and should do for society. On the other hand, entertainment advocates currently working in Hollywood report that they are facing complex resistance to their efforts. They note that entertainment professionals and audiences alike grow ever more resistant to "finger-wagging" or "lobbying," and are repelled by "depressing" and "overwhelming" stories about social problems. They assert that their priority topics must now be reformulated and deeply integrated into narrative programming if they are to have their desired impact. Advocates are

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[9] May G. Kennedy, Elizabeth Eustis Turf, Maureen Wilson-Genderson, Kristen Wells, Grace C. Huang, and Vicki Beck, "Effects of a Television Drama about Environmental Exposure to Toxic Substances," *Public Health Reports* 126, no. 1 (2011): 150-159.

[10] Ryan Latanzio, "The New New Hollywood Film Festival," *Indiewire*, Sept 23, 2015, https://www.indiewire.com/2015/09/the-new-new-hollywood-film-festival-180980/.

therefore actively revising the ways they frame target issues to secure industry cooperation and audience involvement, attempting to find new ways to re-cast and narrativize issues for popular consumption. This project seeks a deep understanding of the shifting ideologies of social change and communicative practices that undergird these kinds of transformations and that constitute a contemporary shift from an "entertainment-education" to a "social impact storytelling" model.

An Anthropological Investigation of Entertainment Advocacy

The dissertation is grounded in and draws upon literature from medical, linguistic, and psychocultural anthropology as it describes and theorizes social impact entertainment work and attempts to understand what is at stake for the advocates and Hollywood creators implicated in the movement. I also pull from research in public health communication, since entertainment-education was originally conceived as a public health communication strategy, a way of increasing the impact of public health workers' efforts to reduce the impact of illness by infusing the public sphere with more "accurate" health information. The notion of "accuracy," of course, is complicated: a long tradition of scholarship in medial anthropology reveals that different communities explain and frame illness and healing in extremely diverse ways and that "cultural" models of health, ill-health, and efficacious treatment are frequently divergent from biomedical[11] understandings of the way diseases are transmitted, how illnesses should be treated, or why certain individuals are vulnerable to certain ailments.[12] Though E-E advocates all over the world

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[11] Though biomedical accounts are clearly also "cultural" (e.g., Mary-Jo DelVicchio Good, "Cultural Studies of Biomedicine: An Agenda for Research," *Social Science & Medicine* 41, no. 4 (1995): 461-473.)

[12] E.g. George Devereux, "Primitive Psychiatry," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 8 (1940): 1194-1213; James Dow, *The Shaman's Touch: Otomi Indian Symbolic Healing* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986); Leon Eisenberg, "Disease and Illness: Distinctions between Professional and Popular Ideas of Sickness," *Culture, Medicine & Psychiatry* 1, no. 1 (1977): 9-23; Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997); Kaja Finkler, "Non-Medical Treatments and Their Outcomes," *Culture, Medicine & Psychiatry* 4, no. 3 (1980): 271-310; Linda Garro, "Cultural Meaning: Explanations of Illness, and the Development

are aware of this diversity in human orientations to health and ill-health, these professionals have long emphasized that biomedically-accurate and scientifically-sound health messages must reach and persuade misinformed or under-informed populations if public health is to be improved. E-E has pragmatism at its heart; advocates attempt to mobilize the influence of storytelling in entertainment media to accomplish concrete, measurable gains in public health and wellbeing.

The logic of using storytelling for this purpose can be easily understood in the context of medical, linguistic and psychocultural anthropological scholarship that establishes the power of narrative and ritual drama to structure and restructure human orientations to experience, including endowing meaning upon the unfolding experience of our own suffering or affectively and cognitively reorienting us to the experiences of others.[13] E-E also orients to these powers of narrative as it leverages storytelling on behalf of increasing the persuasive reach depth of public responses to an issue. However, anthropological scholarship and E-E research have not yet been integrated, nor have anthropological theories been brought to bear in order to understand the practice of entertainment advocacy on the ground. This project seeks to fill this gap as well as to use anthropological theorizing to explore the contemporary emergence of E-E's trendy sibling/substitute, "social impact storytelling" (SIS). I observed that SIS focuses on somewhat different topics and invests in somewhat different ideologies of social change and ethical action than its public-health-focused antecedent. I will argue that SIS also espouses somewhat different

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of Comparative Frameworks," *Ethnology* 39, no. 4 (2000): 305-334; Linda Garro, "Hallowell's Challenge: Explanations of Illness and Cross-Cultural Research," *Anthropological Theory* 2, no. 1 (2002): 77-97; Robert Bush Lemelson, "Traditional Healing and its Discontents: Efficacy and Traditional Therapies of Neuropsychiatric Disorders in Bali." Medical Anthropology Quarterly 18, no. 1 (2004): 48-76.

[13] Thomas J. Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Laurence J. Kirmayer, "Healing and the Invention of Metaphor: The Effectiveness of Symbols Revisited," *Culture, Medicine & Psychiatry* 17, no. 2 (1993): 161-195; Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Cheryl Mattingly, *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots: The Narrative Structure of Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Daniel E. Moerman and Wayne B. Jonas, "Deconstructing the Placebo Effect and Finding the Meaning Response," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 136 (2002): 471-476; Thomas J. Scheff, *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual and Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

stances toward the potentialities of storytelling and storytellers than its E-E predecessor. It constructs, therefore, different kinds of ethical social actors within a practice that is fundamentally oriented to achieving social good through "storytelling for social change."

In the United States, E-E advocacy has almost always been done behind the scenes on a not-for-profit basis. Advocates from health-focused nonprofits or government entities attempt to persuade industry professionals to represent specific topics on their shows (i.e., writers agree to give a character a family history of breast cancer and depict BRCA genetic testing in a storyline), to make health information in storylines more accurate (i.e., an epidemiologist consults with writers on an influenza plotline), or to change representations of certain behaviors (i.e., network executives agree to reduce depictions of smoking on TV). To my knowledge, there has never been an ethnographic investigation of these practices. Researchers have not explored the forces that shape the intentional attempt to position and formulate such topics in entertainment media, such as professionals' beliefs about what kinds of communication are efficacious, what kinds of health topics are most important, or how hoped-for social change is best accomplished. Nor have E-E researchers in the United States investigated the social organization of collaborations between advocates and entertainment professionals or how these relationships influence the way projects are designed and how they unfold. Instead, researchers have tended to focus inquiry on how *audiences* receive and integrate messages; a significant oversight given the crucial role these relationships play in this work.

In rare mentions of the process of working with entertainment industry professionals, E-E researchers have referred to communicative disputes, pointing out that the "culture clash" between advocates and industry insiders can be an impediment to E-E work and that these clashes

often come down to matters of rhetorical style.[14] Those on the entertainment side perceive public health professionals' presentation of topics as "boring" or "do-goody," while those on the public health side perceive Hollywood professionals' framings of health topics as overdramatic or watered down.[15] It is therefore essential to investigate the working relationships and communicative cultures of entertainment-advocate collaborations, directing attention toward not only the impact of messages on target audiences but also theorizing the mechanisms underpinning failures and successes in influencing entertainment professionals. The dissertation will argue that the contours and possibilities of E-E and SIS are profoundly shaped by asymmetries and assumptions built in to advocate-Hollywood relationships. I will describe the various ways that advocates' understanding of "the industry," their beliefs about and relationships with Hollywood professionals, their desire to protect those relationships, and their ideologies about Hollywood storytelling itself dramatically shaped the ways that topics were presented.

Failure to look at the process of advocate-industry collaborations is, perhaps, a symptom of a larger gap in scholarly understanding of America's entertainment production industry more generally. In a review of the anthropology of mass media, Deborah Spitulnik[16] argues that media studies scholars tend to focus on the content and cultural reception of television and film, analyzing media as cultural products or texts rather than exploring the culture of media-making or ethnographically investigating the social context of media production. There have only been a handful of ethnographies of the American entertainment industry.[17] Caldwell's work focuses

[14] E.g. Martine Bouman, "Turtles and Peacocks: Collaboration in Entertainment-Education Television," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 2 (2002): 225-244; Glick, et al. "Health Education Goes Hollywood."

[15] E.g. Bouman, "Turtles and Peacocks."

[16] Debra Spitulnik, "Anthropology and Mass Media," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22, no. 1 (1993): 293-315.

[17] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Sasha David, "Risky Business: Aspiring Hollywood Actors and the Selling

primarily on those who work "below the line" (gaffers, lighting technicians, camera operators) rather than those who conceive of creative content.[18] Sherry Ortner, admitting that mainstream Hollywood production culture was too difficult to access ethnographically, decided to focus on independent film producers and directors who define themselves against Hollywood's dominant themes and trends.[19] Sasha David, also bemoaning the difficulty of accessing tastemakers and creators in the Hollywood mainstream, explored the lives of actors and the agents who represent them, focusing on their experiences of self-fashioning during their search for work.[20] These ethnographic projects, while helpful in understanding certain aspects of Hollywood's creative culture, do not go very far in describing how topics come to be represented in Hollywood's most popular programs – or what might *limit* the topicalization or representation of certain issues. This dissertation does not focus on writers' rooms and Hollywood productions per se, but it was able to produce some insights on this elusive professional culture by observing the everyday social and communicative configurations of Hollywood-advocate collaborations. As I got to know the writers and content-producers operating in (or at least coming into contact with) Hollywood's social impact storytelling/media advocacy community, I learned something about how Hollywood's entertainment industry functioned more generally.

The project also asked how advocate-Hollywood collaborations were being shaped by broader cultural trends influencing popular responses to "social impact" content and social justice movements more generally. For instance, the emergence of "social impact media" and

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of the Self" (PhD Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2009); Sherry Ortner, *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950).

[18] Caldwell, *Production Culture*.

[19] Ortner, *Not Hollywood.*

[20] David, "Risky Business."

"entertainment for social change" may be related to what sociocultural and critical medical anthropologists have variously referred to as the modern "human rights industry," "celebrity humanitarianism," the "NGO industrial complex," or the "neo-missionary" movement.[21] Didier Fassin argues that we are currently living in an "age of humanitarian reason," when the complex political and structural underpinnings of human suffering are *obscured* rather than illuminated by popular campaigns, programs, and organizations that appeal to the public to "help."[22] These popular communications elicit sympathy and emotional involvement rather than demanding justice for vulnerable populations on the basis of their political rights.[23] Fassin and others argue that media representations of affliction and misfortune problematically highlight the gap between "those who suffer" and "those who help," reproducing inequalities and disguising the broad-scale systematicity of "structural violence."[24]

Anthropologists and cultural theorists have critiqued the popular contemporary human rights movement and have pointed to an expanding culture and industry of NGO advocacy, volunteer tourism and celebrity humanitarianism.[25] Hollywood, now more than ever, is implicated

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[21] Mary Mostafanezhad, "'Getting in Touch with your Inner Angelina': Celebrity Humanitarianism and the Cultural Politics of Gendered Generosity in Volunteer Tourism," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2013): 485-499; Tanja R. Muller, "The Long Shadow of Band Aid Humanitarianism: Revisiting the Dynamics Between Famine and Celebrity," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2013): 470-484; Joel Robbins, "Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, no. 3 (2013): 447-462; Amy Ross, "Neo-Missionaries and the Polemics of Helping," *Expositions* 5, no. 2 (2011): 103-110.

[22] Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[23] Ibid.

[24] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004); Paul Farmer, "An Anthropology of Structural Violence," *Current Anthropology* 45, no. 3 (2004): 305-325; Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*.

[25] Lauren Berlant, *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Lilie Chouliaraki, "The Theatricality of Humanitarianism: A Critique of Celebrity Advocacy," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2011): 1-21; Didier Fassin, "Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life," *Public Culture* 19, no. 3 (2007): 499-520; Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*; Mostafenazhed, "'Getting in Touch with your Inner Angelina'"; Ross, "Neo-Missionaries".

in the popularizing of social consciousness and social activism with the founding of platforms such as CineCause, the now-common testimony of celebrities on Capitol Hill, and what the *LA Times* has referred to as a "groundswell of the success of cause-based documentaries" driving a new genre of "social impact cinema."[26] Tanja Muller traces the link between Hollywood and "good causes" back to the 1983-85 Ethiopian famine, during which international media coverage of stricken, suffering bodies converged with high-profile celebrity fundraising to alleviate hunger in Africa's drought and war-stricken east.[27] Keith Tester argues that these and other media representations of suffering solicited affective responses from audiences in problematic ways, trafficking in moral sentiments while constructing a depoliticized, neoliberal "infatuation with humanitarian crusades and ethically correct causes."[28] How does entertainment advocacy – which aims to tell stories about public health problems and social issues – play into or resist these dynamics?

Some social theorists and media scholars level criticisms at these criticisms, arguing that it is equally problematic to prioritize the depiction of structural, macropolitical problems over narrative depictions that center the lived realities of individuals' experiences. Wacquant argues that such representations of social problems collapse people's lives into statistical groupings and abstract structures and, as such, commit a kind of symbolic violence.[29] Many anthropologists have argued for "experience-near," subjectivity-honoring and "person-centered" depictions of people's

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[26] Oliver Gettel, "Hollywood Film Festival to Tackle Social Issues Under New Owner," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/2014/mar/27/entertainment/la-et-mn-hollywood-filmfestival-to-tackle-social-issues-under-new-owner-20140327.

[27] Muller, "The Long Shadow."

[28] Keith Tester, *Humanitarianism and Modern Culture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010) 34.

[29] Loic Wacquant, "Comments on Paul Farmer, 'An Anthropology of Structural Violence,'" *Current Anthropology* 45, no. 3 (2004): 322.

lives rather than privileging more macro-focused or objectivity-seeking representations of social structures.[30] There have been considerable tensions in the field over what is accomplished — what goods or harms are done — by various kinds of representations of social issues. These tensions are closely related to a recent "ethical turn" in anthropology, which includes fresh efforts to work through theoretical predicaments entailed in any effort to understand the relationship between persons and the societies/communities within which they live.[31] Ethics are inextricable, after all, from the identification and representation of social problems as well as any effort to engage with or alleviate the suffering of the self and others.

A growing group of anthropologists argue against social scientific preoccupation with "the sufferer" as a subject of inquiry and anthropological representation, inviting an attention to "the good" and asking for anthropological investigation into everyday, nuanced, first-person practices for creating a good life.[32] Many writers affiliated with an emerging anthropology of moralities urge us to divert attention away from (or at least redistribute a previous exclusive/preoccupied focus on) the normative structures, social norms, and collective ethical rule-making that had

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[30] E.g. Douglas Hollan, "Developments in Person-Centered Ethnography," in *The Psychology of Cultural Experience*, eds. Carmella C. Moore and Holly F. Mathews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Robert A. LeVine, *Culture, Behavior, and Personality: An Introduction to the Comparative Study of Psychosocial Adaption* (New York: Routledge, 1982); Unni Wikan, "Toward an Experience-Near Anthropology," *Cultural Anthropology* 6, no. 3 (1991): 285-305.

[31] E.g. Didier Fassin, "The Ethical Turn in Anthropology: Promises and Uncertainties," *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no. 1 (2014): 429-435; Webb Keane, "Affordances and Reflexivity in Ethical Life: An Ethnographic Stance," *Anthropological Theory* 14, no. 1 (2014): 3-26; James Laidlaw, *The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Michael Lambek, *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Cheryl Mattingly, "Two Virtue Ethics and the Anthropology of Morality," *Anthropological Theory* 12, no. 2 (2012): 161-184; Miriam Ticktin, "Where Ethics and Politics Meet," *American Ethnologist* 33, no. 1 (2006): 33-49; Jarrett Zigon, "Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand: A Theoretical Framework for an Anthropology of Moralities," *Anthropological Theory* 7, no. 2 (2007): 131-150.

[32] E.g. Cheryl Mattingly, *Moral Laboratories: Family Peril and the Struggle for a Good Life*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Robbins, "Beyond the Suffering Subject."

previously characterized anthropological interest in "the moral."[33] Others, as a counterpoint or warning to these arguments, continue to assert that deep attention to experience and first-personness over and above attention to collective rules and compulsory normativity may obscure very real (and perhaps dangerous) macrostructural forces that shape and constrain human subjectivity.[34] As I see it, these conflicts and debates over ethics are very much germane to and alive in the practice of entertainment advocacy and "storytelling for social change."

This project investigates entertainment advocacy in light of these analyses. While public health as a discipline has long highlighted the role of structural, systemic inequality on the health of vulnerable populations, it was not traditionally a part of the E-E paradigm to call attention to the so-called "social determinants of disease." It is only recently that entertainment advocates have sought to directly represent more macro public health and social justice issues in entertainment media. It is, in part, this shift from the more "medical" aspects of health to more "social" concerns that typifies the transformation of E-E into SIS. This transformation has posed problems, however, because the "entertainment" component of the entertainment-education mandate often precludes depicting population-level analyses or references to the systematic political and cultural roots of health crises. These are considered poor material for entertainment content (such academic representations are assessed as boring and drama-flattening). The dissertation explores how advocates' recent move to address macro-level determinants of suffering struggles to flourish within the constraints of entertainment-oriented narratives. It also investigates the narrativization or entertainmentization of public health concerns that characterize many entertainment advocacy efforts, asking whether there are potential connections between this

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[33] Keane "Affordances and Reflexivity in Ethical Life"; Zigon, "Moral Breakdown."

[34] For a thorough exploration of these two positions in anthropology and the writers affiliated with the debate, see Mattingly, ""Two Virtue Ethics and the Anthropology of Morality."

process and the de-politicization of suffering noted by anthropologists of humanitarian movements.[35]

Because E-E and SIS are both premised upon the framing of public concerns within personal, absorbing, and emotionally compelling narratives, I draw heavily upon anthropological work on the linguistic and narrative structuring of affect and experience to understand this aspect of the advocates' activities. A truly enormous body of literature in medical, linguistic, and psychocultural anthropology has examined the power of narrative to construct and transform experience — especially experiences of illness and suffering — by endowing happenings with meaning, orienting narrators and listeners to possible futures, structuring suspense and anticipation, emplotting experiences in time, contesting or congealing social identities, and triggering affective responses to events and/or identification with characters.[36] Entertainment advocates explicitly orient to these powers of narrative in their work with Hollywood writers and producers. They speak to the transformative potential of dramatic suspense and the role of "emotion" and identification as motivational forces.[37] Like Cheryl Mattingly,[38] who emphasizes the clinical potential of popular Hollywood narratives to scaffold patients' approaches to their illnesses and disabilities in hopeful and productive ways, E-E advocates reference the potential

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[35] E.g. Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*; Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and Miriam Ticktin, "Transnational Humanitarianism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 273-289.

[36] Linda Garro, "Narrating Troubling Experiences," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 40 (2003): 5-44; Byron J. Good, *Medicine, Rationality, and Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*; Cheryl Mattingly, "The Concept of Therapeutic 'Emplotment,'" *Social Science and Medicine* 38, no. 6 (1994): 811-822; Lisa Capps and Elinor Ochs, *Constructing Panic: The Discourse of Agoraphobia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); C. Jason Throop, "Latitudes of Loss: On the Vicissitudes of Empathy," *American Ethnologist* 37, no. 4 (2010): 771-782.

[37] D. Lawrence Kincaid, "Drama, Emotion, and Cultural Convergence," *Communication Theory* 2 (2002): 136-152.

[38] Cheryl Mattingly, *The Paradox of Hope: Journeys Through a Clinical Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

impact on audiences of media representations of particular illnesses and portrayals of courses of treatment in popular storylines.

E-E research attends to this aspect of narrativity: a story's capacity to have impacts upon audiences during a story-audience encounter are dependent on an audience's level of "involvement" in, "transportation" by, and emotional engagement with narratives and characters.[39] Deeper engrossment in a narrative and increased emotional responses to characters' predicaments are predictive of fewer critical thoughts and reduced skepticism about topical content.[40] This dissertation's interest in narrative process, however, is more invested in how narratives and ideas about narratives operate at the level of advocate-industry collaboration. It addresses the workaday ways that advocates use narratives to motivate industry professionals. Before "transporting" and "involving" narratives on target topics can be produced, after all, advocates must first transport (or at least persuade) the writers who produce them. I will argue that the issue of how to "inspire" and emotionally involve industry professionals is hyper-cognized by entertainment advocates. The dissertation will describe how advocates organize activities and structure narrative practices in order to invoke emotion, and how they prioritize certain kinds of narratives that privilege certain kinds of affects and affective involvements over

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[39] Kincaid, "Drama, Emotion, and Cultural Convergence"; Michael J. Papa, Arvind Singhal, Sweety Law, Saumya Pant, Suruchi Sood, Everett M. Rogers, and Corinne L. Shefner-Rogers, "Entertainment-Education and Social Change: An Analysis of Parasocial Interaction, Social Learning, Collective Efficacy, and Paradoxical Communication," *Journal of Communication* 50, no. 4 (2000): 31-55; Phyllis T. Piotrow, D. Lawrence Kincaid, Jose G. Rimon, and W. Rinehart, *Health Communication: Lessons from Family Planning and Reproductive Health* (Westport: Praeger, 1997); Sood, "Audience Involvement and Entertainment-Education"; Everett Rogers, Peter W. Vaughan, Ramadhan M.A. Swalehe, Nagesh Rao, Peer Svenkerud and Suruchi Sood, "Effects of an Entertainment-Education Radio Soap Opera on Family Planning in Tanzania," *Studies in Family Planning* 30, no. 3 (1999): 193-211; Michael D. Slater, "Entertainment Education and the Persuasive Impact of Narratives," in *Narrative Impact: Social and Cognitive Foundations*, eds. M.C. Green, J.J. Strange, and T.C. Brock (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2002).

[40] Kincaid "Drama, Emotion, and Cultural Convergence"; Michael D. Slater and Donna Rouner, "Entertainment-Education and Elaboration Likelihood: Understanding the Processing of Narrative Persuasion," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 2 (2002): 173-191.

others. In addition to anthropological work on narrative, then, I also draw upon sociological and psychocultural anthropological research on emotion and affective cultures.

Scholars in the social sciences have long been preoccupied with moral sentiments, emotional bonds, and spiritual fellow-feelings as the "glue" that holds societies together.[41] Face-to-face interaction is a powerful site for the exchange of "emotional energy" such as flushes of embarrassment, surges of empathy, or moments of shared enthusiasm.[42] However, these kinds of emotional inter-subjective exchanges or moments of empathy are distinctly shaped by individuals' local understandings of appropriate affective orientations, their ability to synchronize with others during interaction, conventional repertoires for perspective-taking, and cultural "emotional dialects."[43] Entertainment advocates center these kinds of emotional exchanges as the locus of their work. For the advocates with whom I worked, emotional responses were sought-after experiences thought of as the very locus of social change, personal growth, or professional progress. The dissertation therefore draws upon previous analyses in anthropology and sociology to think about entertainment-advocate collaborations as "affective cultures" where participants engage in "emotion work."[44] Participants engage in emotion work and particular modes of

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[41] E.g. Randall Collins, "Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions," in *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*, ed. by Theodore D. Kemper (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995); Talcott Parsons, "The Place of Ultimate Values in Sociological Theory," *International Journal of Ethics* 45, no. 3 (1935): 282-316.

[42] Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Erving W. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1967); Erving W. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Hillary Anger Elfenbein, "Emotion in Organizations: A Reviewed Theoretical Integration," *Academy of Management Annals* 1, no. 1 (2007): 371–457.

[43] Douglas Hollan and C. Jason Throop, "Whatever Happened to Empathy?: An Introduction," *Ethos* 36, no. 4 (2008): 385-401; Elinor Ochs, Tamar Kremer-Sadlik, Karen Gainer Sirota, and Olga Solomon, "Autism and the Social World: An Anthropological Perspective," *Discourse Studies* 6, no. 2 (2004): 147-183; Christian Von Scheve, A. Michaels, and C. Wulf, *Emotions in Rituals* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[44] Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

attention in the service of producing what I will argue are ethical/moral experiences for themselves and others.[45] I describe the ways that advocates labor to achieve professional success by constructing inter-subjective exchanges in which advocates are "inspiring," writers and producers are "inspired," and TV viewers are eventually also "inspired" to improve their health. Significantly, this inspiration that is itself configured as "ethical" by participants, and I use recent work in an anthropology of ethics to understand these dimensions of social impact storytelling.

Entertainment advocates are ever-oriented to the core concern of how to make public health issues engaging and compelling enough that members of the public will change for the better.[46] To accomplish this within a framework of voluntary participation by the entertainment industry, advocates needed to make public health concerns relevant for Hollywood's writers and producers. This meant that advocates were constantly trying to move and engage entertainment professionals — to make them *care* enough to voluntarily include priority topics in their creative content. My work tracked advocates as they attempted to provoke industry insiders into attending to priority issues, and I examined the communicative ideologies that guided them in this work. The project also tracked the ways that industry insiders, preoccupied with creating narratives that sparked and stirred their audiences, oriented to and topicalized the affective responses of their audiences (and how they responded to advocates' attempts to engage them). The dissertation seeks an understanding of the affective and communicative ecologies of Hollywood-advocate collaborations. After all, these are arenas where professional and commercial success are tightly linked to individuals' ability to engender the emotional commitment of others.

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[45] Thomas J. Csordas, "Afterword: Moral Experience in Anthropology," *Ethos* 42, no. 1 (2014): 139-152; C. Jason Throop, "Moral Sentiments," in *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, ed. Didier Fassin (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

[46] The parameters of this hoped-for change vary depending on the topic, the project — or may remain totally undefined.

This project devotes ethnographic attention to those who work both within and at the borders of Hollywood's creative mainstream by engaging with the social justice and public health dimensions of the entertainment industry. It explores the ways that entertainment advocates mobilize their workaday insights into Hollywood cultural production when they try to inspire industry professionals to include topics in entertainment media and consult with entertainment professionals in writers' rooms, at guild meetings, and on studio lots. It analyzes the varied ways that topics are understood, formulated, resisted, transformed, and re-presented throughout collaboration and consultation between writers and experts. It seeks a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and communicative configuration of entertainment advocacy and "social impact storytelling" in Hollywood, including how shifting theories of social change and transforming repertories for impactful communication are related to recent transformations in this field as well as the broader cultural context of popular social justice advocacy in the United States.

Fieldwork at the Center

When I began my initial work at the Center, it had recently relocated to a new office. The new space was bright, glass-filled and breezy, with freshly-painted bold accent walls and sleek modern furniture. The offices featured an open floorplan and a living-room-like meeting area; only the Director's office and the formal conference room had doors. The formal conference room was soon to be equipped with a state-of-the-art system for virtual meetings that, I was told, would also be used to screen and discuss clips or whole media projects with which the Center was involved. The folks who worked in the suite across the hall popped their heads in to welcome us and openly expressed their awe and envy, coming back with their coworkers. "Look at this place," they exclaimed! Their nonprofit, an organization focused on community health programs

for children and adolescents, was much less invested (literally) in their offices' appearance. The Center, on the other hand, looked more like a Silicon Valley start-up or a trendy collaborative workspace than the often underfunded, grant-dependent nonprofit it was.

The Director of the Center, Tania[47], was acutely aware of the way the new office's style differentiated it from other nonprofit organizations. These aesthetic choices, Tania explained to me, were absolutely intentional, and were far from an arbitrary matter or a question of style over substance. Style, in fact, was crucial to the work. The Center was oriented towards Hollywood: its creative culture, its coolness, and its wealth. In order to impact the industry, the office needed to appeal and appear legitimate to writers, producers, and the issue-focused funders and philanthropists who wanted to use the Center to influence the entertainment industry. It couldn't be dim and dumpy. Neither, for that matter, could the people who worked there.

At one staff meeting, Tania shared a story from earlier in her career. She had come from a more traditional public health background, and spent much of her early professional life working abroad in developing nations and engaging in a more traditional E-E paradigm. She recounted that she had moved back and forth between professional environments filled with "policy wonks" and cultural environments where media-making/entertainment industries were under-developed and target populations for health communication often consisted of the rural poor. Then, she explained, she moved to Hollywood. "I had to get a totally new wardrobe," she explained. Gone were the "suits of the Beltway" — the preferred attire of the "policy wonks." Tania had to find a way to "actually have some style," and to fit in with the more informal Hollywood scene by "showing some personality" in her clothes. She also had to acquire new kinds of social expertise. "I had to totally re-learn to network," she explained. In other contexts, she told us, speaking easily

[47] "Tania" is a pseudonym. All names throughout the dissertation, as well as some participants' biographical details and some field sites' geographical details have been altered to protect participants' confidentiality.

and persuasively about "the facts" opened a communicative channel to personal relationships with people who could facilitate and champion the work. Not so in Hollywood. "I learned that you can't lead with facts," she said. In the entertainment industry, she told us, "fun" personal relationships opened the communicative channel to facts. They were a precondition to any conversation wherein "our issues" could be discussed.

The Center's vision for its offices and Tania's story about personal style was an early signal to me that something was taking place in the Center that I had not yet read about in my research on entertainment-education, entertainment advocacy, or social media social justice work. With the exception of Martine Bouman,[48] who has described culture clashes between public health communications workers and entertainment industry collaborators in The Netherlands, I had yet to encounter research that investigated the cultural and communicative dimensions of the relationships that seemed to be so crucial to entertainment advocacy endeavors in the US. What, I wondered, were the communicative ideologies and theories of social change that governed the Center's strategies for building relationships with Hollywood's creators? How did advocates and their collaborators understand their efforts after the public good within the constraints of "fun" relationships and entertaining content?

Shortly before the period of my fieldwork, the Center had expanded its directives from traditional public health/E-E topics and had begun to conduct outreach on the cultural determinants of suffering and other topics of "social value." The Center's advocates continued their work on their more typical health-related topics, but they would now also focus on poverty, racial inequality, gender discrimination, incarcerated or undocumented legal status, and other more "cultural" factors. This shift seemed to be inviting unanticipated challenges and forcing unanticipated adjustments in the advocates' methods. When I began my fieldwork, the Center was

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[48] Bouman, "Turtles and Peacocks."

actively seeking new ways to conduct its outreach work. Its original model, they were realizing, had been better suited for certain kinds of issues and had perhaps been most productive in a different era.

Advocates described new and friendly interest among Hollywood's writers and producers about issues of "social value." They were excited about a growing "cultural moment" in Hollywood during which more media-makers were speaking openly about the possibility of using their work for social good. There were new discourses circulating about "citizen change-makers," as well, and the advocates were optimistic that their labor could contribute to a collective sense of citizen efficacy to make change on difficult cultural problems. But they also perceived increased resistance to "lobbying" or naked attempts at persuasion, and they described a sort of "allergy" to topics that were "too political." There seemed to be a sort of simultaneous claim and disavowal of culture change as a pursuit. I was immediately interested in, first, what might be driving the Center's recent shift to new topics; second, what factors inherent in these topics demanded methodological transformation in the context of these shifts; third, participants' understandings of why and how certain strategies were working; and fourth, how ideologies about the world's problems and potential solutions might integrate into the entertainment industry as a cultural juggernaut influencing economic, aesthetic, legal, religious, and social values at every strata of society. Media scholars have discussed the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' "entertainmentization" of culture, noting the prominent role of mass entertainment consumption in the formation of citizen subjectivities during late capitalism.[49] The Center and its advocates intervened directly into this complex social field; I wanted to understand what these interventions were all about and what kinds of subjectivities they demanded and produced.

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[49] Spitulnik, "Anthropology and Mass Media."

During my time at the Center, I encountered people who were committed to culture change on an array of social issues: immigration reform and life undocumented status, healthy and fulfilling aging, America's "war on drugs," learning disabilities and differences, palliative care and planning a "good death," family planning and reproductive health, LGBT youth well-being, human trafficking, mass incarceration, prison education and anti-recidivism, juvenile justice, access to medical care, access to healthy food/food deserts, racial discrimination, mindfulness and meditation, and more. I was present for conversations where these topics were weighed and debated as potential priorities for the Center. I assisted in the adaptation of academic research articles and the formulation of grant proposals for private foundations and government funders on these subjects; I assisted as these topics were translated into language that aimed to appeal to entertainment industry audiences in newsletters and via social media. I observed panel discussions and workshops, some of which were deemed successes and others, failures. I participated in planning field tours for writers and producers, who the Center thought would be more impacted by "experiences," and "real stories from real people" rather than case presentations and panel discussions. I observed and facilitated pro bono consultations between academic experts and entertainment professionals on diverse topics, listening with fascination as academics were briefed in advance to "speak to what is at stake for the storytellers" as they attempted to integrate evidence-based assertions in ways that didn't become a "turn-off." And I attended meet-ups, mixers, and private gatherings that attempted to create points of social contacts and merge the missions of professional creatives, grassroots activists, professional advocates and nonprofit organizations into a social movement that sought to use Hollywood's influence to change the country (and, often, the whole world) for the better.

Along the way, I got to know frazzled writers' assistants and fastidious script fact-checkers, network TV writers in need of help with narrative puzzles and unstaffed writers looking for new material, independent documentarians, feature-length filmmakers, big wigs and self-defined "wannabes," and many other Hollywood professionals in between. I worked alongside students and graduate students in public health, communications, and social entrepreneurship; entertainment-education veterans and new advocates itching to change the paradigm; seasoned social justice activists and people who were newly politicized, elderly philanthropists and young grant managers, grant-makers from big foundations with programmatic support to offer and independent funders of one-off passion projects. I also talked to over 100 "experts" in fields from virology to trucking logistics, from clinical psychology to political science, some of whom ended up consulting with writers or participating in the Center's events and some of whom didn't. The Center's work brokered connections between all these varied participants and the diverse priorities they represented. It did so with the ambitious goal of using Hollywood to change the world for the better.

Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter Two explains the methods I used during fieldwork, comprehensively describes the corpus, and discusses my goals for data analyses. Each subsequent chapter of the dissertation addresses a different preoccupying concern of the social impact entertainment professionals I worked with and explores the ways that writers and entertainment professionals took up or contested these concerns as they encountered or worked with the Center's advocates. These were topics that emerged again and again in my observations of everyday interaction, my interviews, and the textual materials I collected.

First, advocates worried over the evolution of existing entertainment-education models and discussed pressures on the models to change and shift in order to accomplish new goals in a newly emerging market of "social impact storytelling" and a changing Hollywood marketplace. Chapter Three therefore explores the history and underlying logic of E-E, a middle-range adaptation of the model for US contexts in the 1980s-early 2000s, and emerging contemporary trajectories in the form of social impact storytelling (SIS).

Second, I observed a deep commitment to and investment in the power of narrative to change the world; this ideology was shared across a staggering variety of participants (who one might not expect to ideologically agree). Discourses about the unique properties of storytelling as a vehicle for social change were pervasive, and there was a sense of urgency about bringing topics up-until-now unrepresented in Hollywood into narrative circulation. Chapter Four therefore explores what I began referring to as the "narrative theory of social change," while Chapter Five talks about the function of different stories and different narrative actors in what I believe it is useful to think about as Hollywood's contemporary narrative economy. Chapter Six discusses the kinds of narrative transformations that were valued and undertaken in the service of these specific narrative demands in a narrative economy, and thinks about what might be missed or made invisible by these privileged transformations, as well as the tremendous narrative demand generated in this cultural context.

Third, advocates and their colleagues were sincerely concerned about the "social good," about generating positive cultural change, and about engaging in meaningful efforts to alleviate the suffering of others and construct a more just world. Ever-present questions about inequality, injustice, and ameliorative social action led me to explore the conceptions of ethics that were operating in this context. Chapter Seven thinks about social impact media advocacy as an ethical

practice and project. It describes what kinds of ethical actors and actions were hoped for and worked towards by advocates and their collaborators. It also explores participants' beliefs about how the consumption of Hollywood's entertaining narratives invoked or constrained specific kinds of ethical engagements, and relates these to contemporary anthropological work on ethics.

Fourth, professionals working in social impact media were constantly orienting to the role of affect in their work; especially affects such as compassion, inspiration, compassion-fatigue, and disgust ("turn-off"). They worked hard to engender motivating affects in the workplace, and emotion-work was a major feature of their everyday practice. Chapter Eight therefore focuses on the role of affect in the practice of entertainment advocacy, as well as advocates' theories about what constituted effective versus ineffective uses of affect in the service of their social change mission.

Finally, a concluding chapter considers how hegemonic narrative practices and a limited view of what constitutes ethical involvement converge in social impact storytelling, and how a growing contemporary cultural focus on narratives (especially certain kinds of narratives) and affects (especially certain kinds of affects) — might problematically constrain practices that attempt to build a better world. It relates the project of SIS to anthropological critiques of global humanitarian movements and argues for a wariness of "popular justice." It urges suspicion about pop justice's reliance on discourses of story-power and its valorization of narrative representation (even as it devalues other kinds of representation), as well as its centering of subjective experiences of fellow-feeling and inspiration as the locus of justice (concurrent with its devaluation of structural, policy-based, or redistributive justice projects). Finally, it argues for significantly more anthropological attention to nonprofit communities/organizations and our

contemporary philanthropic economy in the United States to supplement the existing anthropological attention to global humanitarianism and development capital.

CHAPTER TWO

Methods

Field Sites and Participants

From January 2014 through May 2015, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Los Angeles, California. My primary field site was an entertainment advocacy nonprofit, "the Center," and I spent most of my time (ultimately approximately forty hours per week) in the Center's offices or, alternately, wherever the Center' events were taking place (usually off-site in the evenings, but sometimes off-site during the day). The Center's events took place at a variety of locations, but were most commonly held in theaters (i.e., screenings), professional guild conference spaces or studio offices (i.e., briefings or panels), or topic-related sites in the community (i.e., South Central LA for a tour related to gang violence). I attended a total of thirty-one Center-related events during my fieldwork; these took place all over greater Los Angeles.

My fieldwork also included participant observation in what might be described as LA's broader "social impact storytelling" scene. This scene was nascent at the time of my study; social impact entertainment was being hailed as an emerging movement and participants were involved in loose, developing affiliations. Studying SIS therefore meant going to many different kinds of events and locations where participants were involved in "mixers," workshops, or networking-oriented gatherings. People were beginning to connect with others interested in Hollywood's involvement (or potential involvement) with social issues, so I circulated among them and made contacts Like the gatherings put on by the Center, these events sometimes took place at professional guilds, and offices, but they also happened at talent agencies, nonprofit offices, restaurant banquet rooms, bars, and a few people's homes. I attended a total of eleven such events during my fieldwork, seven that were open to the public and three that were privately-hosted.

Also similarly to the Center-sponsored events, these gatherings took me all over Los Angeles, from west side neighborhoods like Santa Monica and Beverly Hills, to the downtown and east side homes and restaurants where many Hollywood creatives lived and played, to industry offices in Century City and Studio City. Like Los Angeles itself, my research sites sprawled.

And like the "social impact storytelling" community itself, my research participants represented diverse social identities and professional interests. My primary research participants, of course, were the people who were directly working in and with the Center. But even this research home base involved a rapidly revolving cast of characters: Center staff and volunteers, experts on diverse content, funders, advocates, activists, and "real people" affiliated with the Center's specific initiatives. For example, I observed a total of twenty-nine consultations during my fieldwork; these involved thirteen unique writers/writing teams and twenty-five different individual topic experts (not to mention the multitude of experts who were contacted but did not end up actually participating in a consultation). My observations of everyday work at the Center included sitting in on meetings with twenty-one different funders and an additional twenty-three nonprofit or advocacy organizations that either collaborated or were considering collaborating with the Center. These contacts sometimes involved teams of people, sometimes a lone representative. But the Center's meetings, phone calls, events, and presentations took place at a furious pace. There was a constant flow of different people, some of whom became recurring participants in my fieldwork, others of whom I met once and never saw again.

I also got to know a wide range of people who had no official contact or collaboration with the Center but who were interested in social impact media/entertainment for social change and were either beginning work in the sector or exploring its possibilities. These included a number of industry professionals, but they also included visual artists, novelists, students,

musicians, activists, and a number of “social entrepreneurs” who were curious or compelled by the idea that Hollywood’s stories (or popular storytelling) could positively impact America’s social problems. I had many informal conversations and interviews with these participants who, although operating outside the realm of the Center and its methodologies, shared many of its ideologies and wanted to participate in efforts to leverage popular storytelling on behalf of social change.

Participant Observation & Recordings of Focal Activities

I engaged in ethnographic participant observation of workaday life at the Center.[50] I first began my fieldwork as a part-time volunteer, sitting in on activities at the Center offices and lending a hand wherever I could. As I spent more time in the Center and developed more rapport with its staff, my role expanded from that of an ad hoc assistant to that of a full-time program coordinator; it became my responsibility to orchestrate many of the activities that I was observing the Center staff planning. My daily presence made me increasingly useful, and I began to assist the Center’s Director and its leadership as they engaged in longer-term strategic planning as well as continuing to help staff and volunteers complete their everyday work. By the end of my fieldwork, I was invited (and expected) to sit in on most meetings, consultations, and events within the Center, to participate in all of its sponsored events, and to attend related non-Center events along with Center staff.

I took ethnographic field notes throughout my fieldwork, usually after workdays or during meetings when it was socially appropriate to be typing incessantly on my laptop. Periodically, I

[50] Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006).

flagged emerging themes and patterns in my field notes.[51] These themes coalesced as my understanding of the Center's work deepened. On a basic level, I observed and investigated the activities of entertainment advocates as they went about their work: as they pursued and collaborated with content experts, volunteers, and professionals from other nonprofits; as they sought out and engaged with Hollywood writers and producers; and as they navigated relationships with funders and other advocacy and social justice-oriented organizations. Early in fieldwork, I honed in on what seemed like the advocates' four core activities: 1) fundraising and grant-writing, including collaboration with people from other nonprofits; 2) outreach planning and coordination, including the internal planning of events and the construction of materials for industry audiences, 3) facilitating consultations between topic experts and writers/producers, including finding and training appropriate experts to consult pro bono, and 4) producing events for Hollywood professionals, including talks/panels, workshops, and tours. I began to track these focal activities more carefully and think about how they related to one another. I also took field notes about the non-Center-related events I attended on social impact storytelling or social impact media.

Of particular interest to me were the communicative ideologies and social relationships that governed encounters between various participants on priority topics. I sought to understand how topics were discursively formulated and how different social roles were enacted by participants enacted vis-à-vis these formulations. For example, "priority topics" often moved across contexts and focal activities. "Mass incarceration" would be discursively formulated for a funder during the grant-writing process, framed somewhat differently during meetings with a collaborating community organization, re-articulated differently still when advocates were recruiting academic experts, and transformed yet again when being presented to a room full of

[51] Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*.

writers and producers. I therefore observed closely when advocates discussed how a topic should be presented to a funder versus a writer, or when they commented on how an expert should frame a subject versus how a "real person" would do so. I was particularly attentive to the way that Center staff "trained" or counseled experts, "real people" or activists to talk to and consult with entertainment industry professionals in ways they considered most productive.

My goal was to come to understand the driving concerns, values and relationships that undergirded social impact media interventions. Over time, I came to realize how challenging it was for Center staff to manage the various relationships their working model required. Collaborations and consultations between representatives of various cultural and professional groups involved constant communicative snags and hard-won successes. The Center was utterly dependent on the continued friendly and voluntary (unpaid) working relationships between advocates, entertainment professionals, and consulting experts, including so-called "real people." These relationships did not simply "grease the wheels" of the work; they *were* the wheels. I came to understand how fragile these associations could be, how many distinct modes of communication characterized them, and how carefully the people at the Center protected and monitored their dynamics.

I had hoped to take video or audio recordings of daily interactions at the Center and to collect video of the events it sponsored. Center staff, however, were hyper-cognizant of the tenuousness of social relationships, and I was prohibited from recording many Center activities for this reason. The Center's leadership was fiercely protective of their relationships with Hollywood professionals and funders in particular. For example, I was never allowed to record any meeting with a funder or potential funder of the Center's work, although I was eventually allowed to sit/listen in on these exchanges. Nor was I allowed to even broach the *question* of

recording consultations with writers' rooms, although I was allowed to take detailed notes on my laptop during these encounters, which usually took place via phone conference (and my note-taking was therefore unobtrusive). The writers themselves, however, sometimes wanted to audio-record their consultations for later reference, and the consulting experts almost always agreed to this. Over the course of fieldwork, I developed closer relationships with a handful of writers who worked with the Center multiple times as well as the consulting experts who were involved in these multiple contacts. Because of this handful of more-secure relationships (and the very good luck that they'd asked to record consultations), I was able to obtain recordings of eleven consultations, consisting of a little over seven hours of audio. Though I do not have permission to share transcripts of these encounters, they greatly informed my analyses.

Whenever possible, I audio-recorded Center staff meetings. This was only an option infrequently as there were often collaborators or funders present of whom the Center was protective (recall the constant flow of visitors and stakeholders). I was, however, able to collect a little over eight hours of audio recording of meetings between Center staff and volunteers. It was not possible or practical to video or audio-record the events I attended outside the Center's purview, as these were designed as one-offs and usually full of people I was meeting for the first time (though I took field notes afterwards). The Center's events, on the other hand, were fair game. In fact, the Center typically hired a professional videographer to film events so that they could post the complete videos online and promote them in the interest of continued outreach. I quickly determined that these videos were of substantially better audio and visual quality than my amateur efforts, so I used these rather than shooting my own video. In the end, my corpus included a little over eleven hours of professional event video. I reviewed and re-reviewed these videos as well as my audio recordings, transcribing excerpted sections for closer analyses. These

data provided insights on the ways topics were variously formulated, negotiated, and transformed by participants over the course of repeated interactions, as well as offering me a chance to analyze more carefully the advocate-industry relationships I was observing throughout my fieldwork.

Interviews

I conducted a total of nineteen interviews over the course of my research. These interviews varied widely in length and structure and were generally informal, semi-structured conversations with anyone who was amenable to an interview with me. I attempted to speak with at least one of every "type" of participant represented in the research process. I wanted to obtain a sample of perspectives and a balanced representation of people's understanding of the social impact storytelling space. Interviewees therefore included volunteers, nonprofit professionals, consulting experts, "real person" consultants, writers, advocates, and activists. The content and parameters of these interviews and conversations varied widely depending on the person, as both the Center's social world and the social impact storytelling community were remarkably diverse. Whether I was speaking to a Hollywood creative, an academic expert or a die-hard grassroots activist, however, I generally asked participants to speak to what led them to work with or be interested in media advocacy or entertainment for social change, to tell me something about their experiences in this work or what they thought about its possibilities. I was curious about various people's understandings of what was happening in the industry and how they oriented to the practice of attempting to achieve social change through entertainment media.

When relevant, I also inquired into participants' reactions to the Center's specific interventions. This was often difficult because, as I mentioned, the Center staff were incredibly leery of anything that might burden or alienate any participants. I was, however, able to

informally debrief with several writers and experts after consultations and to ask about what participants had thought of these encounters. On a few occasions, I was also able to follow up with activists or “real people” who had spoken at panels organized by the Center or who had attended its events. Interviews with these participants included more particular questions about whatever issue was being topicalized at these events, the interviewee’s interest in or reactions to that topic prior to contact with the Center, and their reactions to the Center’s programming on the topic. Wherever possible, I audio-recorded, although this was frequently impossible because it would have threatened my rapport with either the Center staff or their industry contacts. In these cases, we simply talked “off the record” in order to inform my perspective of the issues.

Of nineteen interviews, six were with people who were associated with the Center and thirteen were with people who I met outside of the Center’s purview. In the end, I was able to record a total of nine interviews that made up a little less than seven hours of audio.

Textual Materials

I collected a corpus of textual materials produced by the Center. These materials were designed for distinct audiences: for professionals in the entertainment industry, for potential or current funders, and for activists and advocates in the field. They were most often grants/concept notes and outreach event programs, invitations, or promotions. In these texts, the Center’s stances toward their priority topics were being discursively concretized for public consumption. I was able to analyze these discourses and compare them to talk in other contexts. For example, a program produced for a panel on social impact media at a local university might be quite different than a program produced on the same topic at a television studio, which might be quite different,

in turn, from the way an advocate talked to an expert about the same topic prior to a consultation with a writers' room.

Center staff spent substantial amounts of time debating the finer points of word choice within these written materials. They argued over what kinds of language was "too strong," would be a "turnoff," or was "too research-y" for the entertainment industry; they argued over what kinds of data would be "research-y enough" for funders who demanded proof-of-concept or "evidence-based" strategies/modes of assessment. I observed their editing process over iterations of drafts. My exposure to the process by which these texts were conceived, edited and finalized gave me insight into the factors that governed the Center's communicative strategies as well as helped me get a sense of some of the ideas driving ongoing transformations in their overall outreach methodology. In total, my corpus of written materials included twenty-one grant proposals/concept notes, thirteen event-related texts (programs/invitations), four newsletters for industry professionals, and forty-one miscellaneous texts (letters, reports, etc.).

Corpus & Data Analyses

My fieldwork was focused on the day-to-day activities of entertainment advocates, consulting experts, and the Hollywood professionals with whom they worked, as well as the broader social context of those who were beginning to work on social impact media/storytelling in Hollywood. The goals of data analyses were to discern patterns in evolving formulations of "social impact" topics as messages moved across social contexts, to note the communicative repertoires through which advocates attempted to achieve the buy-in of Hollywood professionals on priority topics, and to obtain a deeper understanding of the relationships involved in this field of cultural production. It also focused on the broader, developing "social impact storytelling"

movement, tracking popular discourses circulating in these contexts and exploring their relationship to other humanitarian and social justice movements.

The final corpus involved several hundred pages of my ethnographic field notes; these included my notes regarding twenty-nine consultations between experts and writers, twenty-one meetings with funders or potential funders, twenty-three meetings with advocacy or nonprofit organizations (collaborators or potential collaborators), thirty-one Center-affiliated events, and eleven non-Center events. I conducted a total of nineteen interviews. The corpus also included over two hundred pages of textual material I collected from either the Center or related organizations: twenty-one proposals/concept notes, thirteen event-related texts, four newsletters, and forty-one miscellaneous texts. I collected approximately twenty-two hours of audio recordings: eight hours of Center meetings, seven hours of consultations, and seven hours of interviews. I obtained eleven hours of video from Center events. Together, field notes audio/video-recordings of interactions, interviews, and textual materials constructed an integrated picture of what unfolding in the "social impact storytelling" movement and provided insights into what was at stake for participants.

Conversation and discourse analytic methods were used to discern how topics were formulated across contexts and for different recipients, as well as to identify the ways these messages are prioritized, resisted, rejected, reframed, or taken-up in different settings, within different texts, and by/for different interlocutors. I repeatedly reviewed field notes and video/audio data, transcribing excerpts of relevant audio and video recordings for detailed analysis. Transcripts included in the dissertation use symbols adapted from conversation analytic methods developed by Gail Jefferson, Harvey Sacks and Emmanuel Schegloff.[52] For a

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[52] Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn Taking for Conversation," *Language* 50 (1974): 696-735.

transcription symbols key, see Appendix A. Of particular interest for my purposes were the linguistic and communicative practices through which participants attempted to "inspire" or affectively "move" one another about priority issues, as well as participants' patterned ways of talking about and seeking collaboration and participation. I also used discourse analytic methods to assess the Center's use of certain discourse units (i.e. "social impact" or "the power of storytelling") across contexts, exploring how the use of these terms signaled affiliation or disaffiliation with distinct agendas. Close attention to these discursive maneuvers allowed me to explore the ways that social impact entertainment and social impact storytelling related to other humanitarian discourses regarding social justice and social change.

CHAPTER THREE

From "Entertainment-Education" to "Social Impact Storytelling"

This chapter will trace the arc of nearly fifty years of active efforts by public health professionals to use popular entertainment media to reach audiences with health messages, mobilizing entertaining stories in the hopes of engaging hard-to-reach populations and changing health practices all over the world. I will first describe the origins of the field of "entertainment-education," its foundational rationales and how its early programs functioned. I will explore strengths and limitations of the original model, many of whose features continue to influence present-day efforts. The chapter will go on to discuss several decades of transformations in the field as advocates attempted to expand the practice and conduct research in new contexts, first as the practice moved from the developing world then as it attempted to adapt the practice to respond to new topics. I will describe dilemmas presented by these new ways of practicing and theorizing this work. Finally, I will bring us into the present by discussing ways that "entertainment-education" has undergone further changes in the past five years, further re-branding and re-formulating itself for new topics and new contexts as it transforms from E-E into the "emerging"[53] field of "social impact storytelling" or "social impact media." I will briefly sketch the implications of this most recent transformation, to be explored more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

Early History & Foundations of Entertainment-Education

Since the early 1970s, public health professionals all over the world have attempted to influence publics and promote improved health practices by harnessing the reach and persuasive

[53] Rather than understanding the movement as "emerging" per se, this chapter will describe the antecedents to the movement and suggest that this way of thinking about the role of popular media in the service of prosocial causes has a long history and is grounded in many decades of research and practice all over the world.

power of mass media. These “communication strategies for social change,” collectively referred to as “entertainment-education” (E-E), are defined as strategies for “purposely designing and implementing a media message both to entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members’ knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior.”[54] E-E programs have been diverse in focus, form, content, and path to production. They have been broadcast in a multitude of cultural settings and range from government-funded radio plays to advocate-produced soap operas; from direct appeals such as Public Service Announcements to content that is embedded in existing TV shows with the help of content experts. At its most basic level, however, all E-E attempts to use popular media to deliver prosocial, educational, often health-related content to audiences that would not necessarily encounter, consume, or integrate this content otherwise. E-E capitalizes on the broad appeal of entertainment media to inform the viewing/listening public and, at least for much of its history, attempted to intervene in the world’s problems by showing these publics different (better, more healthful) ways of living.

The E-E construct seems to have been the simultaneous innovation of a few sets of people in several parts of the world. Of course, people in all kinds of cultural environments have long made use of well-crafted mass communication to attempt to change public attitudes and behaviors; efforts to influence the public through entertainment is probably as old as popular entertainment itself (i.e., morality plays, propaganda, political satire). These practices are outside of the scope of this study and I will not be taking them up here. Nor will I focus on independent or organic efforts by entertainment content-creators who, because of their own deeply-held beliefs or interests, may seek to bring audiences into different ways of thinking or feeling about an issue (a phenomenon no doubt as old as art itself). These writer/creator motivations were not central or

[54] Singhal & Rogers, *Entertainment-Education*, 9.

explicit in the original E-E paradigm. When I talk about E-E, rather, I am talking about communication strategies intentionally designed by public health professionals to bring about desirable social changes through the deliberate crafting and dissemination of educational/prosocial content via entertaining media messages.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, American activists, lobbyists and lawmakers concerned about population growth set out to influence the TV industry and to persuade networks to integrate storylines on "the population issue."[55][56] Under the operational umbrella of the Population Communication Center (now Population Communications International-Media Impact)[57] and the Population Institute, these E-E pioneers set up population-related advisory committees. They invited titans of industry, thought leaders, and elected officials to be members. These advisory committees had considerable social prestige and were able to persuade TV network leadership to declare support for programming on their issue. They hosted banquets and luncheons for TV executives and creatives, sponsored cash prizes for scripts, and threw awards galas. Within a few years, top shows of the era (i.e., *M.A.S.H., Mary Tyler Moore,* and *All in the Family*) trotted out storylines related to abortion and contraception. Poindexter recounts that "US culture changed" as "messages…were carried in the heart of US television, articulated by such

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[55] David O. Poindexter, "A History of Entertainment-Education, 1958-2000," in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research and Practice*, eds. Arvind Singhal, Michael J. Cody, Everett M. Rogers, and Miguel Sabido (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[56] The reader may be wondering about how early entertainment-education advocates understood their work in relation to other forms of persuasive public communication such as propaganda, missionizing, or advertising. What is fascinating is how *absent* is any discourse about these potential connections appears to be, except the occasional flat denial of any link to such practices (e.g, J. Douglas Storey and Thomas L. Jacobson, "Entertainment-Education and Participation: Applying Habermas to a Population Program in Nepal," in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research and Practice*, eds. Arvind Singhal, Michael J. Cody, Everett M. Rogers and Miguel Sabido [New York: Routledge, 2004].)

[57] Like almost all the old school players in the E-E field, PCI has recently rebranded by adding "impact" to its name and mission statement, as well as a story-centric slogan: "Tell a Story, Change the World." These rhetorical shifts flag wider shifts in the field and I'll take them up in subsequent chapters.

American favorites as Mary Tyler Moore as Mary Richards, Rob Reiner as Meathead, and Bea Arthur as Maude."[58]

As far as I know, the Population Communication Center was not actively evaluating the impact of these early E-E efforts through research; its claims to achieving "culture change" through the effect of its outreach are unsubstantiated and anecdotal. After all, there was substantial cultural change already underway in 1970s America regarding sex, contraception, and reproductive health. Did the shows' depictions of these issues augment that change? Did the entertainment industry cooperate with E-E advocacy on these topics because the issues were already circulating in the culture, anyway? It is impossible to say. The notion put forth by the PCC, however — that public opinion can and will pivot if issues such as abortion can be articulated within the entertaining storylines of popular, beloved characters —was an idea that formed the foundation of subsequent E-E efforts and E-E research. Although E-E projects in the US would not resume until the mid-1980s, PCC's initial efforts probably broke the ice in terms of the TV industry's later collaborations with activists and policy-makers. PCC, however, also piloted an E-E radio program in Costa Rica in the early-mid 1970s, collaborating with a few researchers from Stanford's Institute for Communication Research to assess the effect of family-planning related content on audiences. They found that the more rural and less educated audiences were, the more they were influenced by E-E content.[59] This early research may have steered public health workers interested in E-E toward targeting more rural populations in the developing world. E-E programs would not again be aimed at American media audiences for some time.

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[58] Poindexter, "A History of Entertainment-Education," 26.

[59] Felipe Risopatron and Peter L. Spain, "Reaching the Poor: Human Sexuality Education in Costa Rica," *Journal of Communication* 30, no. 4 (1980): 81-89.

At the same time as the Population Communication Center was engaging in its early E-E advocacy, Mexican TV producer and screenwriter Miguel Sabido was developing his own entertainment-education methodology. Sabido put forth a theory of entertainment-facilitated social change that fused social science research on social learning with theories from the dramatic arts.[60] The idea was that entertainment could produce social change by depicting "morally coherent" and "realistic" plotlines as well as presenting characters with whom audiences could identify and feel for, characters after whom they could model themselves.[61] As the characters underwent crisis and resolution, learned and changed, so would the audience — integrating the beloved characters' responses and behaviors into their own lives. Sabido developed Mexico's first national family-planning themed soap opera by the mid-1970s.[62] He had also developed a research program to measure its results, so when the *telenovela* aired in 1977, he collected pre- and post-data on viewers' knowledge and attitudes about family planning themes.[63] These pre- and post-tests revealed that audiences had indeed learned from the program.[64] Additionally, Mexico's population growth significantly declined that year, and the reported use of contraceptives increased spectacularly.[65] Although these results could not be attributed directly to the *telenovela*, they were provocative enough to garner further interest and support from the Mexican government for subsequent programs and the "Sabido Method" was off and running.

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[60] Singhal and Rogers, *Entertainment-Education*.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Miguel Sabido, "The Origins of Entertainment-Education," in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research and Practice*, eds. Arvind Singhal, Michael J. Cody, Everett Rogers and Miguel Sabido (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[63] Singhal and Rogers, *Entertainment-Education*; Poindexter, "A History of Entertainment-Education."

[64] Nariman, *Soap Operas for Social Change.*

[65] Singhal and Rogers, *Entertainment-Education*,56-57.

Sabido and his colleagues began to produce additional *telenovelas* and *radionovelas* on family planning in conjunction with Mexico's national program to address rapid population growth.

Sabido's successes in Mexico were also capturing the attention of public health officials and health communication researchers who were working in other parts of the developing world. Pilot programs swiftly popped up in India, Kenya, Brazil, and Tanzania.[66] US academics also took note, and Stanford's Institute for Communication Research and John's Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health established research programs for E-E interventions in additional areas of the world. By 2004, John's Hopkins' program, in conjunction with USAID, had developed or assisted in the development of public health E-E programs in over 40 countries, primarily in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.[67] These programs were more or less faithful to Sabido's method, which relied heavily on the idea of audiences identifying and (dis-identifying) with particular tropes and paradigmatic characters (the early adopter; the grumpy resister) as well as ideas about social modeling and mimeses.[68]

Many global E-E programs were radio-based and designed to reach poorly educated rural populations who might not have access to television or who might be resistant to outsiders and public health workers. In other words, E-E typically targeted communities that public health workers found it difficult to reach (both literally and figuratively). Because public health workers were often part of larger development projects, E-E's topical priorities tended to overlap with global development priorities: hygiene and disease prevention, vaccination, neonatal and early childhood care, sex and family planning, maternal health, education for women and girls, and

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[66] Arvind Singhal, Michael J. Cody, Everett M. Rogers and Miguel Sabido, eds. *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[67] Ibid.

[68] Sabido, "The Origins of Entertainment-Education."

gender-based violence.[69] In rural India and Tanzania, health officials designed multiple radio and TV dramas that addressed themes such as family planning, domestic violence, and reproductive health issues.[70] Often, E-E programs were broadcast in parallel with community outreach programs. Boots on the ground were thought to be able to reinforce and measure changes in health behavior as well as support shifts in social norms that might sustain such changes. E-E programs typically involved local, face-to-face education and health initiatives and efforts after organizational change in coordination with the production of entertainment content. It is therefore important to emphasize that early E-E, situated as it was within broader development and public health initiatives, was almost always part of a coordinated, explicit, multi-modal effort after major cultural and economic change in the cultural context where programs were being broadcast.

As you might imagine, however, these early E-E initiatives faced many challenges. Their effectiveness was contingent on many complex factors. First, as cultures became more media-saturated over time, the effectiveness of E-E messages seemed to diminish.[71] Audiences became more savvy media consumers and target populations became more suspicious of direct, didactic appeals. By the early 1990s it was widely recognized that a particularly intransigent problem with E-E was, essentially, the poor quality of E-E *as entertainment*.[72] Stories and characters were often stereotypical and heavy-handed, or too saturated with educational messaging to be engaging. Public health professionals and academic researchers, after all, are not always equipped to make compelling, artful drama! Second, launching E-E programs was expensive and organizationally complex. Research funding, academic institutional support, or global development funds were

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[69] Piotrow et al., *Health Communication*.

[70] Rogers, et al., "“Effects of an Entertainment-Education Radio Soap Opera”; Sood, “Audience Involvement and Entertainment-Education.”

[71] Singhal and Rogers, *Entertainment-Education*.

[72] Ibid.

rarely enough to pay for high-quality, entertaining productions, let alone pay networks enough to broadcast them. If E-E programs were to adapt and continue, it seemed like it would be necessary to form long-term partnerships with people in creative industries who would champion E-E content, or to somehow find a way to produce better-quality programming that integrated health topics yet engaged the public.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, public health professionals everywhere were coming to understand the enormous cultural complexity of health behavior as well as the impact of macro structural issues such as global inequality. Though public health workers had long understood basic cultural competence and the need, say, to produce content in local languages, as non-native participants they were often unable to integrate *micro* dilemmas — the nuanced cultural/relational contexts of the problem. Nor was the E-E able to address *macro* dilemmas in and of itself; many public health problems could not be changed by individual viewers' behavior alone. You could depict hand-washing on-screen all you wanted, for example, but without infrastructure to pipe potable water to a family in the slums, what was the point? You could demystify and normalize childhood vaccination in a friendly plotline, but if it was impossible for communities to pay for medicines, what then? It was unclear how much popular storytelling could compel culture change in the absence of funding for basic infrastructure and prevention. On the other hand, making public health-supportive basics available and increasing popular portrayals of "healthy" behaviors were proving insufficient, too. You could supply condoms and depict contraceptive usage ad infinitum, but if these behaviors were inconsistent with local religious practices and did not account for people's deeply-held values, would they really take hold in everyday life?

It was increasingly evident, in other words, how truly difficult it was to design E-E messages and interventions that 1) adequately and thoughtfully addressed the social dimensions of issues like sexual behavior or infant care, 2) were entertaining enough to influence increasingly cynical/savvy media consumers, 3), were grounded in functional relationships and partnerships with people who could both fund and facilitate the work, and 4) were adequate to the task of addressing seemingly-intractable determinants of poor health such as poverty and gender inequality. E-E continued to seem like a useful and promising tool in the public health/development tool kit, but how were supporters of the paradigm going to adapt their models to contend with these dilemmas? The question continues to challenge people committed to E-E as a tool for global health, and many of the innovations and transformations I describe in the next sections have been responses to these problems.

Middle Years: from the Developing World to the West

E-E programs were being piloted, researched, launched, and evaluated by public health professionals in the developing world throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Many interventions were shown to be demonstrably effective in shifting public knowledge, attitudes, and behavior on target topics.[73] In fact, programs that more or less follow the "old model" continued all over the world and extend into the present day. In South Africa in the 1990s, for example, nonprofits produced TV youth dramas saturated in messaging about HIV transmission and safe sex.[74] In Brazil, health advocates produced short narrative radio and TV spots on vasectomy.[75] Organizations like PCI-Media Impact, Population Services International, USAID and the World Bank have robust E-E

[73] Nariman *Soap Operas for Social Change*; Singhal & Rogers, *Entertainment-Education; Singhal, et al., Entertainment-Education and Social Change.*

[74] Aziz & Salveson, "Voice Out."

[75] Kincaid et al., "Impact of a Mass Media Vasectomy Promotion Campaign in Brazil."

programs in the Global South. However, I now leave these kinds of efforts behind in order to trace a different branch of E-E: the area of the field that branched off in order to address Western audiences.

As E-E was thriving abroad in the 1970s and 1980s, those who wanted to adapt E-E for a US media context faced considerable resistance. Leaders in the field told me that back then, "everyone" thought that US audiences were too cynical and critical to absorb the kinds of health messages that were being broadcast in *telenovelas* and radio plays abroad. Americans were thought to be far too media-savvy to abandon their suspicions and whole-heartedly identify with characters being intentionally presented to them as role models. Perhaps *children* were naïve enough to be influenced by such educational programming, but Western adults would surely fail to be moved by E-E's teachings. Moreover, many people believed that the kinds of public health problems E-E was most effective at addressing were simply *different* than those faced by populations in the West. As I mentioned already, E-E had typically centered basic public health and economic development issues: sanitation, vaccination, family planning, early childhood education, and literacy. It was thought that Americans simply didn't need to see dramas about child-spacing or vaccination. Would the E-E methodology work for American public health priorities — problems like drug use, mental illness, and drunk driving? Finally, it was widely understood that America's entertainment industry — unlike those in developing countries — was a juggernaut posing significant, perhaps insurmountable barriers to entry. Models that required public health workers to design and produce their *own* content simply weren't a viable option. Moreover, getting access to entertainment leaders and persuading them to collaborate would require considerable clout — the kind of clout that many health communications workers and researchers who had spent their careers in the global south or in academic settings did not possess.

Then there was the fact that much of the research and theorizing about E-E throughout the 1970s and 1980s actually substantiated some of these fears. These data highlighted the importance of finding ways to transform and innovate E-E methods depending on context and topical content: the same things simply didn't work in different places. Research into the mechanisms behind E-E's effectiveness demonstrated that E-E's effects were heavily dependent on an audience's level of "involvement" in, "transportation" by, and emotional engagement with narratives and characters.[76] These were the very factors that seemed most difficult to generalize across contexts, and required the most artful and culturally-attuned creations. Moreover, researchers found that there was often cognitive resistance to E-E content and health messages, even in non-Western, less media-saturated "message environments."[77] This resistance had to be overcome if messages were to be persuasive.[78] Deeper engrossment in a narrative and increased emotional responses to characters' predicaments were found to be predictive of fewer critical thoughts and reduced skepticism about the content of a program.[79] E-E advocates were realizing that these emotional responses and narrative investments were difficult to predict or invoke without substantial local and cultural awareness, not to mention creative skill.

Put bluntly, it was increasingly clear that public health messages needed to be integrated into high-quality, compelling popular narratives — not dropped awkwardly into entertainment

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[76] Kincaid, "Drama, Emotion, and Cultural Convergence"; Papa et al., "Entertainment-Education and Social Change"; Piotrow et al., *Health Communication*; Sood, "Audience Involvement and Entertainment-Education"; Rogers et al., "Effects of an Entertainment-Education Radio Soap Opera."

[77] Heather J. Hether, Grace C. Huang, Vicki Beck, Sheila T. Murphy, and Thomas W. Valente, "Entertainment-Education in a Media-Saturated Environment: Examining the Impact of Single and Multiple Exposures to Breast Cancer Storylines on Two Popular Medical Dramas," *Journal of Health Communication* 13, no. 8 (2008): 808-823; Singhal and Rogers, *Entertainment-Education.*

[78] Slater and Rouner, "Entertainment-Education and Elaboration Likelihood"; Singhal and Rogers, *Entertainment-Education.*

[79] Kincaid, "Drama, Emotion, and Cultural Convergence"; Slater and Rouner, "Entertainment-Education and Elaboration Likelihood."

programming produced by well-meaning academics. There were calls in the field for increased attention to the affective and rhetorical aspects of E-E, including more careful consideration of when and why some messages serve as "powerful triggers" for action in audiences while others make little impact.[80] If E-E health communications were going to work in the West, they'd need to achieve substantial narrative potency. Living up to this kind of narrative potency, however, would *either* require the deep penetration of a public health ethos into existing popular media-making, or the deep penetration of a popular media ethos into existing public health worlds. Neither of these seemed like easy paths. The people I talked to who were involved in E-E during this era described a sense of a Sisyphean task ahead of them. They were excited by the results they were seeing abroad and wanted to replicate them in the US, but couldn't seem to marshal adequate support to adapt the paradigm and do what it would take to work with/within the American entertainment industry. They had to convince powerful academics that TV wasn't too silly; they had to convince powerful Hollywood types that public health wasn't too boring. But they also had to push against general resistance to the proposition that E-E could work *here*, in the United States. One person I interviewed told me,

1 I swear I spent the 80s,
2 The better part of the 80s,
3 Chipping away at people and,
4 Like groaning. ((groan))
5 YEARS.
6 My good years! ((laughing voice))
7 ((whiny voice)) It can't work here,
8 ((whiny voice)) It can't work here,
9 Nobody wanting to fund it,
10 audiences are cynical yadda yadda,
11 but then everybody happily talking about how corrupting TV was,
12 ruining the youth?
13 But that same catalyst for influence?
14 In another direction?

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[80] Collins O. Airhihenbuwa, "Of Culture and Multiverse: Renouncing 'The Universal Truth' in Health," *Journal of Health Education* 30, no. 5 (1999): 267-273.

15 Na:::::::
16 then it's just,
17 ((whiny voice)) Hollywood just wants fluff sex and violence.
18 Frustrating years.

The "frustrating years" described by this participant were marked by a sort of disorganized objection from "everybody" to using the American entertainment industry for public health causes. "Nobody" wanted to fund projects, believing that "it can't work here." Either the audiences were too "cynical" compared to their naïve counterparts in the developing world, or they were naïve enough to be "corrupted" and "ruined," but this vulnerability to influence could not be used in "another direction." Hollywood would never agree to deviate from its preference for "fluff sex and violence," so entertainment as a "catalyst" for E-E agendas was off the table.

Then, in 1988, Harvard's School of Public Health launched an ambitious E-E program that sought to resolve some of the problems that had limited E-E's effectiveness. The "Harvard Alcohol Project," in collaboration with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), set out to secure collaboration with major US TV networks and industry leaders in order to promote "designated drivers" (DDs) and to change US cultural norms and behaviors about drunk driving.[81] This was not the first time a public health-entertainment industry collaboration had ever been attempted in the US (remember the PCC and population control initiatives), but this was an effort of greater magnitude and, significantly, marked an innovation in E-E strategy. Rather than producing content themselves or designing content that would be mandated by network leadership in a top-down way, Harvard's E-E program secured the cooperation of the Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW), the union that represents most of Hollywood's working writers in TV and film.

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[81] Montgomery, "The Harvard Alcohol Project."

The core innovation here was that WGAW's writers agreed to *voluntarily* integrate the "designated driver" into ongoing plots and to introduce language on this topic into the mouths of existing characters. Writers would retain full creative control and imaginative license, and Harvard would serve as a resource for free and accurate information on the subject. The concept of the DD would be integrated in casual, subtle, ways. The risks of drunk driving would be depicted in storylines that were native to the shows' ongoing story and character arcs. Additionally, at the behest of Harvard (an institution that had enough clout to overcome industry resistance), networks agreed to air Public Service Announcements during commercial breaks from episodes where DD-related content came up. This split off the didactic, direct, potentially-boring part of the "education" from the more covert, indirect, and vital message embedded in "entertainment." This addressed the problem of audience "resistance" by augmenting the quality of the entertainment half of education-entertainment, attempting to enhance audiences' emotional involvement and investment in the issue being depicted. Then, when audiences were already engaged, they were confronted by direct appeals during commercial breaks, usually a piece that presented a plaintive message by a celebrity with a hotline.

Between 1988-1992, over one hundred sixty prime time episodes integrated storylines and dialogue about drunk driving, which introduced and reified the concept of the DD in America's popular culture.[82] Importantly, a multitude of other public institutions and nonprofit organizations joined the effort to advocate for this particular issue in their own spheres of influence, constituting a mass movement to change this public health concern.[83] The project seems to have contributed to significant culture change: there was a 24% reduction in alcohol-related driving fatalities during

[82] Harvard School of Public Health Center for Health Communication, "Harvard Alcohol Project," accessed July 21, 2018, https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/harvard-alcohol-project/.

[83] Winsten "Promoting Designated Drivers."

the four-year period (after no change in the previous three years), and a majority of regular drinkers in America (across socioeconomic and ethnic categories) reported using a DD during that time.[84] Yet, these changes cannot be directly attributed to the *entertainment* arm of the broad social movement that amassed around the Harvard Alcohol Project. There were other major shifts underway in public policy, health education, and law enforcement that contributed to these effects. Importantly, this multi-prong effort was similar to traditional E-E programs in that it garnered impact through multiple initiatives and methods at once. But because of its multiplicity, it is difficult to disentangle cultural changes on drunk driving as catalyzed by entertainment programming versus those provoked by policy change. Nor can we really separate the impact of the *direct* messaging in PSAs from the impact of information that was being *subtly* integrated into prime-time storylines. Still, the Harvard Alcohol Project was indisputably a "win" for public health in the US, and a proof-of-concept for subsequent E-E campaigns.

The success of the Harvard Alcohol project ushered in more entertainment-education efforts or, more accurately, E-E-adjacent efforts, many of which were not designed by public health professionals in conjunction with a multi-armed public health effort but were instead put forth by problem-focused organizations (i.e., Partnership for a Drug Free America). They were funded by a variety of entities in collaboration with diverse nonprofits and public institutions. A proliferation of PSAs and "very special episodes" paired with hotline-based campaigns addressed issues like substance abuse, suicide prevention, eating disorders, and teen pregnancy. The impact of some of these broadcasts were assessed through ratings or numbers of hotline callers; others were not evaluated. This was not necessarily a "win" for the E-E-oriented public health community, especially as in the broader culture, these methods were swiftly becoming a joke. PSAs and after-school specials were parodied ruthlessly on *Saturday Night Live* (and elsewhere)

[84] Harvard School of Public Health Center for Health Communication, "Harvard Alcohol Project."

and became an easily-satirized genre. That said, the success of the Harvard Alcohol Project meant that additional E-E and "health communication" departments were founded and funded in many schools of public health and communication all over the country. Slowly, too, a new working model for E-E was emerging.

In the meantime, an epidemic had been emerging, too. The AIDS crisis was taking hold, and public health workers were scrambling to respond. In 1994, the CDC hosted a summit to discuss the possibility of E-E programming to address HIV/AIDS.[85] Experts in health communication and public health met with medical researchers, policy makers, and representatives from the entertainment industry to discuss how the CDC might engage with HIV/AIDS[86]. These stakeholders recommended that public health professionals find ways to collaborate with the entertainment industry to develop programs for influencing the public more generally; not just on the precipitating crisis of HIV/AIDS, but on other issues going forward.[87] E-E HIV/AIDS programs targeting youth were launched on MTV and in radio youth markets. But the CDC also created E-E pilot projects and formative research programs to discover what audiences were *already* learning about health issues in entertainment programs.[88] By 1998, the CDC had initiated an agency-wide E-E outreach project that continues to this day and has offered considerable, long-term financial support to public health communication programs nation-wide.

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[85] Vicki Beck, "Working with Daytime and Prime-Time Television Shows in the United States to Promote Health," in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, eds. Arvind Singhal, Michael J. Cody, Everett M. Rogers, and Miguel Sabido (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[86] The federal government also used the aforementioned PSA model to address HIV/AIDS in America, producing content that was often highly ambiguous, offensive, stereotypical and alarmist in response to this public health crisis (William DeJong, R. Cameron Wolf, and S. Bryn Austin, "US Federally Funded Television Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to Prevent HIV/AIDS: A Content Analysis," *Journal of Health Communication* 6, no. 3 (2001): 249-263).

[87] CT Salmon, *CDC Conference Summary Report: Using Entertainment-Education to Reach a Generation at Risk* (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control, 1994).

[88] Beck, "Working with Daytime and Prime-Time Television Shows."

It funds the production of accurate "tip sheets" for media-makers writing on health topics; these include basic information as well as case studies that can be used in public media. It provides tools and templates for organizations that are designing media or social campaigns, including tips and resources for assessment.

As I see it, a West-adapted E-E paradigm, launched by Harvard and institutionalized by the CDC, is best characterized by two core ways of practicing. First, E-E advocates engage in facilitative and consultative work with entertainment professionals rather than attempting to produce entertaining content themselves (often called "reactive outreach"). They operate in a "resource" relationship with the entertainment industry, providing and facilitating free consultations between topic "experts" (typically physicians or scientific researchers) and interested writers/producers. Second, E-E advocates design topical events, activities, and other in-person programs — not for the public, but for the entertainment industry (sometimes called "proactive outreach"). They design activities for people in the entertainment industry in order to educate or engage them on "priority" topics (often set by funders or public institutions). For example, the CDC periodically sets its "public health priorities" and the World Bank sets its "development priorities."[89] E-E programs funded by these institutions would also organize their outreach activities around these topics. The idea is that creative professionals who engage in these activities will then use expert consultation to hone, fact-check or flesh out their creative content.

By the early 2000s, the major E-E players in the US were practicing this model. A robust research program has demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborating with the US entertainment industry in this way, and programs working within this model have also been successful and

[89] Center for Disease Control, "Winnable Battles," accessed August 27, 2018, https://www.cdc.gov/winnablebattles/index.html.

sustainable in the Netherlands.[90] The model has served up substantiated wins, at least as represented by audience self-report, on organ donation,[91] breast cancer and the BRCA gene screening,[92] youth obesity/hypertension,[93] and sexual health.[94] The model, however, presents its own challenges and limitations. It involves practices and relationships that foreground very different predicaments and theoretical thickets than its predecessors. I will go into these predicaments more thoroughly in later chapters, but I will briefly introduce them here as they are problems that have pressure on the model to change and shift over time, and are essential in understanding how the field was changing during my fieldwork. I see them as problems of 1) message construction, 2) relationships, 3) funding and research, and 4) problem formulation.

First, there have been marked shifts in the preferred level of *explicitness* of messages and the directness of E-E appeals. There was a near-consensus understanding among professionals I talked to in the field that if health communication is to work best, it must get even subtler, ever subtler, as to never call attention to itself. Efforts that appeared as explicit or direct were thought to collapse audience engagement and Hollywood cooperation at once. This preference for

[90] Martine Bouman, "Entertainment-Education Television Drama in the Netherlands," in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, eds. Arvind Singhal, Michael J. Cody, Everett M. Rogers, and Miguel Sabido (New York: Routledge, 2004); Bouman, Maas and Kok, "Health Education in Television Entertainment."

[91] Susan E. Morgan, Lauren Movius, and Michael J. Cody, "The Power of Narratives: The Effect of Entertainment Television Organ Donation Storylines on the Attitudes, Knowledge, and Behaviors of Donors and Nondonors," *Journal of Communication* 59, no. 1 (2009): 135-151; Lauren Movius, Michael Cody, Grace M. Huang, G. and Michael Berkowitz. "Motivating Television Viewers to Become Organ Donors," *Cases in Public Health Communication & Marketing* June (2007): 1-20.

[92] Hether et al., "Entertainment-Education in a Media-Saturated Environment."

[93] Thomas W. Valente, Sheila Murphy, Grace Huang, Jodi Gusek, Jennie Greene, and Vicki Beck, "Evaluating a Minor Storyline on *ER* about Teen Obesity, Hypertension and 5 A Day," *Journal of Health Communication* 12, no. 6 (2007): 551-566.

[94] E.g. May G. Kennedy, Ann O'Leary, Vicki Beck, Katrina Pollard, and Penny Simpson, "Increases in Calls to the CDC National STD and AIDS Hotline Following AIDS-Related Episodes in a Soap Opera," *Journal of Communication* 54, no. 2 (2004): 287-301; David Knapp Whittier, May G. Kennedy, Janet S. St. Lawrence, Salvatore Seeley, and Vicki H. Beck, "Embedding Health Messages into Entertainment Television: Effect on Gay Men's Response to a Syphilis Outbreak," *Journal of Health Communication* 10, no. 3 (2005): 251-259.

"burying the lead" was profound enough that many, if not most of the professionals in this sector have abandoned the term, "entertainment-education," altogether, because it invokes the specter of intentional, on-the-nose messaging. People in this sector increasingly describe it as "social impact media" or talk about "social impact storytelling," "social impact entertainment," or "storytelling for social change." There are other reasons for this shift in self-titling (to which I will return later), but a primary reason is the need to distance themselves from what one participant referred to as "corny old E-E." PSAs and "very special episodes" are now considered hopelessly old-fashioned. Discourses on "influencing," "educating," or "persuading" audiences are thoroughly disavowed, as these call up these old ways of operating. Some participants I talked to even found the language of "advocacy" to be too strong, as it comes with associations of lobbying, product placement, and other tainted methods. The preferred rhetoric now is softer, less pointed. It calls upon rhetorics of "inspiration" and "engagement" as the original goal of "education" is driven further underground.

Second, in step with this shift, E-E (or formerly E-E) advocates (or formerly advocates) are faced with challenges related to the relationships involved in the "entertainment outreach" and "consultation" aspects of their profession. They are acutely aware of the risks of alienating the people who constitute a lifeline to "the audience" — the writers who craft the popular storylines in which content will be embedded. Access to and relationships with writers and producers are the backbone of the practice, and proactive "outreach" must not drift toward anything resembling lecturing, preaching, or indoctrinating these prized storytelling professionals. Nor can the "experts" engaging in consultation with writers be too boring, pedantic, or (worst of all) dazzled by the industry and thus act in ways that were overeager or "uncool." Managing these relationships and facilitating the right kind of communication between "professional storytellers"

and “professional experts” requires a certain repertoire of professional skills and presents a new domain of expertise in this sector. As one person told me,

1 E-E is outdated.
2 It no longer works the way it worked thirty years ago.
3 You can’t shove things down people’s throat?
4 You risk alienating the industry,
5 you can’t continue that way.
6 We need to think of ourselves as culture change brokers.
7 There’s a special language.
8 to change industries?
9 To train experts to talk to people.
10 If you don’t know how to approach working writers and producers,
11 it may shut them down,
12 and shut down their willingness to work with us without being paid to do it.

Here, the new pressures and new practices inherent in the model are crystal clear. The old E-E “shoved things down people’s throats,” whereas the new paradigm requires “culture change brokers” who (presumably) would not be “alienating the industry.” Here we have the emergence of a new kind of expert, a person who is a “culture change broker” rather than a public health worker or an advocate. This new kind of expert has to be trained to “approach working writers and producers” without ‘shutting down’ their willingness to engage. Importantly, much of the concern professed in this excerpt is centered on the prospect of losing access to the *industry* by being too heavy-handed, whereas the old models were worried about losing *audiences* by being heavy-handed. I will return to this in the next chapter.

Thirdly, this model poses challenges to research and assessment and, in turn, program evaluation and funding. Whereas in previous models, E-E professionals had control over the design and implementation of content, there is no such control over content in this model, making its effectiveness uniquely difficult to evaluate. In fact, *most* outcomes of E-E activities cannot be well-evaluated in this paradigm. This is because the outcomes of both proactive outreach (events

designed to inspire and inform writers/producers) and reactive outreach (answers to writer/producer inquiries) are by nature autonomous from research programs and grounded in voluntary, no-strings-attached participation. An organization might know that they had assisted on a show or storyline and watch for it (or a particularly friendly writer might inform them it was going to be airing), but they have no reason to go to the trouble of working with E-E researchers so that they have time to pre-test audiences and assess effects of the episode. This kind of research collaboration does exist, but because it is so contingent on the unique and subjective relationships, only a small percentage of the outcomes of consultations can be assessed. During the sixteen months of my fieldwork at the Center, for example, it never happened, though the Center was doing brisk business in facilitating writer inquiries. The fully voluntary and relationally precarious nature of the model also produces serious problems with funders, who (understandably) want to see demonstrable results. Simply put, funders wanted their priority topics to be represented in television shows in exchange for their funding of outreach and consultation efforts. Ideally, they also wanted to see actual change on these issues. But organizations in this field cannot guarantee "results," nor can they even guarantee that when writers do take on priority topics, the content will be accurate.

Lastly, there was a growing sense in the field during my fieldwork that the existing model needed to undergo another series of transformations if it was to successfully address the so-called "social determinants of health" and social justice topics. The E-E model was designed for and has worked primarily for health-related topics and, more recently, scientific topics as well (expanding into climate change and environmental issues, for example, or other domains of scientific expertise). Other kinds of social problems and challenges to human well-being such as chronic, widespread structural inequality, racism, ableism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia are

increasingly of concern to public health professionals, however. These issues force the use of a different kind of "expert" and appear to demand a different kind of "outreach," each introducing their own predicaments. It is this shift — from health content to justice content — that I turn to now.

From Health to Justice: Social Impact Storytelling

The period of my fieldwork coincided with growing efforts in entertainment-education to address the "social determinants of health" (SDH). The SDH are defined by the World Health Organization as the "conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems."[95] While public health as a discipline has long highlighted the role of structural, systemic inequality on the health of vulnerable populations, it has not traditionally been a part of the E-E paradigm to call attention to the so-called "social determinants of disease." In fact, as I've noted, the deeply complex and often irreducibly social, economic, and political underpinnings of health outcomes and health behavior were exactly what posed some of the most significant challenges to early E-E programs. Recall the dilemmas faced by E-E initiatives in developing nations: it proved futile to change minds without simultaneously changing structures and access; it also seemed futile to change access without conscientiously engaging cultural meanings. That said, the professionals with whom I worked, many of which came out of a public health background, believed that entertainment media was well-positioned to intervene in precisely the public issues that proved to be such intractable problems of culture. They saw health and

[95] World Health Organization, "Social Determinants of Health," accessed July 21, 2018, http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/.

wellbeing as inextricable from “conditions of daily life” and made explicit links between health experiences/diagnoses and the complex and structurally unequal “conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age.”[96] A focus on health, then, opened into an increasing focus on justice.

This increasing focus on justice and the structural conditions of living, however, presented significant challenges to the existing model being used to design outreach to the entertainment industry. It also posed complicated theoretical problems related what made certain kinds of narratives “work.” I will briefly discuss these predicaments below, but will explore them more thoroughly in subsequent chapters. The people who I encountered during my fieldwork were actively working against and working through these challenges, finding ways to manage different kinds of topics by using new communicative strategies and forging different kinds of relationships with collaborators. I will argue that together these strategies constituted a departure from E-E and the beginnings of an entry into a new advocacy space, that of “social impact storytelling” (SIS). It is SIS — its underlying ideologies, communicative practices, and ethical implications — which this dissertation attempts to apprehend.

A more explicit focus on the social determinants of health called three major aspects of the E-E practices into question. First, advocates’ desire to focus more on social conditions and cultural contexts challenged the existing role of “consulting expert” and problematized the “reactive outreach” part of their work that involved responding to writers’ inquiries, finding relevant content experts and facilitating consultations. Put simply, when it came to “social” issues, writers and producers did not seem to know/believe that they required expert consultation. Hollywood’s storytellers seemed to understand that they might need to do some research to accurately depict the medication regimen of a character with HIV. It did not seem to occur to

[96] Ibid.

them to seek out academic researchers when they attempted to accurately depict the life of a child living in poverty. Over the course of my fieldwork, the Center engaged in "proactive outreach" on almost exclusively social and economic issues. During the same period, however, it almost exclusively received requests for consultation about medical and scientific issues. Out of twenty-nine consultations during the period of my fieldwork, only three were on non-science/non-medicine topics and only two were directly related to the Center's outreach priorities during that time period. This not only put pressure on the advocates to shift their outreach strategies, but also changed the nature of the way the "expert" role was being constructed and positioned during Center activities. New categories of (non-academic) experts were emerging and being put forward as essential: that of the "real person" or the "activist-expert," for example. These were categories of expert that could speak to the "social" aspects of phenomena rather than "scientific" aspects. Yet, the Center had to invoke and shore up these roles *as expert* in order to continue to serve as the kind of influential resource that they hoped to be on such topics.

Second, a shift from health to justice topics challenged the advocates' relationships with Hollywood professionals, the very relationships of which they were most protective. This was because the social determinants of health were thought of as *political* in a way that medical or scientific topics did not tend to be (with climate change, perhaps, as an exception). This was a problem for advocates because they had until now always cultivated and maintained a politically neutral stance in order to avoid being a "turn-off" to creatives. Hollywood's content creators were understood to be seeking narrative-enhancing information but to be "allergic" to any hint of "a mission." People repeatedly told me that being "too political" was a cardinal sin and tended to sour the treasured relationships required for successful work in this arena. This was complicated given that advocates very much wanted to talk about inequality and injustice, yet wanted to avoid

being seen as “activists,” “organizers,” or “zealots.” Instead, they positioned themselves as conduits for writers to access accurate information or as facilitators of new experiences and knowledges that could inspire and invigorate, totally deemphasizing their strongly-felt missions.

I observed that SIS professionals consistently disavowed discourses of “education” and “persuasion,” as well as discourses of “social justice.” Instead, discourses of “social change” or “social good” were preferred, since these were thought to be more politically neutral. This leeriness of politics was striking to behold among people who would privately espouse fierce commitments to a “more just world.” On one occasion, for example, I listened to a lengthy discussion during which language for a program about refugee experience and “human rights” was replaced by language on “human well-being.” I am certain that every person at the table that day would have declared their unwavering personal commitment to “human rights,” but they also believed that foregrounding “human well-being” would allowed for more influential encounters with people in the entertainment industry, whereas “human rights” gave off the stink of a political agenda. I will argue that SIS found some remarkable workarounds for this evasion of the political, and I will describe some of their repertoires for doing so in later chapters.

The perceived need for de-politicization also presented problems when it came to the aforementioned construction of expert roles. For example, researchers and nonprofit professionals who worked on mass incarceration were thought to be interpersonally risky for Hollywood consultations. Unlike the lab scientists who were brought in to answer writers’ questions about the spread of avian influenza, the mass incarceration experts were regarded with some wariness — they might be too political and come off as too impassioned. Experts in medicine and hard sciences were coached out of being didactic and boring. Social scientists, on the other hand, were coached out of being political. The coaching workaround, however, was the same for both

predicaments: *personal narratives* were encouraged over the language of "expertise." Personal stories were thought to bypass *both* politics and expert jargon. Outreach on systemic poverty, therefore, centered the *personal* stories of people who had suffered in poverty. Experts' talk about the social and policy dimensions of structural inequality were avoided in the same ways medical jargon might be, as alienating ways of interacting with the gatekeepers of Hollywood's much-desired field of cultural production.

Finally, this emphasis on personal narrative, combined with the centering of entertainment as the locus of positive social change, proved *structurally* problematic when it came to depicting population-level analyses or the systematic political and cultural roots of health problems. These kinds of systemic issues that constitute the social determinants of health are often part of the background/context of a story; they are the fabric of the world in which a drama takes place, rather than the material for the dramatic plot itself. I will return to this in depth in the following chapters, but it is worth noting here as well. Structural inequality and social justice issues seemed to present different dilemmas for storytellers than, say, an unplanned pregnancy or the revelation of a diagnosis. As people working in this space attempted to bring knowledge about the social determinants of health into popular media, they once again confronted some of E-E's early challenges related to contours and construction of "entertaining" narratives more generally.

The next chapter will explore the relationship between SIS and narrativity in greater detail, as well as examine what I perceive as an ongoing "narrative turn" in the social justice and nonprofit industry. This narrative turn involves an explosion of nonprofit organizations in Hollywood which, though not necessarily officially affiliated with E-E, public health, or previous programs for integrating popular media and prosocial content, share ideologies and discourses with these programs about what popular narratives can and should do for society. Additionally,

new media-related nonprofits devoted to "social impact media" or "social impact storytelling" are competing within the same funding ecosystem as (formerly, rebranded) E-E programs in schools of public health. According to their websites, some of the biggest funders in the nonprofit world (i.e., Ford Foundation, California Endowment, Rockefeller Foundation, Skoll Foundation) and some of its most prestigious organizations (United Nations, World Bank) have recently positioned "popular storytelling" or the "power of stories" as a funding priority separate from the old programmatic E-E initiatives. Increasingly, "storytelling" is positioned as the ultimate social change fulcrum that can "drive change" and "raise global awareness" to change the world for the better. This is ushering in new patterns of practice, new pressures on advocate-industry collaborations, and new discourses that instantiate a very particular theory of social change as well as ways of using particular kinds of stories on behalf of the social good. Social impact storytelling raises a complex set of ethical questions and places unique demands upon participants as advocates scramble to narrativize social problems in ways that are accurate but not alienating, comprehensive but not boring, entertaining but not shallowing. It is to this narrative frenzy and its implications that I turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Narrative Theory of Social Change

In May 21, 2016, Jill Soloway, outspoken showrunner of Amazon's critically-acclaimed series *Transparent*, accepted a Peabody Award at the foundation's seventy-fifth annual awards ceremony.[97] Soloway began by thanking Amazon for giving them the

1 JS freedom to do this thing that you guys are referring to as television and,
2 um but for me feels like a political movement.
3 And a moment where I get to take the people that would normally be the butt of the jokes,
4 people who are odd,
5 or who are queer,
6 or who are trans,
7 or who are Jews,
8 or who are sluts,
9 the people who have been forced to be the objects in most popular entertainment finally now get to be the subjects.
10 They get to be the privileged protagonists.
11 So for that, I want to thank Jeff Bezos,
12 Roy Price and Joe Lewis[98] at Amazon…
[excerpted]
14 and I want to dedicate this award to <u>you</u> Our Lady J,
15 and to you Alexandra Billings.
16 And to all the trans people who work on our show and to all of the trans people in the world,
17 they have their own stories to tell.
18 So many stories to tell on the road.
19 Of reaching the peaks of their own mountains to their own lives,
20 and the safety to feel free and beautiful and powerful.

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[97] Jill Soloway, "Jill Soloway - Transparent - 2015 Peabody Award Acceptance Speech" (speech, 2015), YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWvG3vh49PA.

[98] At the time of writing, both Roy Price and Joe Lewis have been ousted from their positions at Amazon after claims of sexual misconduct (Nellie Andreeva and Dominic Patten, "Amazon Studios: Joe Lewis Exits as Head of Comedy & Drama," *Deadline Hollywood*, October 23, 2017, https://deadline.com/2017/10/amazon-joe-lewis-exit-head-of-comedy-drama1202193535/; John Koblin, "Roy Price Quits Amazon Studios After Sexual Harassment Claim," *New York Times*, October 17, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/17/business/media/roy-price-amazonstudios.html.

Soloway's acceptance speech points to some of the remarkable things that are unfolding in what some have claimed is a new era in Hollywood, a time when content creators and industry giants increasingly pledge themselves to efforts after social change and center *stories themselves* as agents of change, publicly championing the social justice potential of entertainment. In the speech, in fact, *Transparent* ceases to be entertainment, ceases even to be *television*, and is reframed as a "political movement." It is political, we are told, because people who are typically marginalized in "popular entertainment" and "forced to be objects," are now "subjects," now "privileged protagonists" thanks to the show's portrayals. When Soloway thanks the CEO of Amazon, Jeff Bezos,[99] the nature of Amazon as a capitalist enterprise and *Transparent* as a commodity have also been fully elided. Soloway's framing of *Transparent's* accomplishments suggests that they believe Amazon has afforded them the possibility of "getting to take people" (who may have "their own stories to tell," of course, but presumably cannot/will not tell them) and turn them into something more potent, more powerful — almost like a manufacturing facility transforms raw materials. They credit the show with turning people from "objects" of entertainment into "subjects," from the "butt of jokes" to "privileged protagonists"; and, in doing so, *Transparent* is transformed from television into a movement for social change.

At little over three months later, these ideas seemed to have distilled further and Soloway's discourse had become even more oriented to the connection between TV content and

[99] Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, is the richest man in the world, and his philanthropic strategies are often critiqued (Chris Weller, "Jeff Bezos is the World's Richest Person – and He Could Redefine Philanthropy," *Business Insider*, March 6, 2018, http://www.businessinsider.com/jeff-bezos-richest-personphilanthropy-2017-7; Nick Wingfield and Nellie Bowles, "Jeff Bezos, Mr. Amazon, Steps Out," *New York Times*, January 12, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/technology/jeff-bezos-amazon.html). Perhaps, like Soloway, he believes his entertainment productions are world-changing enough?

social change. On Sept 18, 2016, Soloway won an Emmy award and delivered their acceptance speech:[100]

1 JS Wow, um.
2 People asked me if it's hard to be a director and I tell them, no,
3 life is very hard,
4 being a good partner,
5 being a good mother,
7 being a good person is hard,
8 being a director is so ((bleeped)) easy?
9 I just get to make my dreams come true.
10 It's a privilege and it also creates privilege.
11 When you take women,
12 people of color,
13 trans people, queer people,
14 and you put them at the center of the story,
15 the subjects instead of the objects,
16 you change the world we found out.
17 We found out!
18 Um,
19 so I want to thank you,
20 my sweet Jeff Bezos,
21 because you changed the world,
22 and you invited me to do this thing that these people call television,
23 but I call a revolution.
24 I always wanted to be part of a movement.
25 The Civil Rights movement,
26 the feminist movement
27 This TV show allows me to take my dreams about unlikeable Jewish people,
28 queer folk,
29 trans folk,
30 and make them the heroes.
31 Thank you to the trans community for your lived lives.
32 We need to stop violence against transgender women and topple the patriarchy!
33 Topple the patriarchy!

[100] Maxwell, Strachan, "Jill Soloway Yelled 'Topple The Patriarchy' At The Emmys And It Was Great," Huffington Post, September 18, 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jill-soloway-topple-the-patriarchy_us_57df35eee4b04a1497b5167d.

Again, Soloway positions trans "lived lives" as raw material populating their dreams. They translate and transfer these lives from the margins into the "center of the story," where they become "heroes" instead of objects and thereby become a "movement" on par with the "Civil Rights movement" and the "feminist movement." This televising of certain kinds of lives, they assert, is an action that literally "creates privilege" and changes the world. Soloway's "sweet Jeff Bezos" has "invited" Soloway to join him as he "changes the world" with stories. Television of this kind, we are told, is not television, but a "revolution." There is an unsettling irony in Soloway's public gratitude toward the "sweet Jeff Bezos" paired with her cries to "topple the patriarchy." What is going on here?

I include these texts because I believe Soloway's speeches exemplify an extraordinarily potent and pervasive contemporary ideology about the power of popular storytelling (and narrative more generally). It is, I will argue, an ideology that is so ubiquitous as to be taken for granted as common sense in the communities and professional settings where I was conducting fieldwork.[101] Of course stories change the world! Of course narrative depictions of marginalized populations will help those populations! Of course TV shows that produce these kinds of narratives are, or can be, revolutionary! This chapter will explore the contours of this ideology, some of the discursive processes and practices that instantiate and sustain its potency, and the theoretical and cultural implications of its foothold in Hollywood and beyond.

I will begin my discussion by outlining what I am calling a "narrative theory of social change," a cultural model operating across the contexts of my fieldwork and, I think, beyond. I will describe popular discourses on the "power of stories to change the world" and outline the

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[101] Although to my knowledge Soloway never used the services of nonprofits who facilitate expert consultation, I was told by participants that *Transparent*, like many shows, made ample use of paid expert consultants — particularly trans-identified consultants who offered their "lived lives" as checks and balances against Soloway and their writers' room's "dreams." The way (paid) consultants in Hollywood are utilized would be an interesting dissertation in and of itself, but the model differs from the one used by the organizations with whom I worked.

implicit constructs that I argue undergird these discourses. I will argue that this particular ideology about narratives and what they are capable of exerts tremendous pressure on subjects to participate in a social context that demands certain kinds of narratives at the expense of others. It also devalues non-narrative interventions and marginalizes efforts after the social good that do not necessarily privilege storytelling as justice-enhancing or world-changing. I assert that the narrative theory of social change has achieved hegemonic status in contemporary Hollywood. This constitutes a sort of narrative supremacy that leaves little room for resistance or innovation and that, perversely, invisibilizes and marginalizes some of the very social issues that social impact storytellers hope to depict.

A Narrative Theory of Social Change

This section will explore what I am calling a "narrative theory of social change." A narrative theory of social change positions "story" at the heart of efforts after "social change," elevating narrative as the privileged fulcrum of social transformation in the interest of the public good. This theory of social change, I argue, is held in common by entertainment advocates, social justice nonprofit professionals, and, increasingly, entertainment industry professionals who, despite occupying different social positions and pursuing (one would presume) different missions, share an investment in this ideology and the use of its associated discourses. I observed that a narrative theory of social change bound together the participants in Hollywood's nascent social impact storytelling community, and was constantly invoked and re-invoked as the common ground between people and the foundation of their common efforts.

In fact, however, the "narrative theory of social change" is a misnomer, because it did not seem to be operating as an elaborated theory for the majority of the people who engaged with

it.[102] Instead, it functioned as an ill-defined but shared concept that despite of (or because of) its nonspecificity, was available as a justification for ongoing efforts in various unrelated sectors.[103] For example, the intuitive questions of *what kind(s)* of story/stories, *whose* story/stories, story/stories *for whom*, change *for whom* and *what kinds* of change were almost always bracketed and deferred by those who subscribed to the theory or drew upon its discourses. What was foregrounded, instead, was the generality of the construct: the non-specificity of using "story" (never defined) in the service of "social change" (rarely defined). This points to an essential aspect of the narrative theory of social change: the implication that (any) story could impact (any) of the kinds of social changes we might hope for (anyone). My argument is therefore not so much that the "narrative theory of social change" is a theory, exactly, but that it operates *as-if* it is a theory. Like many as-if theories, it approached the status of commonsense among the people with whom I worked and communicated over the course of my fieldwork. Part of the aim of this chapter (and this dissertation) is to, like many founding parents in anthropology and sociology, unpack and clarify the constituent notions and theories about the world that are hidden within this commonsense, and to explore their implications.[104]

It would be hard to hyperbolize the deluge of discourses in American popular culture on the powerful, empowering, world-building, world-changing properties of stories. It is by no means restricted to those working in entertainment sectors, though these are the organizations on

[102] This is complicated for the (formerly E-E) advocates in the public health world who do have a research-based and theorized rationale for why embedding content in narratives "works" and would like to continue to engage in formative and evaluative research such as that discussed in Chapter Three, but are seeing their funding diverted to organizations and projects that draw upon narrative theories of social change but do not invoke or conduct research to substantiate or investigate these claims.

[103] "Unrelated" in that one might be working on child health while another works on veteran homelessness; one on brand strategy for businesses and another on social policy.

[104] Harold Garfinkel, "Aspects of the Problem of Common-Sense Knowledge of Social Structures," in *The Self in Social Interaction. Vol 1: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Chad Gordon and Kenneth J. Gergen (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968); Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1991); Clifford Geertz, "Common Sense as a Cultural System," *The Antioch Review* 33, no. 1 (1975): 5-26.

which I focus here.[105] "Story" is assigned almost magical qualities as organizations claim to "use the power of story to make a difference and inspire social change" or to "galvanize the public to action to foster positive social change."[106] Storytelling can "promote empowerment and social justice"[107]; stories can "inspire and compel social change"[108]; stories in social impact media "inspire activism, compassion, and social transformation"[109]; and "storytellers are change makers".[110] These are all examples of discourses produced by important funders of social activism and community engagement in the United States, and they are the tip of the iceberg when it comes to philanthropic enthusiasm for story-power. As one grant-maker I talked to during my fieldwork put it,

1 GM The people making a difference out there,
2 the people in a position to be storytellers,
3 story framers,
4 story bringers,
5 story makers.
6 Those are the people we need to build bridges to and support.

This kind of lyrical rhetoric, rich with parallel structure, about story and the crucial role of storytellers was striking, and seemed to be at the tip of everyone's tongue in the social contexts

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[105] The branding and marketing worlds are also supersaturated with story discourse. America's nonprofit and social services industries are awash with talk of stories and their power. Not to mention scores of academics in various fields who continue to make claims about narratives' ability to heal, educate, socialize, moralize, etc. It is as though narrative can literally do it all, and can do it for anyone!

[106] Skoll World Forum, "The Five Secrets of Storytelling for Social Change," *Forbes*, August 1, 2013, https://www.forbes.com/sites/skollworldforum/2013/08/01/the-5-secrets-of-storytelling-for-social-change/#65eef9644859.

[107] Transformative Storytelling for Social Change, accessed July 21 2018, https://www.transformativestory.org/.

[108] Sederer, Lloyd I. "Company with a Conscience: Participant Media's Social Action Campaign and 'The Beaver.'" *Huffington Post*, May 6, 2011. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/lloyd-i-sederermd/company-with-a-conscience_b_854598.html.

[109] Social Impact Media Awards, "Awards Info," accessed August 27, 2018, https://simaawards.org/.

[110] Ford Foundation, "Just Films," accessed July 22, 2018, https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/our-grants/justfilms/.

where I was conducting research. Funders were particularly eager to "build bridges to and support" the "people *in a position to be storytellers*" (emphasis mine). These were the people thought to be "making a difference out there." I was often startled, in the first months of my research, by how readily-available such poetic and often grandiose language about stories seemed to be and how easily participants seemed to slip into proffering stories (in the abstract) as the answer to the world's ills. I was bombarded by discourse about the "power of stories" and eventually even became habituated to the quantity of talk about how world-changing stories are. When I revisited my field notes, interviews, and recordings of interactions, however, people's unrelenting invocation of the "power of story" was startling to me all over again.

The "power of story to change the world" seemed to be the agreed-upon premise of everyone's work and was the basis of their associations with one another. When I asked one advocate about how writers, experts, and activists worked together, her response was, "the unspoken thread between all of us is the power of story." Indeed, a belief in narratives seemed to bind stakeholders together, but I wondered about the nature of this belief. It came up constantly as a taken-for granted phenomenon, but "the power of stories" hung in the air as though it spoke for itself.[111] Was this the same narrative wave that surged through academia in the late 1980s and 1990s during the "narrative turn," I wondered? If so, it had now flooded this sector with such force that the "power of stories" was never debated, contested, or problematized. I began to ask myself (and, later, my participants) questions: upon what basis were stories thought to be world-changing? What other assumptions were embedded in a narrative theory of social change? What did efforts after social change look like when premised upon this theory?

[111] Though one could also argue that the pervasiveness of the discourse means that these ideas are *never* taken for granted — always claimed and re-claimed, always bearing repeating and needing to be shored up. People's constant insistence on stories' power may belie their unvoiced suspicions about this concept and its vulnerability.

Early in my fieldwork I attended a panel discussion, co-sponsored by the Center, at a nonprofit organization in South Central LA that worked with former gang members who were reentering communities after years of incarceration. Panelists included formerly gang-affiliated people as well as nonprofit staff, a legal advocate, and a sociologist from a local university. At the time, it was unclear to me who exactly was in the audience, and I had my doubts about whether there were even any writers or producers in the room (though I got better at recognizing the "Hollywood" attendees over time). A Center staff-person with more experience, however, took a moment to directly address the Hollywood creatives in attendance:

1	SM	We really wanna acknowledge the creative people in this room.
2		Because you know it takes a really visionary,
3		writer or producer to tell the most compelling story that the public learns from.
4		And,
5		so I just wanna honor.
6		All of you.
7		Because truthfully?
8		You can tell these real stories better than we can.
9		And so that's why I-
10		(N) and I have worked with the industry for so many years because you've got the power.
11		And the magic!
12		And you're the ones who really can transform society.

Here, people in "the industry" were singled out as "the ones who really can transform society." They were thought to able to "tell the most compelling story that the public learns from," and therefore the people with "the power" and "the magic." We can already see some indwelling assumptions within this larger idea about the power of stories.[112] There is, for instance, the idea that as the "public learns" (from stories), society transforms. There is also the assertion that Hollywood can "tell these real stories better" than the real people to whom they belong. The

[112] The reader may be wondering about what, exactly, "stories" are being differentiated from, here – what kinds of communication are presumed to *lack* the kind of power that stories are understood to possess. I will return to this later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.

underlying logic is that a "better" or more "compelling" story will result in more public learning which, in turn, will result in societal transformation. Like the grant-maker who talked about the importance of those "in a position" to be storytellers/makers/bringers, this staff person endows Hollywood with "magical" social change potential because of its status as a purveyor of popular stories.

At a different event much later in my fieldwork, an influential film producer sat on a Writers Guild panel about immigration reform. The audience was made up of either guild-members or their pre-approved guests, who sipped on wine and ate a catered dinner as they heard from two undocumented students, a community organizer, a documentary filmmaker, and an immigration lawyer. Toward the end of the panel, during closing remarks, the film producer declared to his colleagues in the audience,

1 FP A lot of people just aren't aware of it because it doesn't daily affect them.
2 And it's incumbent upon us as storytellers to to-
2 to tell these stories,
3 because as Jake was saying about his friend who saw *12 More Years a Slave*,
4 a story really does change our soul.
5 And it has the power I think to change minds more than anything else.
6 We can't coerce people really and make them change their minds,
7 we can't force them with policy,
8 that doesn't always work because people react in ways that-
9 uh they don't like to be told.
10 But if they –
11 if their heart um is captured and captivated and they're engaged,
12 by stories that we tell,
13 then there's a chance to have then conversations about these issues and start talking.
14 I'm very gratified by all the work the 3 of you are doing to tell the stories that can engage and captivate because that I believe it is really the primary way that we relate as human beings,
15 through stories,
16 is the way we can change.

This short passage manages to draw upon layered assumptions about the possibilities of human change and growth, the types of affordances that are believed to impact the heart and soul, the nature of human resistance, and how humans relate to one another. For my purposes, though, it is most significant to note how the passage bears the traces of a theory of social change that centers narrative's capacity to not only initiate "awareness" of things that don't "daily affect" us, but to actually "change our soul," to "change minds more than anything else." This kind of change is differentiated from *other* kinds of social change projects or other sorts of levers for societal transformation. Members of society "don't like to be told" and cannot be "coerced" through *policy* or (one assumes) other kinds of structural interventions. Stories, on the other hand, render people "engaged," with our hearts "captured and captivated" and therefore ready for change. In this logic, social change begins with individuals' awareness and their captivated hearts; this changes our very souls and starts "conversations" that lead to social transformation. The narrative theory of social change asserts, as this producer does, that "the primary way that we relate as human beings, through stories, is the way we can change."

Centrally, a narrative theory of social change positioned popular entertainment media as the de facto most productive locus of social change efforts. In the context of a narrative theory of social change, Hollywood's entertainment industry, as the most powerful purveyor of stories to global audiences, becomes the ultimate conduit for stories and, thus, the ultimate vehicle for producing positive culture change. I argue that this theory also consisted of four constituent assumptions about what stories are capable of and how they achieve hoped-for "social change," and that these sub-assumptions have important implications for how SIS works (and does not work). I will briefly describe them here, although I take them up in more detail later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters. Many of them are articulated together (or all at once) in the

discourses of advocates and Hollywood content creators, but I believe they have subtly different implications.

Stories Reach People

First, there is the "Stories Reach People" assumption. Here, "reach" has both an affective inflection and a literal one. Stories are thought to "reach" people emotionally, pulling up their feelings, penetrating deeply into their hearts and minds, and breaking down their resistance to whatever content the story may be communicating. This is typified by the producer who spoke about hearts being "engaged" and "captivated" by stories and souls therefore being changed. Reach is differentiated from the "coercion" implied by "policy"; it penetrates more deeply and more subjectively. But the popular broadcast of stories is also thought to make difficult information more accessible to more people, to make it easier to digest and understand and to reach broader populations. For advocates from entertainment-education backgrounds, these ideas about stories are grounded in decades of research.[113] For non-academic participants in this field, though, there was a more general faith in stories and the power of storytelling to reach people. As one advocate asserted to me in an interview,

1 BM Stories change lives.
2 That just makes sense.
3 Everyone can remember a story that changed them.
4 Now multiply that by a mil-
5 by thousands and thousands of people.
6 That's how we change the world.

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[113] Summary, Bouman, et al., "Health Education in Television Entertainment"; Nariman, *Soap Operas for Social Change; Singhal & Rogers, Entertainment-Education.*

Here, there is the notion of life-changing encounter with narrative, on par with the “soul” change or the “magic” mentioned in previous transcribed excerpts. But there is also the more pragmatic notion of “reach” through the numbers implicated in mass broadcast and popularity.

I observed that the “Stories Reach People” assumption was often characterized by affective discourses: discourses of empathy, of compassion, and of being “moved” (I will be exploring affect in another chapter). It is also typified by discourses of access and appeal, and differentiated from *other* kinds of communication that are thought to be less moving or less appealing: news media, documentary, and “educational programming.” These genres were associated with the devalued properties of “policy.” Whereas policy change might ineffectively “coerce” (as the producer put it) and documentary might bore, stories are “compelling” and Hollywood professionals can as the public health advocate asserted, “tell stories better than we can,” thereby reaching the populace.

Seeing the Unseen and Hearing the Unheard

Second, there was an assumption that “Stories Make the Invisible Visible and the Unheard Heard.” This assumption was typified most distinctly by discourses of “raising awareness” and “giving voice.” Stories were thought to bring previously “untold” and “unrecognized” issues and experiences into individuals’ awareness, changing individuals’ consciousness and additively shifting the hearts and minds of the populous, inspiring them to political agency. Since stories “reach” people, they are a medium wherein supposedly novel, unvoiced or unheard material can be heard and received by others — even material that, as the producer put it in a previous excerpt, “doesn’t daily affect them.” As such, stories are means of discovery and capable of changing what is thought/known as well as what matters for people and communities. This logic was

encapsulated beautifully in an interview I conducted with a social impact media professional who was involved in developing "prosocial" projects with a prominent Hollywood showrunner. When I asked him to describe his work, he explained,

1 JD What we do,
2 what we help other people do,
3 is take something that um,
4 it's out there and people are working on it and it matters but most people don't really know?
5 And we put it forward,
6 we say,
7 this matters,
8 there's a lot of work to do but we can bring light to that thing,
9 that person's story,
10 it starts mattering for somebody else and then we have this whole global spread of agency movement where citizen change-makers are really getting traction on major social issues but it starts with the story,
11 95% is the story,
12 that awareness that comes from that.

This advocate believed that "really getting traction on major social issues" involved bringing material that is "out there" and working to "put it forward," to "bring light to that thing" in order to make the issue "start mattering." This "mattering" ignites a "global spread of agency movement," and "95%" of that "is the story." "Awareness comes from that," from the story, which "brings light," "starts mattering," then expands through "citizen change-makers" into global action on major social issues.

An implicit assumption operating here is that bringing previously unseen/unheard material into public narratives is inherently *good*, inherently *justice-enhancing*, because encounter with the narrative material will automatically ignite "citizen change-makers." This notion places quite a bit of faith in the power of awareness. It also gives quite a bit of credit to a representation-based vision of social justice that privileges the reparative powers of symbolic recognition over, say,

redistributive or formal redress.[114] It also indirectly attributes global injustice to *unknowing*: issues are "out there" and "matter" and "people are working on it," but the problem is "most people don't really know." The implication is that if more people saw and heard stories of injustice, injustice would matter to people and they would work toward a more just world. This therefore positions seeing and hearing about social issues through *narrative encounter* as the essential precondition for social issues coming to matter to the public, with this "mattering" positioned as a precondition to "getting traction." Within this logic, policy-change and global justice are quite literally inextricable from Hollywood's storytelling industry — quite a claim, but one that seems increasingly commonsensical in Hollywood's current cultural climate as well as, perhaps, a broader cultural preoccupation with representation/recognition-based understandings of justice and equity, a complex issue to which I will return in my final chapter.[115]

Stories Inspire and Empower

Third (and also salient in the previous example), there is the "Stories Inspire and Empower People to Action" assumption. This assumption is typified by discourses of empowerment and inspiration, obviously, but also of agency, efficacy, and motivation. The underlying assumption is that when you consume a story about someone like you (or someone with whom you identify) who is doing good in the world or experiencing empowerment, you will feel as though you, too can do good in the world, or that you, too, possess a spirit of efficacy and power. This notion is perhaps rooted in entertainment-education's early reliance on Bandura's social cognitive learning

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[114] Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," *New Left Review* 212 (1995): 68-68; Nancy Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, Participation," WZB Discussion Paper FS 1 (1998): 98-108; Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Verso, 2003).

[115] Webb Keane, *Signs of Recognition: Powers and Hazards of Representation in an Indonesian Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

theory.[116] Bandura's theories provided the rationale for early E-E interventions because they demonstrated that observational learning (in this case, seeing characters model new ways of being in the world) could change audience knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors by activating their sense of identification with characters exhibiting self-efficacy and motivation.[117][118]

Conversely, this assumption also involves the idea that consuming a story about someone who is suffering will inspire you to act to alleviate this suffering. I will return to this in Chapters Seven and Eight when I discuss in more detail SIS's orientation to ethics and the role of affect in these endeavors. But it is important to note in a more general way that this presumes that individuals' *feelings* of empowerment or inspiration (invoked by their encounters with stories, especially encounters with stories of social ills) will actually translate into their taking action or behaving differently in the world at-large.[119] The narrative theory of social change relies upon the belief that emotional engagement in stories ("compelling" ones that change hearts, minds, souls) will provoke story-consumers to confer or redistribute their power and privilege in the real world (through donation, volunteering, "getting involved," etc.). Participants in social impact storytelling were very invested in the idea of "citizen change-makers" who would become

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[116] Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory for Personal and Social Change by Enabling Media," in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, eds. Arvind Singhal, Michael J. Cody, Everett M. Rogers, and Miguel Sabido (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[117] Papa et al., "Entertainment-Education and Social Change"; Sood, "Audience Involvement and Entertainment-Education."

[118] This kind of learning could also go badly, of course, resulting in negative influences on viewers just as easily as positive influences. For those working in the E-E space, however, the "bad influence" inflections of Bandura's research simply suggested even more urgency when it came to reforming popular narratives – it was even more essential than ever to ensure salutatory and accurate depictions in the media, and such research provided rationale.

[119] A multitude of academics have critiqued the mediatization or popularization of depictions of human suffering (e.g., Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in our Times," *Daedalus* 125, no. 1 (1996): 1-23; Anne Rothe, *Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in the Mass Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011); Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Macmillan, 2001). Yet, E-E and social impact storytelling professionals would not affiliate themselves with this kind of critical inquiry regarding suffering (though, as I explore in later chapters, they worry over the "fatiguing" aspects of consuming suffering.

socially/politically active once they knew about a social issue, once it was made to "matter" to them through the unique properties of story.

It was my impression, however, that the longer someone had been involved in entertainment-education or social impact media, the more likely they were to be actively worrying about the validity of this assumption. Many people I spoke to thought that "action" could not be taken for granted and was, in fact, becoming increasingly difficult to evoke from audiences or was perhaps insufficient for provoking social progress. In general, participants appeared to hold the link between narrative-inspired empathy and active altruism as an unquestioned and sacred principle of the work. But some, privately, expressed concern. As one very experienced advocate and community organizer confessed to me,

1 HF We know stories can't do everything.
2 We have to do a survey of the landscape of the issue space and see if there are levers,
3 tipping points where we can effect change.
4 Also there's the oh so important issue of,
5 can we communicate to the people who have taken action that their action has made a difference,
6 and here's an update?
7 To build a community?
8 Not an email list,
9 not phone numbers,
10 but a community that we can go back to?
11 I mean,
12 how can we build more intentional infrastructure around stories like this?

This person's concern about producing "intentional infrastructure," taking stock of "levers," and assessing "tipping points" revealed his sense of the complexity of social change processes, and an awareness that *more* than exposure to narratives would be required to achieve social change. Part of his worry was that viewers needed to *know* "their action has made a difference" as a way of sustaining motivation and constructing community around social actions. This need for people to

understand they have made a difference was understood to be a protection against a sense of futility. It wasn't enough to be inspired, to take action, or to join an email list. This excerpt, I think, reveals this advocates' concern about the *transience* of story-inspired engagements and the fragility of feeling involved. A sense of narrative-inspired efficacy would wear off, at least in the absence of an "intentional infrastructure around stories" being offered to the public. I will return to the problem of transience in Chapter Eight when I consider SIS's use of affects.

In my experience, this kind of worry was growing among the professionals in this sector but had not yet been actively addressed in any systematic way by the community. Unlike the kinds of multi-pronged public health initiatives designed by E-E professionals in previous eras, social impact storytelling leveraged only the "power of story" and (presumably) affectively-engaged and inspired viewing audiences as mechanisms of social change. As in this excerpt, there was some talk among people about how *exactly* they might translate narrative energy into sustainable public actions, but in my experience this was fairly rare. Moreover, it would be difficult to accomplish within a model that relied upon the voluntary participation of Hollywood professionals who made no guarantees and subscribed to no particular program or protocol for achieving social change.

It Adds Up

Finally, the fourth assumption is what I describe as the "It Adds Up" assumption. This is a proposition crucial to the narrative theory of social change, as narratives are understood to be deeply impactful collectively by acting on the level of individual encounter with a story. Essentially, the proposition is that social change is cumulative; it functions most effectively from the ground up through combined changes to a multitude of individuals' consciousness and

behavior rather than being achieved through intervention at collective or macro levels. In fact, macro-level interventions were often explicitly devalued and framed by participants as inadequate: "Policy change is not enough. Law is not enough," one entertainment advocate told me. Another advocate articulated this logic by invoking the example of *Will & Grace*, a television series that people in this community often casually credited with turning America's cultural tide toward widespread support for LGBT issues such as marriage equality[120]:

1 JV *Will & Grace* made the argument that for every Will there's a Grace.
2 Right?
3 So there's the straight best friend.
4 The straight brother,
5 the straight sister,
6 the straight coworker.
7 Who advocates for the gay friend.
8 The cultural change leads the legal change,
9 not the other way around.

Here, social change is presumed to takes place at the individual and intersubjective level; the implication is that we might construct a story that would activate a "Grace" on behalf of a "Will." In stories on-screen, individual "straight coworkers," "straight brothers," or "straight sisters" are awakened as allies or act as allies by "advocat[ing] for the gay friend." The argument for the show's social value is that through audience's encounters with the stories of Will and Grace, Will becomes a "gay friend" for a *multitude* of individuals who are watching the show. These individuals want to engage in social advocacy on behalf of gay people writ large because of their relationship with the character, Will. This then, add up to cultural change that "leads the legal change." Recall the advocate who noted,

1 BM Stories change lives.
2 That just makes sense.

[120] I have not been able to find any substantiation of these commonsense claims that *Will & Grace* changed the culture on LGBT issues, but they are hard to refute.

3 Everyone can remember a story that changed them.
4 Now multiply that by a mil-
5 by thousands and thousands of people.
6 That's how we change the world.

In other words, it adds up.

Professional advocates I talked to, as well as other categories of people engaged in the social impact storytelling universe, made much use of "social change" and "culture change" discourses, along with discourses of "community" and the "social" more generally. There was certainly an awareness among them of social problems being collective, macro-cultural issues (rather than pathologies lodged in individuals). Yet, the narrative theory of social change involved foregrounding how narratives impacted the *individuals* who consumed them while simultaneously disavowing processes that impacted *collectives* (i.e., "policy," "legal change," etc.). There was an untheorized/undertheorized leap from individual shifts to what one person I met referred to as "culture shifts." An artist-activist I met at a mixer told me,

1 JBM I'm at the intersection of arts culture and politics.
2 And I believe
3 that it's really stories not facts that move people's opinion.
4 Which always precedes policy change.

Again, this idea that changes in public opinion "always" precede policy change positions any mechanism that changes an individuals' "opinion" (or "soul," or "mind," or "heart") at the center of social change efforts. This logic was ubiquitous in social impact storytelling and social impact media communities. It was unclear to me whether a narrative theory of social change was dependent upon this assumption or vice versa. Certainly, the idea that advocates needed to "build more intentional infrastructure around stories" (or perhaps in conjunction with or *prior to* stories) was rarely put forth, except in one or two confessional interactions I had with experienced advocates. Stories were the answer; everything else would proceed accordingly.

I hope it is obvious that in the context of widespread investment in these four assumptions, Hollywood's storytellers seem like the keys to social change — more so than lawmakers, educators, etc. It is a short hop from the assumptions underlying the narrative theory of social change to the notion that Jeff Bezos's television empire might be the stuff of revolutions. This is a far cry from previous visions of Hollywood as a great pacifier of the people that, at best, co-opts and domesticates social movements and, at worst, perverts and puts down revolutions in the making by instantiating neoliberal and capitalist subjectivities.[121] American progressives and conservatives alike have often oriented to Hollywood in a relation of suspicion and critique (i.e., the oft-reference "culture wars" between political right and political left and their mutual use of mass media and popular communication).[122] Now, though, we see a proliferation of public discourses asserting that Hollywood can and should be an engine for social change, that the practice of making certain kinds of entertainment content can be politically radical, and that the practice of watching such content might also be revolutionizing for the viewer and thus for society at large. There is plenty of critique in the community about Hollywood's *success* in being a force for positive social change, but there is very little critique about whether the story industry *should* and *could* be engaging in efforts to be an agent of change. As I see it, it is this powerful ideology about stories — the narrative theory of social change — that is at the heart of this shift in how contemporary Hollywood is perceived and perceives itself.

That so many now understand television to be revolutionary and deeply political points to the depth of our contemporary cultural faith in "stories," but it also points to the way that we have

[121] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Jyotsna Kapur and Keith B. Wagner, *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema: Capital, Culture, and Marxist Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (New York: Verso, 2009).

[122] Useful summaries in James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Brian McNair, *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratization of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

seemingly, as a culture, shifted our ideas about what constitutes politics and what constitutes revolution. Many scholars have noted that Americans have divested in political institutions at a grand scale, in favor of a more diffuse notion of "culture"[123] or "market."[124] Media scholars have discussed in the context of the "entertainmentization of culture."[125] In our current political imaginary, "the people" or "the public" are primarily imagined as a (media) *audience*,[126] though some argue persuasively for a less monolithic understanding of "media" in a media-consuming public.[127][128] It is little wonder, then, that we see an almost frenzied centering of popular storytelling as the locus of political action and political optimism. I heard people talk again and again about television and film as politically potent because they are tools for "changing the narrative" on "women," on "immigrants," on "Muslims," on "people of color," or on a staggering number of other social categories and topics. The presumption here is that a "change in narrative" is revolutionary in and of itself — a notion that I think we must bracket and examine more closely before we completely divest in other methods of revolution or other ways of attempting change in our societies.

I also want to note that these ideologies about stories and story-consumers are reshaping existing fields of social justice ("social change") discourse and rationale.[129] All kinds of

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[123] Žižek, *First as Tragedy.*

[124] J. Gregory Dees, "Taking Social Entrepreneurship Seriously," *Society* 44, no. 3 (2007): 24-31.

[125] Spitulnik, "Anthropology and Mass Media."

[126] Richard Butsch, *The Citizen Audience: Crowds, Publics, and Individuals* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[127] Peter Bennett, Alex Kendall, and Julian McDougall, *After the Media: Culture and Identity in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[128] I think this has shifted, perhaps, to imagining "the people" as "followers" (i.e., Twitter, Instagram)…but certainly as an audience of people consuming public messages.

[129] What is also interesting is that unlike much of the work on narrative in the social sciences and humanities, people writing in these sectors are not really focusing on what stories do or can do for those who are *constructing narratives*

organizations within the nonprofit world are rebranding and revising mission statements to incorporate grandiose and abstract discourses on the power of story and media.[130] Influential funders and grant-makers are also restructuring their funding priorities around narrative lines or asking grantees for evidence of public-facing media savvy and commitment to storytelling prowess.[131] This, obviously, drives activists/advocates further toward "story" because they must speak to story-related issues in exchange for their funding. A narrative theory of social change has also co-evolved with the emerging field of practice and production I explore here, that of social impact entertainment and "social impact storytelling. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, many organizations that would formerly have identified as E-E have distanced themselves from this name in favor of the newer, more on-trend title, "social impact storytelling." Not all (or, even most) organizations that claim the mantles of "social impact media," "social impact entertainment," or "social impact storytelling" are engaged in the form of E-E that was congealing and being practiced throughout the first decade or so of the twenty-first century. They are, however, all drawing upon the same idealizing ideology about the "power of stories to change our world." They are all participating in what I think it is useful to think of as a "narrative economy," to which I now turn.

or telling stories. They are thinking about what stories do for *audiences*, listeners, and viewers – mediated consumers.

[130] Though I can't speak to changes in practice among these organizations, I think many are at least re-orienting to stories in terms of how they fundraise, how they brand themselves, what they incorporate into their grant-seeking, etc. On the ideological or public-facing plane, they have begun to foreground narratives.

[131] See Ford Foundation's Just Films initiative, the United Nations's and PVBLIC Foundation's Media for Social Impact Summit, the Skoll Foundation and Sundance Institute's Stories of Change initiative, and recent declarations by the California Endowment on its future strategic planning.

CHAPTER FIVE

Narrative Economy and Narrative Capital

In her work on the autobiographical storytelling of HIV/AIDS patients in South Africa, Marian Burchardt introduces the concept of "narrative economies," defined as "the set of exchange relationships within which biographical self-narrations circulate and produce social value for individuals and organizations, which operates as narrative capital."[132] Burchardt here makes use of Goodson's notion of "narrative capital," which attempts to supplement Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital and point to individuals' use of specifically *narrative* skill to accrue social capital and command support for their causes in a "narrative politics."[133] Goodson speaks about situations where what has traditionally been considered symbolic and cultural capital (i.e., being educated, being well-spoken) might work *against* political figures in a "narrative politics," whereas "narrative capital" might be deployed distinctly, noting public insistence on *stories* over other kinds of communication.

The idea of "narrative capital" is one that has been used in multiple academic fields, but is typically referenced in relation to individuals' autobiographical self-narrations and involves analyzing how self can or must be narrated in contexts where *self*-narration is both demanded and constrained: asylum hearings, clinical settings, or truth commissions, among others.[134] I would like to take these ideas of "narrative economies" and "narrative capital" and expand them further.

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[132] Marian Burchardt, "The Self as Capital in the Narrative Economy: How Biographical Testimonies Move Activism in the Global South," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 38, no. (2016): 593.

[133] Ivor F. Goodson, *Developing Narrative Theory: Life Histories and Personal Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Ivor F. Goodson, "The Rise of the Life Narrative," *Teaching Education Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2006): 7–21.

[134] I.e. Roberto Beneduce, "The Moral Economy of Lying: Subjectcraft, Narrative Capital, and Uncertainty in the Politics of Asylum," *Medical Anthropology* 34, no. 6 (2015): 551-571; Vanessa May, "Narrative Identity and the Re-conceptualization of Lone Motherhood," *Narrative Inquiry* 14, no. 1 (2004): 169-189; Enrique Alonso Población and Alberto Fidalgo Castro, "Webs of Legitimacy and Discredit: Narrative Capital and Politics of Ritual in a Timor-Leste Community," *Anthropological Forum* 24, no. 3 (2014): 245-266.

Specifically, I would to move beyond analyses of specifically self-narration in institutional/ritualized contexts and think about narratives and narrators circulating in other settings; settings that I would argue can and should be thought of as narrative economies (i.e., the nonprofit economy, or Hollywood). In these sectors, narrative capital often produces more than "social" capital,[135] although it certainly produces social capital as well. Possessing narrative capital in a narrative economy produces *actual* capital, too. In my view, an approach to narrative through the lens of a "narrative economy" involves attending to how narratives and narrators accrue symbolic, narrative capital but it *also* involves analyzing how stories and storytellers are monetized and commodified, keeping in mind that profit is inextricably entangled with even the most "revolutionary" popular narratives.

Considering narrative economies means studying narratives in the contexts of their production, commodification, circulation, and consumption, as well as examining the social relations that are constituted by and constitute these processes and exchanges. This approach therefore invites specific lines of questioning: what kinds of narratives and narrators are viable in a (particular) narrative economy? What makes certain narratives and narrators highly-valued and not others? What are the pre-existing and distinctive culture of feeling[136] that make certain stories narratively valuable? What social and economic value is attached to narratives; what kinds of narratives are commoditized? How are stories circulated and who owns the means of circulation? Who consumes them, and what kinds of value do consumers (listeners, viewers) ascribe to them? Part of what I find most useful about these questions is that they draw our eye to the very aspects of narrative practice that tend to be invisibilized and/or backgrounded among those who espouse a narrative theory of social change. Thinking about "social impact storytelling" in Hollywood as a

[135] Burchardt, "The Self as Capital."

[136] Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," *Marxism and Literature* 1 (1977): 128-35.

narrative economy therefore sheds light on aspects of the practice that, I think, would not be easy to hold in view otherwise.

Disappearing Capital in a Narrative Economy

The notion of narrative economy allows me to deal head-on with the intersection and intertwinement of *capital* and *narrative capital*. I observed that those involved in "social impact media" and "social impact storytelling" tended to evade and obscure these connections. Advocates consistently erased the impact and influence of financial capital on the kinds of stories being centered and circulated in popular media as well as how capital constrained the kinds of work they were able to do. Hollywood professionals who were invested in a narrative theory of social change tended to do the same. When popular storytelling is positioned as revolutionary and popular narratives are framed as prosocial movements, the fact of Hollywood as an *economic enterprise* — one that profits massively from the production, circulation, and popular consumption of stories — slips from view. We lose sight of economic processes as, instead, stakeholders foreground discourses about story-power and changing the world through television. Jill Soloway's speeches, explored in the previous chapter, are excellent examples of this backgrounding. Many of the people I met from the industry, however, asserted that this was a contemporary pattern in Hollywood writ large.

One writer who I interviewed, for example, had had recently been involved in pitching a TV pilot to networks. He and his writing partners had successfully sold a handful of TV shows throughout their careers, but this writer noted a change in the climate since they had last "taken a show out" in the year before our interview:

1 EE Nobody mentions money right now.
2 You just cannot.

2 Even when everybody is actually talking about money.
3 In rooms how we are pitching,
4 executives but no one talks about money?
5 Just meaning.
6 Just influence.
7 ((drama voice)) This is going to have a huge influence,
8 ((drama voice)) This has social wings,
9 social reach.
10 What they mean is,
11 this is going to make money.
12 But it's like money takes the meaning from it,
13 And we-
14 ((peppy voice)) sure we want to make meaning!
15 be socially relevant,
16 be in the revolution!
17 all of that.

This writer comments on how even in "rooms" where contemporary Hollywood professionals are explicitly "pitching" executives, money and the potential of commercial success were being invisibilized as, instead, discourses on being "socially relevant," being "in the revolution," having "social wings" or producing material with "reach" (i.e., "all of that") were offered as privileged modes of understanding success. We can hear echoes of Soloway's understanding of their own relevance in this writer's understanding that he must discursively frame his work in terms of its "meaning" and "social reach" rather than its potential popularity or financial success. I argue that a narrative theory of social change both *affords* this invisibilization of profit and capital in Hollywood and *demands* it of Hollywood's storytellers if they want to constitute themselves as ethical subjects in this context. I will return to this idea when I discuss social impact storytelling as an ethical practice in Chapter Seven.

Bracketing the question of whether popular storytelling can actually produce revolutionary social change, however, it is essential to remember that popular storytelling is also a for-profit *industry*, in the business of producing commodities that sell (and/or that sell other commodities

through affixed advertising). This fact certainly shaped the practice of advocates' "outreach" and determined the nature of consultations taking place in the E-E or social impact media space. Effective advocates understood that some kinds of material would appeal to writers because writers would be able to "sell" it to executives or would be the stuff of storylines that could be pitched to colleagues within their writers' rooms; other kinds of material would be unappealing for the project of producing popular (and profitable) television. The advocates associated with the Center were therefore hyper-aware of the "sellability" of stories — to Hollywood, and to audiences. That said, the language of profit/capital was discursively invisibilized in favor of the language of "appeal," "entertainment value," and "success."

People with whom I worked were necessarily focused on how to (re)formulate and present topics to secure Hollywood professionals' buy-in. In this outreach model, after all, Hollywood's professional storytellers had to voluntarily "invest"[137] in a topic if it had any hope of entering circulation and reaching audiences. Appearing to explicitly "sell" to writers and producers, however, was totally forbidden, as was pitching directly to the possibility of social progress or the invocation of political affiliations in any kind of explicit, on-the-nose fashion; these were thought to be a "turn-off." Advocates told me that outreach must not tip over the edge to *obvious* advocacy, much less all the way to "activism." Moreover, any hint of "pitching" by either advocates or content experts — any moment of being caught in a naked attempt to persuade a Hollywood professional to buy-in to a topic or a storyline — was an appalling gaffe, one that someone could (and did) get fired for. The director of one SIS group told me, after firing an advocate who was "too advocacy-y,"

1 HL The outreach person is the hardest to hire.

[137]It is interesting how the financial discourses and the language of "investment" and "buy-in" can be used while simultaneously rejecting *direct* consideration of money – financial metaphors, in this community, are used to talk about *emotional* "investment" and *attentional* "buy-in."

2 They literally,
3 um,
4 hold the key to the whole thing.
5 They have to *push* but they can't be pushy.
6 If they alienate the writers then-
7 if they're boring,
8 if they sound like a salesperson,
9 if they sound like they're just,
10 too much selling.
9 If they don't *get it*.
10 That's it!

The "outreach person" was a difficult hire because they had to be communicatively and interpersonally skilled enough to toe such complicated lines. They had to be persuasive without appearing to persuade; to present ideas that could be viable in Hollywood's narrative economy without appearing to sell them. Writers were thought to be easily "alienated" in the face of someone being "pushy," "boring," or "selling" to them. If the outreach person could "*get it,*" they would find a way to make topics appealing and exciting to writers and could therefore be "the key to the whole thing." To appear as a "salesperson," however, would have invoked disallowed aspects of the practice, those associated with capital, profit, or economic influence.[138]

For example, although advocates' efforts were primarily funded by charitable interest groups (philanthropic organizations, foundations/funders with distinct topical interests), these financial relationships were carefully underplayed and compartmentalized. The Center could under no circumstances be seen as accepting funding in exchange for storylines; this would collapse the premise of the Center being in a free relationship of *service* to the entertainment industry (rather than serving someone's interests or lobbying to the industry). Center leadership were careful to underscore to funders that writers maintained full creative control over content

[138] Efforts after political persuasion or explicitly activist communications were also disavowed; there were considered missionizing and moralizing and would also be a "turn-off" to writers. I will return to the specific dynamics in Chapter Three when I consider the ethical dimensions of SIS.

and that the Center had no power to promise that *any* topics about which they conducted outreach would gain purchase in among Hollywood's content creators.

For example, I went along with Center leadership when they attended a small event with non-industry professionals. This event was something between a networking event and a panel, designed for people who were interested in social impact storytelling and wanted to hear about the model. The audience was made up, primarily, of representatives from funders and community organizations who might collaborate on future social impact media projects. The Center's director, Tania, explained of her work,

1 TM We curate these trips to really give the creative community a kind of total immersion.
2 In an area.
3 So they can kind of draw their own conclusions.
4 We *never* tell a writer what to write,
5 we never tell anybody what story to tell,
6 we just keep offering up?
7 The edgiest most interesting topics we can find.
8 And then the creative process takes off?
9 And it's amazing to us what they do with it!

Here, the Center maintains that it is simply "offering up" encounters and "total immersion" experiences with topics so that writers "can kind of draw their own conclusions." They would "never tell anybody what story to tell," and would "*never* tell a writer what to write." That kind of direction or directness, we presume, would collapse the magic of the "creative process." And without the creative process, the Center's efforts could be reduced to something more reminiscent of product placement or proselytizing; practices the Center absolutely disavowed. Instead, the Center simply positioned itself as a purveyor of the "edgiest most interesting topics we can find," invisibilizing, of course, the process by which funders offered financial support for advocacy on their particular topics.

At times, this maneuver made the Center's relationship with potential funders precarious. Understandably, funders wanted some reassurance that their support would yield results — they wanted storylines, which Center staff resolutely refused to certify. Making such promises would have been starkly contrary to their advocacy model, which required *inspired* participation by writers and storylines freely-offered. It was thought that *only* this way of operating would produce storylines that were of high enough quality to deeply impact viewers. It was hoped that the storylines that emerged from these kinds of contacts — rather than ones involving explicit direction or bearing the trace of financial exchange — would avoid the invocation of viewers' *own* resistances to being "pitched" or "sold." Where earlier forms of E-E were most worried about appearing to "teach" while embedding the educational content in entertainment, SIS professionals were more worried about appearing to "sell" (or, of course, to "preach," which I will return to in another chapter) while embedding prosocial/social justice content in entertainment media.

This was also the reason that contemporary social impact media organizations, unlike their E-E progenitors discussed in a previous chapter, avoided top-down mandates from TV executives to media-makers and content-producers. Top-down commands and employer influences were thought to diminish the quality of narratives. NBC's annual "Green Week," for example, was often referenced by advocates with a groan. During "Green Week," every prime time show on NBC is mandated by higher-ups to include environmental themes.[139] "Green Week" was a cautionary tale, a situation where writers were called upon to include prosocial messages in televised programming, but lacked the intrinsic interest or motivation that would have made this programming impactful for the public. The stories, therefore, "totally sucked" (as one person

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[139] Joe Makower, "NBC's 'Green Week': Not Business as Usual," *CNN Money*, November 13, 2007, https://money.cnn.com/2007/11/13/news/companies/makower_NBC/index.htm?postversion=2007111311.

unapologetically asserted). "Like the NPR pledge drive — you just turn it off for a week," another corroborated.

Advocates believed that they needed to promote or encourage Hollywood professionals to use the Center's services without ever appearing to pitch (much less mandate) the Center's services. Pitching was universally taboo, in part because it called up capital and thus needed to be disavowed, but in part because it invoked the frightening specter of missionary, proselytizing zeal that advocates thought would be an immediate turn-off to Hollywood creatives. "Pitching" was a genre associated with profit and persuasion, whereas "stories" and "consultation" were associated with more creatively pure and virtuous motives. "Pitching" seemed to work against the magical *storiness* of it all, the *narrativity* whose properties were being "harnessed" (as many slogans put it.). A think-piece commenting on the growing popularity of social impact media in Hollywood noted that "a social angle can be a hindrance" as much as an attraction for a film or television show.[140] Though a "social angle" is undeniably built in to the endeavor of social impact storytelling, then, so is its simultaneous disavowal. The "cause" must be both championed and defended against/buried. Writers and viewers alike did not want to be "sold" on a cause. Therefore, though pitching and the influence of capital/funding were thoroughly entangled with the day-to-day work of everyone in these industries, acknowledgment of this was strenuously avoided. It seemed all too easy for participants to draw upon the sparkle of "story" to distract everyone from these trickier aspects of their work. In other words, this narrative economy foregrounded *narrative* in order to background *economy*.

That said, effective advocates found a way to underscore that advocates' expert consultation services, field tours, or presentations by "real people" could improve writers' stories and make writers more "successful" (subtext: profitable). For example, someone from the Center

[140] Sederer, "Company with a Conscience."

closed most events for the entertainment industry with a plug for the Center's services. These deliveries danced on the line between "pitch" and a disinterested offering:

1 TB We're a free resource to those of you who are content creators.
2 Writers and producers.
3 If you want to access real people with real stories?
4 Or you want access to experts?
5 Like all of the people,
6 these amazing people on the panel.
7 Reach out to us.
8 We're available to you.
9 If you have an idea or you're working on a script or you want a script review,
10 or you want inspiration,
11 any of those things.
12 You can reach out to us and we will connect you.
13 We are simply a bridge.
14 We have a huge uh,
15 database of experts we know a lot of people who are willing to talk to writers and producers and the reason we do this?
16 Is we know that people believe what they see on the screen.
17 They believe it's true.
18 And we feel that if we help you make your stories more compelling,
19 that it's actually you know,
20 you're going to have more success with your work and viewers are going to be learning something of social value.

Here, the Center configures itself as a "free resource" who can provide "access" to something that "content creators" want: "real people with real stories" or "experts." When the Center Director underscores that "we are *simply* a bridge" (emphasis mine), the implication is that the Center has no skin in the game, they just offer "help" that will give the writers "more success with [their] work." The fact that "viewers are going to be learning something of social value" is a sort of happy accident of the project of producing "more compelling" stories that will boost *writers'* success. Yet, neither financial reward/value nor prosocial reward (the politically-neutral "social

value") could be overemphasized or foregrounded without threat of the dreaded turn-off in the face of a pitch from a missionizing salesperson.

The delicacy of these dynamics frequently produced stutters and near-misses as advocates tried to toe the line. One morning, for example, an advocate stood before a group of seated writers at the front of a lurching, twenty-seat bus. The writers would be spending the day going to a series of locations where they would learn about human trafficking from a variety of perspectives. The Center had designed a program that involved law enforcement, experts in social policy, formerly trafficked individuals and people working in direct social services. They were on their way to the first stop and the advocate was introducing the Center's work to the group. She had just quoted a number of statistics from previous E-E research, underscoring for the writers that storylines on popular TV series had been proven to change public opinion on things like organ donation and knowledge of cancer risk, as well as to increase self-reported testing for sexually transmitted infections. Sensing that she was perhaps losing her audience with the statistics and public health studies, the advocate (somewhat awkwardly) switched gears:

1	A	So,
2		you may not care about that but we do,
3		we're so interested in how storytelling actually impacts individuals and communities,
4		and then we publish the results in journals that three people read ha ha,
5		and,
6		but,
7		we-
8		we care.
9		So.
10		Um,
11		we uphold you as master storytellers in this world.
12		Now this makes me cry ((cry voice))
13		((cry voice)) Because what you do matters.
14		And even though you might not be trying to teach anyone anything,
15		that's okay with us?

16 You do.
17 And when you get the story,
18 when you write a story that's actually based in fact and its accurate and realistic?
19 No matter how dramatic.
20 People believe it.
21 So we applaud what you do and we're here to serve you in any way we can.

In the beginning of this interaction the advocate realizes, perhaps, that she is on her way to being boring or is already sounding like a public health salesperson. To counteract this, she makes fun of herself and jokes about the limits of academic influence, which only involves publishing "results in journals that three people read." The advocate absolves the writers from caring about her statistics, teaching the public, working on public health, or being interested in the ways "storytelling actually impacts individuals and communities." But she then stumbles over her non-pitch pitch for a moment, only recovering the flow when she calls up intense emotion to address and "uphold" these "master storytellers in this world." She literally becomes tearful as she reminds them that "what you do matters," even if they "might not be trying to teach anyone anything" (I will return to advocates' use of affect in another chapter). The advocate insists that the gap between their missions is "okay with us," but also manages to make plug for stories "actually based in fact" and that are "accurate and realistic" (subtext: the Center can help with that, and that's what's good for society). What is underscored is that the Center is "here to serve," *not* to push an agenda.

This passage, as well as the others I have shared in this section, present a picture of the way advocates talked a tightrope between layered communicative agendas operating in these interactions. On the one hand, the advocates invoked both the academic nature of their work and the ways it sought to operate on behalf of the public good. On the other, they downplayed links to academia as well as modulating active activist/advocacy efforts, distancing themselves from the interest groups that funded them or topical interests/commitments that governed their outreach

choices. They routinely invoked the ways Hollywood professionals might be implicated in positive social change if they worked with the Center, but they also downplayed writers' need to *care* about these aspects of their work and emphasized that engagement with these topics would simply make their stories more "compelling" or "successful." They promoted the Center and its priority topics but avoiding being seen as promoting them, instead foregrounding being "here to serve" and "simply a bridge" that gave free "access" to desirable and helpful material.

Division of Labor in a Narrative Economy

Interpreting my fieldwork data through the lens of narrative economy allowed me to take a closer look at what I came to see as a division of labor in the "social impact storytelling" space. In general, narrative labor was divided between

a) those who were thought to provide raw materials for popular narratives: think Soloway's reference to trans "lived lives" and the Center's rhetoric about "real stories from real people," or the case studies and information provided by consulting "content experts"
b) those who could produce/manufacture popular narratives: professional storytellers, in this case, Hollywood's writers and producers
c) those who owned the means of production and distribution of narratives: studios, networks, internet streaming services, etc.
d) those who wanted to influence the narrative economy by funding entertainment advocacy or SIS endeavors: philanthropists, foundations, sometimes academic grant-makers.

People belonging to each domain were afforded different social positions, constrained in different ways, and thought to provide (and respond to) very different kinds of discourses of value. The advocates I worked with were interested in maintaining and making use of relationships with

people in these different domains and facilitating certain kinds of intentional encounters between them. The professionals at the Center positioned themselves as useful middle men ("simply a bridge") that could serve the industry without interfering with writers' creative process (and while enhancing the writers' products). They situated themselves as purveyors of quality experts and "compelling" raw stories. They also self-identified as "culture brokers" between people who wanted to influence the industry (but did not "get it") and the industry itself. They asserted that activists, public health workers, and foundation grant-makers needed the Center in order to achieve the right kind of access to Hollywood without being "too political" or a "turn off" to Hollywood professionals.

Center advocates guarded their status as liaisons and were mindful of being cut out by direct contact between other participants. The professional storytellers, for example, were not permitted to deal *directly* with expert sources or "real people." There were frequently uncomfortable moments at the ends of consultations when writers, experts, or both were interested in exchanging contact information with each other so that they could follow up with one another directly. Center staff were trained to anticipate these moments and instructed to manage them by swiftly interceding. They usually interjected with something like, "we're happy to reconnect you whenever you might have another question or want to follow up! Just get in touch with us at that time!" Center leadership explained to me that this was to protect both parties from potential exploitation or overstep given the voluntary donation of experts' time and the fragile affiliation of writers with the endeavor. It was easy to imagine other more cynical motivations for/interpretations of this, however, since such contact would effectively eliminate participants' future need for the Center's services.

Similarly, for foundations and funding entities, the advocates were conduits to Hollywood; the funders were never permitted to deal directly with writers. Frequently, however, funders recommended consulting experts who were active in their topic areas; thus, funders interacted with writers indirectly. People at the Center were acutely wary of these under-supplied experts, as they were perceived to be too attached to an *agenda*, too political, or, worse, so excited by the prospect of contact with the Hollywood television system that they would try to "pitch" writers on their own ideas of what would make a good story. These dynamics played out in intricate ways over the course of my fieldwork. The division of labor I describe here was not always intuitive for newcomers or first-timers, who had to be instructed in how to stay in their lane. Advocates made explicit efforts to train people in how to respect the boundaries of others' professional skillsets so that no one felt intruded upon or competitive with other participants in this particular narrative economy. Still, sometimes things went awry.

Toward the end of the all-day tour I mentioned earlier, for example, writers and advocates climbed off their bus and joined a group of women in the large living area of a group residential facility. This facility served young women who had recently left sex work or had been previously trafficked as minors. The writers had already heard from academic experts and law enforcement; this was the "real person" part of the tour. The women who joined us had been trafficked themselves and had begun working in social services in order to help others who had experienced similar traumas. They told their stories to a rapt room.

All day, though, the Center staff had been on edge. Against the Director's better judgment, she had allowed a funder's recommended expert-activist to come on the tour, and she'd spent much of the day trying to politely contain or shut down his attempts to deliver speeches to the writers on the bus. At one point I had seen her pull him aside, so I suspected he'd been

diplomatically but firmly chastised and, perhaps, reminded of the Center's policy of neutrally offering up content without an agenda. After hours of managing his (more or less failed) attempts to interject, though, I could tell by her facial expressions that she'd had enough. Then, as one of the women at the group home finished her harrowing story, he took advantage of what was probably his final opportunity to speak. Interjecting and speaking incredibly fast, he asserted,

1 AA I have something about the media representation of this an-
2 and you brought up a really good point which is that whenever we see something on TV or in movies we think that's the only way because that's human nature.
3 Whatever we're seeing that's how it is.
4 And as we explained before the LAPD sees a certain kind of trafficking and special forces and Navy Seals see other kinds of traff- and it's all valid,
5 some is happening a lot more like the work they're doing is way more.
6 I think it's *not that hard*,
7 when you're dealing with a particular episode that specifically focuses on this or specifically focuses on international trafficking for one of the main characters to hear from an expert.
8 To show in a moment HEY ((snaps fingers))!
9 This is what's happening,
10 this and this and this is also trafficking,
11 it-
12 and-
13 it's <u>not</u> too much of a distraction,
14 you're not going to that storyline.
15 But just say the main character one of the characters is like you know these are the three kinds of trafficking.
16 Begin to engage audiences and educate audiences [th-
17 TM [a little exposition
18 AA A little exposition, a [little bit ((inaudible))]
19 TM [((inaudible)) it's gotta be smooth- ((inaudible))]
20 AA [it's gotta be smoothly integrated
21 TM [((inaudible))]
22 AA so that people don't think that whatever they're seeing is the only thing.
23 TM Okay well we only have a few more minutes.
24 so is there a burning question?

This exchange, essentially, was the Center Director's nightmare. An activist had not only pushed his agenda in front of a room full of writers ("the three kinds of trafficking"), he had suggested an actual storyline to the writers ("one of the main characters to hear from an expert"), including his imagined dialogue ("one of the characters is like, you, know, these are the three kinds of trafficking")! Moreover, had there been some contempt in his assertion that "it's *not that hard*" or some argument with a presumed resistance when he said, quite forcefully, that such dialogue is "not too much of a distraction"? Adding insult to injury, he had underscored that the writers should "begin to engage audiences and educate audiences." He had broken all of the rules, and an interactional tussle for control ensued as he and Tania spoke over one another for multiple turns of talk until the director, finally, announced the end of the entire discussion ("we only have a few more minutes"), asserting that only the most urgent comments would be admitted ("a burning question").

This interaction reveals what can go wrong when participants did not stay in their defined roles, their place in the narrative economy's division of labor. Activists were not supposed to involve themselves in the work of the professional storytellers! And although this field tour had broken down the boundaries between these divisions, most of the Center's events were structured such that participants had a fairly clear idea of what was expected of them and what kinds of narrative material was foreclosed by their specific position. The Center staff always sought out representatives from different roles when they were putting together events; these consisted of 1) experts (often researchers or academics), 2) expert-advocates ("activists"), 3) experiencer-storytellers (often referred to as "real people"), and 4) professional storytellers (Hollywood writers/producers/filmmakers). I have already discussed some of the communicative expectations

and narrative performances demanded (or discouraged) from those who occupy these roles, but will describe them in more detail, here.

Ideal expert consultants were expected to walk a fine, highly nuanced communicative line. An "expert" both offers and must be prevented from offering facts, specialized language, summaries, and statistics. If she is a scientist, for example, she should express herself as a scientist, but without too much scientific jargon. She should use "rich and realistic" language to describe the topic being inquired about, because writers are thought to desire and use that vocabulary and will respond poorly to being "talked down to." But she should perform the role of having specialized knowledge without being *alienating* about it. Experts are coached to use case studies and examples, but they also mustn't be too good at storytelling, too polished or too slick lest it drift into offering up an actual storyline; this was best left to the professionals. They can and should tell stories from their own research, but they mustn't venture into the professional storyteller's storytelling lane.

As I've already mentioned, Center staff were particularly wary of expert-advocates. These were usually professionals from the nonprofit sector who were dedicated to a particular cause (i.e., a lawyer with expertise on human trafficking who works for Human Rights Watch). Occasionally, they were academics who also identified as activists (i.e., an anthropologist who studies border communities and also advocates on behalf of migrant farm workers). Often, as I mentioned, these experts were offered as resources by foundations or nonprofit entities who funded particular projects related to their work. These experts "belonged" to the funder and were therefore thought to be particularly motivated to persuade on its behalf. The people in this role were often warned explicitly, in advance, that the writers with whom they would be consulting were not interested in their expertise because they cared about the *mission*, but were only

interested because they wanted to make their stories "realistic." One advocate complained to me privately, after a consultation that had gone awry because the expert-advocate had "climbed up on his goddamn soapbox,"

1 TM I wanted to tell him,
2 for God's sake dude,
3 they don't care about this,
4 they don't give a shit,
5 really.
6 About any of that!
7 They just want enough to make their storyline and get their answers and keep it moving.

As seen already, there was often an explicit disavowal or distancing from expectations that the Hollywood professionals would "*care"* about the issue at hand. Recall the advocate at the front of the tour bus, asserting that writers didn't have to care, but "we do," and tearfully arguing that what writers do *matters* whether or not they care about the impact and whether or not they want to "teach anyone anything." The advocate in the excerpt above is positioning writers as people who are only out to "get their answers" and "keep it moving," not people who are invested in changing the world. This routine disavowal of writers' capacity for interest and care was particularly strange given that the premise of outreach was to inspire and engage writers on priority issues (presumably, to make them *care*). I will return to this peculiar dynamic in Chapter Eight when I explore it more thoroughly in the context of advocates' use of affect and affective language.

Experiencer-storytellers, on the other hand, were "real people" who offered personal narratives about the topic at hand. They, too, were often referred as free resources by funders or nonprofit organizations that engaged in direct service activities or advocacy. Yet, they were not thought of as risky in the same way that activists from these organizations; they were not professionally (or financially) bound up in the issue at hand. The people in this role had

credibility on the basis of their first-person understanding; they themselves struggled with the diagnosis being explored, or had been incarcerated, or currently lived with undocumented status (to name a few examples). Their first-person offerings were only seen as problematic when they were too bleak, or did not contain a kernel of triumph. This occurred very rarely, if at all, as these people's very survival and position as a person narrating their experience for a Hollywood professional often marked them as a "success story." Most of the experiencer-storytellers seemed to understand implicitly what story was being asked of them, and made adjustments to conform to these expectations without having to be told directly to do so. During my fieldwork, I never observed a "real person" being coached by an advocate.

Professional storytellers from the industry were also asked to participate in the Center's proactive outreach, though they were never called upon to respond to other writers' inquiries. Professional storytellers were primarily writers or writer-producers who had been involved in television episodes featuring whatever theme was being explored in an event (or, occasionally, might be the writer-producer of a documentary[141]). These "storytellers" signaled the Center's credibility to other writers who were attending an event, and the Center therefore sought out the most prestigious writers available to them on any particular subject. Writers were usually asked to bring or comment on a clip they'd been involved in related to the topic of outreach.[142]

Because of their affiliation with Hollywood and/or because of their status within the industry, the "professional storyteller" on the panel was often the primary focus of people's

[141]As I've mentioned, the people affiliated with the Center were opposed to documentary as a form, believing documentaries to either be too boring, too preachy, or too sensationalistic/grim, depending. Still, some documentary slipped through since many people committed to using media for social change were or had been involved in documentary films.

[142] These were not clips that the Center had been involved in consulting on, though sometimes the writers were aware of the Center and had used its experts in the past. Center staff brainstormed for shows or storylines they had seen on the issue and reached out to writers' reps to invite them to participate (usually, speaking on a panel at the WGA was something writers were open to).

attention at events. The professionals themselves, however, were frequently openly deferential to the experts and “real people” in the room. One confessed to me that he had “felt like a fraud” when his short clip about juvenile detention had been shown after others had shared their first-hand stories and expert case studies. Another reported to me that he felt “vaguely guilty” after presenting a clip of an episode he had written on solitary confinement, mentioning that he felt that he had somehow “stolen” the topic from the people in the room who had direct experience with prison, or had been “presumptuous” in representing the issue (even as he was being lauded for it). I would suggest that these writers’ private sense of guilt, fraudulence, or thievery are in large part because of the way narratives (and narrators) circulate in this narrative economy; the way people differentially profit from narrative capital. In fact, a tentativeness and subtle defensiveness emerged whenever these issues became salient in the room.

In the transcript below, for example, a “real person” on a panel at the Writers Guild of America (WGA) had just shared her touching story of assisting in a terminally ill loved one’s suicide. A prominent Hollywood showrunner was slated to follow her talk, and he had been asked to talk about his experiences writing about death and dying on his show (a popular medical procedural drama). He began,

1	MF	Wow.
2		I wish I’d written that. ((MF and audience laughter))
3		I-
4		First of all I,
5		I- I,
6		This afternoon I spent some time and driving over here I spent some time thinking what can I <u>possibly</u> say.
7		This wonderful panel,
8		what do I have to add.
9		And I-
10		you know at the end of the day what I have to add are my stories.
11		And um,
12		in the tradition of my friend John,

13 tell my story and you-
14 and some unflattering stories about experiences and you uh-
15 hopefully uh-
16 we're at the WGA,
17 writers' rooms are a safe place,
18 that's the way Hollywood works,
19 so uh,
20 a privileged safe space.

This writer declares that he "wish[es] he'd written" the first-person story of another panelist and expresses, through a series of stuttered false starts, his concern over what he could "possibly say" or "add" to a panel that included experts and experiencers. I believe that this exposes his sense of vulnerability related to his and others' place in the contemporary narrative economy. He is aware that he has neither experiential capital (like the "real person") nor intellectual capital (like the "expert") to offer here; he must therefore use specifically *narrative* capital: "at the end of the day what I have to add are my stories." By foregrounding narrative capital in this moment, he points to and reifies a division of labor in a narrative economy that distinguishes between narrative-making and story-crafting "out there" in the world and the storytelling and story-making "in here," "at the WGA," in "writers' rooms" that "are a safe place," a "privileged safe space." "That's the way Hollywood works," he reminds the audience (and himself). Yet, this experienced showrunner is in possession of a good deal more than his narrative capital; he has far more *financial* capital than any other participant on the panel due to the economics of Hollywood.[143] As a Hollywood content creator, he is rich in both narrative capital and actual capital, whereas the "real person" may possess only narrative capital. This, I think, was awkward for everyone in the room.

[143] Depending on the show's network and the experience/professional prestige level of the showrunner, showrunners can be making anywhere from $30,000 per episode to $300,000 per episode or, in the case of a Shonda Rhimes, up to twenty million dollars per season (Staff, "Hollywood's Salary Report 2017: Movie Stars to Makeup Artists to Boom Operators," *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 28, 2017, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/2017-hollywood-salaries-revealed-movie-stars-makeup-artists-1043252).

Moreover, participants' ideas about narrative authority were such that even professional storytellers were seen to be lacking some crucial component that makes up narrative value in a narrative economy: first-hand experience, or expertise. This is part of what made them deferential or "guilty" and what the Center was, in part, actively correcting. For example, a writer/producer speaking at one of the Center's events attempted to respond to several audience members' questions about why there wasn't more television representation of issues pertaining to mass incarceration and racial inequality in policing and sentencing. He declared,

1	DF	So I uh,
2		I just want to say when people say why don't writers write about these things.
3		Writers wanna write good stories,
4		they write about what they know.
5		And they write about what they have access to and if they don't know they don't write about it because how could they?
6		How can I write about it I've never heard about it I haven't lived it I don't-
7		how can I write about this?
8		That's why the work of uh- the uh-
9		The Center and the panel is so important because it-
10		it helps writers hear those stories so that we can write about it and turn it into not exactly the story,
11		but a version of it that fits for whatever it is we're writing and our shows are all different,
12		so our movies are different,
13		our shows are different,
14		they have different needs.

The writer is asserting that writers require epistemic authority over their narratives; they have to "write about what they know." Writers' knowing is necessary, it is asserted, in order to "write good stories," and good stories are good when writers have "access to" something, either having "lived it" or "heard about it." He is also careful to note that when writers finally "hear those stories" that might give them the epistemic authority to write scripts on a subject, they "turn it into not exactly the story, but a version of it that fits" whatever purpose is required. He is being

careful, I think, to evade the idea of narrative theft, but he is also gesturing toward the "needs" of the industry that might drive narrative transformations. What do we imagine determines *how*, exactly, a narrative needs to be transformed in order for it to "fit" into these "different needs" of movies and shows? I will return to this question in the following chapter, when I focus on narrative transformations. I would argue, though, that it is the demands of a narrative economy that determine these kinds of narrative adaptations.

We can also see here that the narrative economy assigns certain kinds of value to experience/first-person access to stories, though this is distinguished from the value assigned to the professional storyteller's capacity to "turn it into" something else. I observed that writers were uncomfortable and uncertain when it came to these dynamics around "what they have access to," especially when faced with people who have "lived it." For example, at another event at the WGA, a self-identified queer audience member posed a question to a female executive producer on the panel. This producer's show had recently drawn a lot of publicity for its depiction of an array of race-related and LGBTQ issues. The audience-member inquired:

AM=audience member
SR=showrunner

1 AM If you have writers writing characters,
2 um,
3 with experiences that they haven't lived and I recognize that writers do that I mean I-
4 that's what creativity is and yet how do your-
5 your writers actually ground the stories in,
6 in truth that's believable?
7 SR Well we try to do research and and you know we try to have a diverse-
8 as much of as a you know-
9 diversity of experience in the people that we work with but-
10 you know we talk to people,
11 and we try to-
12 we wanna do it accurately?
13 We make mistakes,

14 I'm sure we don't always,
15 but,
16 you know we had *Jake ((queer staffperson also on panel)) so we could say,
17 does that sound right to you,
18 and like,
19 you know there are people-
20 a lotta people coming up saying to us,
21 you know,
22 I don-
23 I don't know. (1.2)
24 AM Thank you.

This executive producer begins with claims of "research" and attempts at "diversity," or consultation with real life experiencers in the form of affiliated staff. We assume that she herself does not identify as LGBT, as she does not use her own lived experience as an epistemic claim. She also acknowledges that "we make mistakes," but offers up a colleague's first-person claims as a sort of proxy authority on the subject ("we had Jake"). She begins to assert, seemingly defensively, that "a lotta people" are "coming up saying to us" what we presume are complimentary things. This is the end of her series on why the writers might have a right to write what they do not "know," because her sense of herself as being in a position of authority to tell popular stories on this subject has appeared to erode even as she built a case for it. She trails off, finally retreating into "I don't know" followed by a long silence, a sort of backing down that seem to satisfy the audience member, who at least is willing to let her off the hook with a "Thank you." This was an exquisitely awkward exchange that, I think, calls attention to the complexity of the whole endeavor by which narrative labor and the rewards of Hollywood's economy are differentially distributed across participant roles.

I perceived a persistent, often unpleasant tentativeness on the part of participants in moments where the division of labor in a narrative economy became salient. I believe that this was the result of everyone's implicit or explicit awareness of their differential roles, the

entanglement of these roles with financial capital, and the total disavowal of openly acknowledging the economics of these unequal relations. When they rose to the surface, everyone panicked. Participants struggled to manage the relations of power that characterized ownership of narrative content and, in some sense, the very experiences that were being represented in stories. It is my sense that people were tacitly aware of and uncertain about how to answer questions about who possessed and benefitted from narrative capital: who was entitled to represent people's stories? Who would be profiting from the translation of these stories into a popular narrative? What kind of gains in social, symbolic, or financial capital might be expected if a Hollywood professional made a protagonist out of a "real person" or made a popular story out of an expert's research? Did someone who had no access to lived experience or expertise on a subject have the right to write about/depict it or profit from these depictions? Because the entire enterprise disavowed totally the economic implications of their labor, participants moved gingerly when these questions emerged, uncertain as to whether they were being exploited, exploiting someone else, trespassing on someone's professional domain, or being trespassed upon. In such moments, participants often fell back once more on grandiose and idealizing discourse on the power of storytelling and the value of stories as the binding element between participants. But what *kinds* of stories were understood to be so powerful and so binding? The next chapter takes on these two questions.

CHAPTER SIX

Narrative Transformations and Narrative Demand

In the previous chapter, I described what I believe it is useful to think about as the contemporary narrative economy. I discussed the implications of this narrative economy for participants in my field sites, who found themselves in relational and communicative predicaments as they navigated the ways that their narrative labors were differentially valued and sought to find ways of managing their differential access to narrative capital. I explored this community's taboo against making visible the impact of *financial* capital on popular storytelling or nonprofit practice, as well as the strong prohibition against any open efforts on the part of advocates to persuade or pitch writers on priority topics. This was a peculiar scene where explicit efforts after social change were simultaneously championed and disavowed; where it was the goal to secure the emotional investment of Hollywood professionals but obvious efforts to invoke care were actively refuted; where a strict division of narrative labor was carefully defended but where narrative hierarchies were in frequent flux. Above all of this, the "story" flag flew. Participants took refuge in grandiose and abstract discourses about the power of narratives and the uniting properties of "compelling" stories when confronted with these tensions. But what kinds of stories, exactly, were they after?

This chapter will discuss the ways that social impact media professionals privileged certain forms of narrativization and representation, thereby producing and validating certain kinds of stories and narrators at the expense of others. It will describe four kinds of "narrative transformations" toward which advocates aimed and which guided their efforts to produce "storytellers" from other kinds of speakers and "story" from other kinds of material. Using anthropological and philosophical work on narrative, I will explore some of the implications of

these specific transformations as well as potential consequences for those stories and subjects excluded by these practices in a narrative economy that seeks social change. I will also begin to discuss the impact of narrative *demand* on participants in a narrative economy. I will argue that contemporary narrative ideologies exert tremendous pressure on subjects to offer themselves up to a narrative economy that values narrative subjectivity above all others, and that this constitutes a sort of narrative supremacy that, perversely, invisibilizes some of the very social issues that social impact storytellers are hoping to depict.

Narrativization

The ethnographic examples I present throughout the next few sections should be seen as examples of efforts by the people I worked with to participate and thrive within a narrative economy — and to construct *narratives* that will thrive in a narrative economy. They are also examples of peoples' efforts to inspire *others* to craft stories that can accrue narrative capital, such that stories can "reach" people and produce prosocial cultural change. As I've described already, the people who are part of "social impact media" and "social impact storytelling" sectors are participating in a cultural context wherein certain kinds of narratives are thought to literally "create privilege" for the underprivileged (à la Soloway) and are understood to "change the world" as they are circulated and consumed. People in these contexts believed very much in a narrative theory of social change, asserting that the only way health and social justice topics would accrue enough social influence to make a difference in the world was if they could be narrativized for consumption by the public. They were committed to the idea that contact with certain kinds of stories was salutatory for viewers in and of itself, as well as capable of igniting the kinds of changes in individual viewers that would cumulatively produce culture change. As

explored in Chapter Three, participants' investment in this narrative theory of social change led them to focus their efforts to make a difference on Hollywood as a specifically *narrative* economy. People who wanted to make a difference in the world were seeking to make an impact on a narrative industry where professionals sought profit, popularity, and survival, but these motives were strategically backgrounded as people increasingly foregrounded the social change dimensions of their work.

One of the goals of this research project was to discover the ideas and assumptions associated with "social impact media," to inquire into the theoretical premises of its practices, and to think critically about these practices' unintended consequences. I do not, though, want to be too cynical about the efforts of the people who are working in this arena. Everyone I talked to during my fieldwork seemed sincerely committed to making a difference in the world (though people might define "making a difference" quite differently from one another). Everyone I met seemed deeply invested in the idea that stories could achieve hoped-for changes in the societies where these narratives circulated. I do not want to discredit these people's commitments or imply, pessimistically, that their work did nothing, and I would never want to argue that popular storytelling and television have no impact on our culture. It seems obvious that stories do impact us, sometimes profoundly, and seem to at least contribute to cultural change, though research on such media-impacted culture change is often ambiguous and presents mixed results.[144] That said, I don't want enthusiasm for storytelling and eagerness for the ethical transformation of society to prevent us from thinking more carefully about the effects of our investment in these ideas, or to

[144] E.g. Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, and Kyungbo Kim, "Understanding the Effects of MTV's *16 and Pregnant* on Adolescent Girls' Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behavioral Intentions toward Teen Pregnancy," *Journal of Health Communication* 19, no. 10 (2014): 1145-1160; Melissa S. Kearney and Phillip B. Levine, "Media Influences on Social Outcomes: The Impact of MTV's *16 and Pregnant* on Teen Childbearing," *American Economic Review* 105, no. 12 (2015): 3597-3632; Edward Schiappa, Peter B. Gregg, and Dean E. Hewes, "Can one TV Show Make a Difference? *Will & Grace* and the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis," *Journal of Homosexuality* 51, no. 4 (2006): 15-37; Stacey L. Sobel, "Culture Shifting at Warp Speed: How the Law, Public Engagement, and *Will & Grace* Led to Social Change for LGBT People," *St. John's Law Review* 89 (2015): 143-194.

overstate their effectiveness. It seems essential to think about whether the practices and discourses associated with a narrative theory of social change are achieving what we believe they can achieve, as well as whether they might be producing effects other than what we intend. This chapter will be exploring some of these issues.

The core of the work of what was formerly entertainment-education and is now "social impact media" is *narrativization*, by which I mean the process of transforming something non-narrative into a story. I am well-aware that the contours of what constitutes "non-narrative," "narrative," and "story" may be very blurry and very fluid depending on one's social context and theoretical temperament. That said, these terms mean something very commonsensical in the particular context where I was conducting fieldwork. Therefore, I will attempt to unpack and use participants' indigenous commonsense understanding of "story" and "narrative" when discussing their work.[145]

One afternoon, for example, I sat with the director of a "transformational media" (his term) nonprofit. He had been talking to me about "storytelling for social change" in general, and had been espousing his deep belief in the importance of "telling stories" rather than "spouting facts about social issues" if one wanted to engage people and get traction on solving the world's problems. It was one of many conversations I had with people where, because of my own academic training in narrative and literary theory, I found myself wondering what exactly he meant when he talked about "story" or "storytelling." I eventually asked him directly, "so, what is a story?" He recoiled at first, as if the question might be offensive, but then delivered an impressively concise definition, one I think most of the people I met during my research would have agreed upon:

1 CD Everyone knows what a story is.

[145] Geertz, "Common Sense as a Cultural System."

2 A good story is a good story.
3 It,
4 um,
5 there are characters you care about.
6 Stuff happens to them,
7 and you care about that.
8 And usually,
9 um,
10 usually something changes for them,
11 and you care about that too.
12 And so it changes you too.

"Everyone knows what a story is," he confidently asserted. Story stood in opposition to his earlier disparaging comments on "spouting facts about social issues." A "social issue," fact, or topic in itself was not a story; in this conception these were non-narrative. Instead, a process of narrativization transformed topics or "facts" into something else, something better. A "good story" offers "characters" and "stuff" happening that "you care about." Changes are underway in a story, and as "something changes" for the characters you care for, "it changes you, too." As I have already mentioned, these internal changes in the hearts/minds of story-consumers were thought by people in this community to be the precondition of social change writ large. Thus, the narrativization process — the transformation of non-narrative material into narrative material — came to be positioned as the essential procedure through which society might be transformed.

Both the Center's "proactive" and "reactive" outreach were meant to support and encourage the narrativization of an array of topics. When they facilitated consultations for writers who approached them with questions ("reactive" outreach), they did so as part of the project of transforming "information" into "story," hoping that through consultation, (ideally) accurate information and facts about priority topics would be enfolded seamlessly into writers' storylines. When they designed events, they did so in order to be "inspiring" of writers' future stories, as well as to provide writers with the epistemic authority to write on topics they might not have

written about otherwise. They hoped that writers would take these points of contact and, while inevitably transforming them for their own purposes, render them into the kind of narratives that "change" people and the world.

Not just any old story was thought to change people, however. During my time observing interactions between experts, advocates, and writers, I observed that people oriented most often to four types of transformations during narrativization that were more highly-valued than others. These, specifically, were the hoped-for outcomes of social impact storytelling. Through narrativization,

1. Topics would be personalized, transformed from a collective or macro scale to a personal/individual one that viewers could care about.
2. Topics would be emplotted, transformed from chronic/structural or episodic issues to ones with narrative temporal arcs.
3. Topics would be made coherent and hopeful, transformed from a bleak or fragmented state to one where solutions were imaginatively available.
4. Topics would be humanized and made relatable, transformed from a status of being alien/othering or abstract into a cognitively and affectively accessible state.

From Collective to Personal

Part of the work of social impact media advocates was to make large scale, collective problems seem personal enough to be relevant (and digestible) to individual media consumers. "Personalizing the issue" was an explicit, core agenda of the subset of professionals in this sector who come from a public health background, especially, as these individuals are habitually oriented to perceiving issues as "public" in the first place. But "personalizing" issues of concern

for the "public" presented significant dilemmas. Public health-oriented entertainment advocates often toggled rapidly back and forth between arguing that public problems needed to be seen as *personal* in order to gain traction, and arguing that problems currently perceived as "personal" are actually *public problems*.

For example, the Center received funding from a private foundation to work with the entertainment industry on the issue of mass incarceration. One of the advocates' priorities was to shift — for both Hollywood professionals and their audiences — people's understanding of incarceration as a problem of personal failure and responsibility to one of public health and cultural responsibility. This involved transforming the broad strokes of the story from something like, "someone's in jail because they chose to commit a crime and were caught" to something like, "generations of African American men are incarcerated because of entrenched racism and structural inequality, and this has catastrophic effects on the broader health and wellbeing of communities."

What is particularly interesting (and ironic) about this kind of hoped-for shift of perspective from personal-to-collective responsibility is that, for the advocates and their funder, the best way to accomplish this was thought to be the presentation of compelling narratives that were deeply *personal*, that told *individuals'* stories. Their strategy was not, as one might expect, to present framings of the problem as collective or structural. For example, a sociologist was invited to speak on a panel for writers about this issue. He was coached in advance by the advocates to avoid presenting any statistics or data on community health or the broader community impact of mass incarceration. Instead, he was asked to present a case study. He was told to bring "the numbers" with him to work into the question and answer period of the program

in case he was asked directly for these statistics, but to generally stay away from “facts and figures” during the main event as these were thought to be a “turn off” for audience members.

At the event, the sociologist complied. He presented the narrative of a hypothetical African American boy, born into poverty with a parent in prison, shunted into the “school-to-prison pipeline,” and eventually incarcerated. This case study from the expert was immediately followed by a narrative from a so-called “real person” who had been invited to tell his personal story at the event. This first-person account, as one might expect, was a more specific and emotion-laden counterpoint to the prototypical narrative provided by the expert. This structure (case study by expert followed by first-person narrative by “real person”) was replicated across events and topics. Experts and “real people” were *both* called upon to represent macro problems as more individual ones, in the hopes that writers would grab onto these accounts and use them as fodder for prime time storylines.

The irony of this practice was that in order to make the problem of incarceration a collective/public health problem, advocates were attempting to facilitate the popular portrayal of *personal* stories of incarceration. This, I think, did not exactly achieve what the advocates hoped. The stories did appear to call up doubts about whether incarcerated individuals were to blame for their own fates; they portrayed a series of unfortunate events befalling a person rather than a series of delinquent behaviors requiring state discipline. This probably did invoke a more compassionate perspective from people in the audience vis-à-vis people in prison. Yet, this way of narrativizing topics continued to reify the *personal* and evade the *collective*. Blame was shifted away from protagonists, sure, but how was it to be shifted onto structures themselves — the very structures that advocates and their funders wanted to change? This presented a storytelling predicament.

"Personalizing the issue" was also a sort of communicative proxy for "avoiding statistics" or "avoiding expert language." Advocates asked experts to share their expertise on the big picture relevance and statistical contours of a social issue, but they were told they needed to do so within a more subjective framework — to use a case study or a personal example to "personalize" things. Experts handled this in different ways, but a communicative strategy I observed frequently was a form of case study narration that involved something like verbal annotation, with facts or statements from a more macro perspective interspersed with personal details in an interlinear fashion. For example, at an event for the industry about learning disabilities, a psychologist who studied educational outcomes for people diagnosed with learning and attention issues presented the case of "Stu" to the audience:

1	AE	So the first one I wanna talk about is a guy named Stu.
2		And Stu was older,
3		he was actually a young adult um when I knew Stu I was 9 or 10?
4		So Stu seemed like he was 30 or 40?
5		He was probably actually like 25. ((audience laughter))
6		Um.
7		Stu was a prisoner.
8		And this shouldn't be shocking because we know,
9		that within eight years of graduating from high school?
10		55% of people with learning and attention issues end up interacting with the criminal justice system.
11		Stu was a prisoner.
12		He did not graduate from high school,
13		also should not surprise you because we know that one third of people with learning and attention issues don't get a regular high school diploma.
14		Um,
15		Stu was a mechanical genius.

This expert had been instructed by the Center's staff to use a person's story in his presentation, a case study, to "personalize" his research for the audience. His use of the personal story of "Stu," then, is intended to be in the service of calling attention to the "55% of people with learning and

attention issues" who "end up interacting with the criminal justice system." His framing, however, more closely approximates the use of statistics to contextualize and understand Stu — rather than using Stu to contextualize and understand the collective class of people with "learning and attention issues." The expert uses the statistic that "one third of people with learning and attention issues don't get a regular high school diploma" to explain the personal detail that Stu "did not graduate from high school," rather than the other way around. And, in fact, all of the audience's follow-up questions that evening were about what had happened to Stu, or whether he had ever gotten out of prison. I can guess from my previous conversations with this expert that this was probably a disappointing outcome for him. His ultimate goal was to raise awareness about how people with learning issues are *systematically* marginalized and criminalized; he wanted to make it clear that these issues are not *individual* (in the brains of diagnosed persons) but *societal*. It was not his goal that people walk away being interested in Stu himself. Yet, the Center's strategy of *personalizing* issues in order to make them more engaging and appealing for popular storytellers (in order to draw popular attention to a societal issue) managed to actually *background* the systematicity and collective responsibility of the problem at-hand.

From Chronic/Structural to Emplotted

This brings me to a related topical transformation during narrativization: the reformulation of chronic, structural social ills into emplotted events taking place within the arc of a story. This was a particularly interesting outcome sought by the work, because I observed that as a professional community, public health professionals tended to be acutely aware of the impact of social and economic structure, infrastructure, and collective cultural norms on the health and wellbeing of populations. Social impact media professionals who weren't explicitly involved in

public health *also* oriented to the structural and chronic nature of social problems: the chronicity of American racism, for example, or built-economic inequality under global capitalism. But they all seemed to share a belief that these issues were too sprawling, too systemic, and too temporally challenging to present easily to “the people” or the viewing public. They needed to be narrativized in order to reach the populous, but they lacked the “eventness” that was required to construct a compelling story. Hollywood’s writers were seen as experts who could supply this function (if they could be inspired to engage the issues). As one public health communications expert who I interviewed put it,

1 PH We need ((the industry)) because these problems,
2 um,
3 these causes are too big and too complex,
4 we can’t ask people to have to get,
5 like,
6 a degree in public health and care about the statistics to care about this stuff.
7 We need them.
8 They make it-
9 they show-
10 when it’s a story,
11 and not a statistic,
12 then it can really work.

There was something seemingly intractable about “these problems,” which were “too big and too complex” for everyday people. Advocates needed people in the industry if they were to get people in the public sphere “to care about this stuff” (I will turn to the issue of affect and “care” in Chapter Eight). Courting Hollywood’s storytellers wasn’t just about accessing the clout and popularity of television, therefore, it was also about utilizing the skillset of professional writers to emplot the issues about which academics and activists sought change. With Hollywood’s help, “it’s a story,” and “not a statistic.” This was essential because only stories “can really work” — a foundational assumption driving the narrative theory of social change.

Many of the people I talked to expressed, like this public health professional, the notion that certain kinds of information — certain kinds of topics — *resisted* narrativization, and must be coaxed or masterfully positioned in stories. Chronic, systemic societal issues were these kinds of topics, they told me. Poverty, racial injustice, misogyny, homophobia, and immigration were these kinds of issues, as were the social determinants of juvenile diabetes and childhood obesity, the health effects of environmental racism, or the differential health outcomes for people without documented citizen status. These kinds of issues, these facts and realities, must be rendered *story* in order to have "impact," but not just anyone could narrativize these chronic problems effectively because they were not easily emplotted. Hollywood's storytellers were thought to possess the skills that would transform these intractable problems into the hoped-for popular media that could create broad and widespread support for change.

Thus, "social impact media" professionals thought of themselves as being, as they put it, in the "inspiration business." They wanted to "inspire" audiences; this required that they "inspire" writers who in turn could inspire audiences. It was thought that Hollywood's "master storytellers" would be inspired if they came into experiential contact with the issues. Since it was, as I've mentioned, taboo to "pitch storylines,"[146] advocates had more indirect workarounds for influencing writers. They enlisted the help of "real people" who told their "real stories." They took writers on fieldtrips to experience what one advocate referred to as "real places, real communities, and real situations" (as some promotional materials put it). Advocates sought to "give writers the grit of real life" that could be overwhelming on its face but which, in turn, could be emplotted by Hollywood's storytellers. This work of narrative transformation would make the

[146] I have theorized in a previous chapter that this taboo against "pitching" was partly about eliding the role of economic capital in popular story-making. Also, perhaps this opposition to pitching was about keeping "inspiration" open for writers, resisting directives that would close off narrative possibilities. Perhaps writers needed to feel as though they could step in and unfold their own narrative agendas, rather than simply reproducing a Center-provided story.

difference between a problem that seemed “too big for anybody to understand without a public health degree” (as another advocate put it) and a problem that could be encountered in a television episode.

From Bleak & Fragmented to Hopeful and Coherent

Despite the advocates’ constant use of academic researchers and experts, they unrelentingly devalued the communicative practices through which research tends to be disseminated. Facts, figures, academic language and research findings were universally considered by advocates to be inadequate for inspiring writers and motivating audiences to engage in social issues (recall the advocate who self-mockingly referred to publishing research in “journals that three people read”). But advocates also considered some kinds of *stories* to be ineffective and uninspiring. If they took on a certain negative tone, they were thought to lose their potency. Stories were a “turnoff” when they were too bleak, too hopeless, too grim or made the problem seem “too large.” Advocates very actively attempted to guard against this. Just as styles of E-E that over-educated or proselytized were thought to have been a detriment to well-meaning public health campaigns, hopeless and grim stories were considered to be dangerous to storytelling for social change as an endeavor.

Several times, advocates I interviewed expressed irritation and frustration about a proliferation of “depressing documentaries” on the topics they cared about. Depictions of what they deemed “sensationalistic suffering” and “poverty porn” were thought to poison the public well, engendering only despair and lethargy in their viewers rather than energy for “positive social change.” The Center was careful to differentiate itself from such representations and always made a point of stating, in funding proposals, public texts or presentations to stakeholders, that

they foregrounded “solutions” and “inspiring” content about “what works” in creating a better world. As framed in one such text, the Center insured that “every story of real-life victims” would be balanced by “stories of safe and supportive resources that are changing lives.”

At Center events, every large, macro-scale social issue represented by an academic’s case study was balanced by someone who could offer an individual story of recovery and restoration, or, as one person’s introduction deemed it, “your story of hope and resilience.” The “real people” who were asked to provide these stories (as well as the advocates who recruited them) often expressed to writers that they would like to see more positive, uplifting depictions of social issues and the people impacted by them. For example, a young transwoman sat on a panel the Center sponsored at the Writers Guild on issues related to the health and well-being of people identifying as trans and gender non-binary. During the question and answer period that evening, an audience member asked this panelist about what kinds of trans characters and storylines she would like to see on TV. She replied:

1 LB It’s mainly like-
2 I feel like there’s two things like,
3 if it’s a trans adult,
4 they’re a sex worker.
5 Or if it’s a trans youth,
6 they’re an emotional emo kid,
7 who doesn’t know how to come out. ((audience laughter)).
8 And I- ((audience laughter))
9 And I just wanna say that um myself?
10 I don’t see myself as an emotional emo kid who’s cutting themselves and trying to commit suicide every twelve seconds,
11 I see myself as confident preppy young woman.
12 And the media and movies they mainly show the struggles that trans people have?

Here, we can see a preference for positive, healthy depictions of trans people over depictions of “the struggles that trans people have.” Stories about “sex worker[s],” kids who “[don’t] know

how to come out," or an "emotional emo kid who's cutting themselves and trying to commit suicide every twelve seconds" are clearly dispreferred. What about a "confident preppy young woman"? The implication is that this kind of positive, hopeful depiction would be better for the cause than calling attention to the difficult experiences and disproportionately bad outcomes that befall trans-identified adults and youth.

I frequently encountered the idea that narratives of trouble and suffering, if they were to be impactful and make a difference, must also contain their opposite. They must also depict the resolution and redemption that were thought to "inspire" viewers. One advocate told me,

1 A2 We will always present stories,
2 that reveal pathways for productive action.
3 We present characters that model compassion and effective advocacy.
4 The story is the problem.
5 If 99% of the story is about how bad things are and then we say,
6 go to our website and do something about it,
7 if the solution part of it is left to the very end,
8 or in some "call your Senator" type one-off,
9 then we haven't done our work.
10 The story needs to have the solution in it.

This person asserts that stories should "reveal pathways for productive action," and characters needed to "model compassion and effective advocacy" rather than simply portraying the social problem itself. The idea is that if the story is about "how bad things are" but the "solution part" is just a "one-off," audiences will become dispirited. "The story needs to have the solution in it."[147]

This focus on presenting narrative solutions for bleak predicaments seemed to be increasing toward the end of my fieldwork. "Action steps" and "pathways to action" were increasingly being foregrounded in Center proposals as well as other related organizations'

[147] These kinds of "solutions" were differentiated from specific directives/moral demands that might be made on viewers – the "solution" here is not an action step, but a narrative resolution or moment of character growth.

public-facing discourses.[148] Advocates perceived that even very difficult topics needed to be presented to writers in a more solutions-focused way. This meant, at times, that even the "real stories by real people" needed to be adjusted and massaged to present the most hopeful and coherent picture for audiences. Even when "real people" weren't coached in this direction explicitly, they appeared to sense that this was what was being asked of them. After a consultation between a writing team and an undocumented student who was telling her story, for example, the student remarked to me in private, "you may have noticed that I didn't tell them that I'm queer, too." I explained that yes, I had noticed, and I asked her why that was. She told me,

1 DS It's like oh,
2 you're undocumented?
3 Oh you're a Dreamer,
4 you're getting your education,
5 you're overcoming those barriers?
6 We got you,
7 we got you,
8 they're coming along with that.
9 But then you throw in the part about being *queer* and it's like,
10 whoa whoa whoa now,
11 now the story is flying apart or something,
12 now they're not with you anymore,
13 now they can't hold it down.
14 They're all like,
15 what story is this?

Here, the complexity of intersectional identities was considered to be too big of a challenge to the coherence of a story that was "about" overcoming the barriers of citizenship status through

[148] This is outside of the scope of this study, but I have wondered if this pattern in SIS is part of a broader movement toward "positivity" in the social justice industry and other fields that seek to analyze or address social problems, including things like the Solutions Journalism Network, nonprofit discourse on "strengths-based interventions," academic obsession with "resilience," and the "anthropology of the good" and its associated critiques (e.g., David Harper and Ewen Speed, "Uncovering Recovery: The Resistible Rise of Recovery and Resilience," in *De-Medicalizing Misery II,* eds. Ewen Speed, Joanna Moncrieff, and Mark Rapley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Jonathan Joseph, "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach," *Resilience* 1, no. 1 (2013): 38-52; Danny MacKinnon and Kate Driscoll Derickson, "From Resilience to Resourcefulness: A Critique of Resilience Policy and Activism," *Progress in Human Geography* 37, no. 2 (2013): 253-270; Robbins, "Beyond the Suffering Subject." What are we to make of this stubborn turn toward the "good" in our efforts to address the bad?

education and the DACA program. This person's DACA status and her pursuit of education were the inspiring solution that would inspire others; everyone could work with that ("we got you, we got you"). To add queerness to the narrative would be to fragment it ("now the story is flying apart or something"). It was as though acknowledging another layer of vulnerability would have undermined the listening writers' sense that there was an available solution to this woman's marginalized status. This would have compromised their investment in her story ("now they're not with you anymore"). The goal was therefore to depict social problems and painful experiences but with care not to make social problems seem *too* complex, *too* problematic or experiences *too* painful (or too painful for too long, venturing into troubling chronicity or a sense of intractability).

From Othering to Humanizing & Relatable

All of the consulting experts who worked with the Center were coached to offer information and expertise as narratively as possible but without ever "pitching storylines." They were asked to tell stories from their own experience with patients, to share narratives that exemplified research problems, or to offer the stories of research participants as a way of "humanizing" whatever issue was at hand. Although "content experts" were being consulted by writers *as experts*, they were asked not to communicate *too much* like experts. As one research scientist joked with us before a phone call with writers, "soooooo...basically, you guys just want an expert who doesn't talk like an expert?" An eruption of knowing laughter confirmed that this was, indeed, the case, and that everyone in the room was quite aware of the contradictions layered into the ask.

Experts' expertise was highly valued; they possessed information desired by writers seeking consultation. One of the Center's primary activities, after all, was match-making between expert-seekers and experts, serving as a "bridge between the world of entertainment and the world of research" (as one mission statement draft phrased it). The nature of the content that experts offered and the way it was communicated, however, were considered to be too alienating on their own terms. What experts offered and how they offered it needed to be softened, edited of jargon and made relatable. This was the primary task of the entertainment advocates, who participated in consultations and smoothed over moments of impasse by encouraging experts to return to real-world examples when they deviated from their case studies and into more fragmented, formal, fact-focused or distancing ways of answering questions. At times, Center staff also had to serve this function at events when they perceived that experts were in danger of losing their audiences.

At the same event about learning and attention disorders where one expert presented the case of "Ted," a medical doctor who specialized in children's language-based and reading-related developmental issues had been invited to make a presentation. I had been present when Center staff had briefed him on what they had in mind, and they had provided their usual coaching: suggesting that he orient to why this issue *matters* for people, that he avoid overly technical language, that he use a case study or personal story to explain the material, and that he not only explain the problem, but also tell the audience about what he thought could make this issue better. The day of the event, however, the doctor arrived at the venue with a stack of handouts that he wanted to be distributed to the audience, including a diagram of the brain. One advocate, gesturing toward the handout, sighed to me, "they just can't help themselves." It seemed this was a presentation that going to require some translation:

DR=doctor
AV=advocate

AUD=audience

1 DR So the reason that this is important and matters.
2 Is enriching the language environment for the child is critical for overcoming or preventing some of these outcomes.
3 There is a major difference that we often don't think about between listening and talking on the one side and reading and writing on the other.
4 We're wired to talk and listen?
5 We are not wired to read.
6 Now what this-
7 you know you don't-
8 babies don't need to go to school to perceive phonemes.
9 They just need to be talked to a lot,
10 and then the statistical learning algorithms in the brain they create a lexicon they-
11 they enrich and the child develops.
12 Some of them don't but most of them do.
14 Reading on the other hand,
15 there is no specialized part of the brain for reading.
16 And, so. [pulls out diagram]
17 If you look at this picture in the left hemisphere [you'll see,
18 AV [show them which picture]
19 DR so this is a lateral sagittal view of the brain,
20 if you look at these regions in what are called the [inferior frontal and temporal [lobe
21 AUD [((laughter))
22 AV [((laughter))
22 DR Details don't matter [haha
23 AUD [((light laugher))
24 AV So wait,
25 parts of our brains grow better if people talk to us a lot?
26 DR Yes, in a sense-
27 AV And that's the enriching environment?

The doctor seems to starts off well enough, gesturing toward "the reason that this matters" and pulling in what might be necessary for "overcoming or preventing some of these outcomes." His language about being "wired to talk and to listen" is accessible enough, but once he crosses over to "phonemes," "statistical learning algorithm[s] in the brain," and a "lexicon," he has begun to go down a path the advocate would prefer to avoid. The advocate's gentle reminder to "show

them which picture" is a reminder to scaffold the information on offer, and the subsequent light laughter on the part of the audience and the advocate are signals that the expert has crossed over into unrelatable, alienating territory. The advocate's rephrasings, in layperson's language, with question intonation ("so wait, parts of our brain…") and performative naiveté in the form of ostensible requests for clarification ("that's the enriching environment?"), are a gentle effort to get things back on track.[149]

In doing this kind of communicative work, the advocates' aim was multi-layered. The experts' offerings had to be made as relatable as possible, but the end-goal was for these things to be made more relatable still; the topics were to be further transformed by Hollywood's professional storytellers into "the most entertaining, relevant, and realistic storylines possible" (as language from a grant proposal put it). But advocates and experts sometimes had their doubts about whether the process of rendering information relatable or the process of "humanizing" issues corrupted some of the accuracy or political potency of information. One consulting epidemiologist told me, irritably, after a follow-up call with a writers' room she'd already consulted with once,

1 DR Listen,
2 by the time they do whatever they're going to do with it,
3 it's for the story,
4 in the end,
5 it won't be technically correct but maybe it's better than nothing,
6 or maybe it's not.
7 But next time they can talk to my intern.

Here, this expert was clearly aware of the kinds of transformations of information ("whatever they're going to do with it") that might be involved in integrating her expert content narratively "for the story." She wasn't so sure it would be worth it when it came to the public health benefits

[149] Recall the notion of the outreach person as a "culture broker" who was thought to need to posess special communicative competencies – this is an example of such communicative competency and brokering in action.

of her donated time and expert knowledge. It might be "better than nothing," but then again, "maybe it's not." In the end, this expert made it clear that she would be referring future requests for consultation to her intern: she was done.

The previous examples involved the "relatability" of *information* and ways that advocates tried to coax relatable language from experts, who could easily alienate writers with their expert discourses. Advocates were also interested in "humanizing" depictions of *people,* however, (recall: "personalizing" the issue). This could usually be accomplished by presenting people who provided first-person accounts; the "real person" immediately humanized the topic for writers where the expert may have been more distancing. But I talked to people involved in social impact storytelling who had serious doubts about "humanizing" as a project. One person I interviewed, a man who self-identified as a "media activist," wondered whether in seeking out humanizing, relatable narratives, advocates were "sugarcoating" things. He asserted,

1 BP When you do that it's like,
2 you make them too good?
3 Like it can't just be the one black guy who isn't a thug or,
4 um,
5 maybe he is a thug you know?
6 But he still deserves a life?

This activist expressed worry that the foregrounding of virtuous, easily-relatable characters makes them "too good." His concern was that this would make audiences expect that *only* virtuous, relatable, characters deserved justice; only these kinds of characters were fully human. "Maybe he is a thug," but "he still deserves a life." In pursuing the depictions of only "too good" characters, the danger is that only the "too good" person will seem to merit justice-enhancing redress or a good life in our communities. Efforts to make topics relatable and humanizing therefore came with associated costs.

Theoretical Implications

As I have referenced several times throughout the dissertation, a rich vein of research in the social sciences, particularly in medical, linguistic and psychocultural anthropology, establishes that narrative is used by cultures all over the globe to structure and restructure human orientations to the world and ourselves in it, including endowing meaning upon the unfolding experience of our own suffering or affectively and cognitively reorienting us to the experiences of others.[150] We use narrative to infuse happenings with meaning, to orient ourselves and others to possible futures, to structure suspense and anticipation, to emplot past experiences, to contest or congeal our social identities, and to communicate our stances toward events and people.[151] It is little wonder that early E-E advocates and their successors have attempted to mobilize the power of storytelling in entertainment media to affect personal and collective change, believing that it can accomplish increased persuasive reach and increased depth of public responses to social issues — even social transformation on such issues.

Yet, decades of empirical research and theorizing about narrative have also pointed to what is *not* well-represented by narratives and what kinds of experiences are frequently excluded by bureaucratic and institutional contexts that demand specific *kinds* of narratives from us. Anthropologists and philosophers have also noted the dangers of social and political contexts where narratives are put to use for social control, where people in power may disenfranchise those who do not conform to narrative expectations, or where narrative breakdowns may equate to compromised healing, discarded or marginalized human subjectivities and experiences, or the

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[150] E.g. Csordas, *The Sacred Self*; Kirmayer, "Healing and the Invention of Metaphor"; Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*; Mattingly, *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots*; Moerman & Jonas, "Deconstructing the Placebo Effect"; Scheff *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual and Drama*.

[151] E.g. Garro, "Narrating Troubling Experiences"; Good, *Medicine, Rationality, and Experience*; Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*; Mattingly, *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots*; Capps & Ochs, *Constructing Panic*; Throop, "Latitudes of Loss."

failure to recognize certain human beings as being valid subjects at all.[152] In our enthusiasm and wonder at the power of narrative to make and remake us, we routinely neglect to attend to the *obligatory* aspects of narrative, failing to observe how storytelling often is (or has become) a compulsory modality for being or becoming a legible subject (who therefore receives a legible subject's life-sustaining benefits).

"Social impact storytelling" is a professional culture in which narratives are spoken about with a marked absence of critique. Instead, SIS takes up the narrativization of issues as a *requirement* for achieving impactful social change on these issues, therefore urging more and more subjects, topics, and experiences into the narrative sphere. It cherishes the narrativization of everything, rather than examining or challenging the premises upon which this need for narrativization is organized. The following sections will explore some of the theoretical implications of this, and will more directly examine the consequences of such unbridled demands for narrative within a narrative economy.

Visibility, Regulation, & Reification

Part of what I have tried to describe in the previous chapters is how SIS professionals and their colleagues imagined the function of particular kinds of stories in a narrative economy. I have

[152] E.g. Beneduce, "The Moral Economy of Lying"; Charles L. Briggs, *Stories in the Time of Cholera: Racial Profiling During a Medical Nightmare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); E. Summerson Carr, "'Secrets keep you sick': Metalinguistic Labor in a Drug Treatment Program for Homeless Women," *Language in Society* 35, no. 5 (2006): 631-653; Didier Fassin and Estelle d'Halluin, "The Truth from the Body: Medical Certificates as Ultimate Evidence for Asylum Seekers," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 4 (2005): 597-608; Linda Garro, "Chronic Illness and the Construction of Narrative," in *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*, eds. Mary-Jo Delvichio-Good, Paul E. Brodwin, Byron J. Good, and Arthur Kleinman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Linda Garro, "Narrative Representations of Chronic Illness Experience: Cultural Models of Illness, Mind, and Body in Stories Concerning the Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ)," *Social Science & Medicine* 38, no. 6 (1994): 775-788; Byron J. Good, "A Body in Pain — The Making of a World of Chronic Pain," in *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*, eds. Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, Paul E. Brodwin, Byron J. Good, and Arthur Kleinman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Elaine Scarry, *Resisting Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," in *Narrative, Philosophy and Life*, ed. Allen Speight, 11-31 (New York: Springer, 2015).

discussed how various stakeholders participated or were asked to participate in this economy, and I have described some of the communicative pressures entailed in their participation. Much of what I have talked about thus far can be understood as pertaining to issues of visibility, representation, and legibility; these are often presented as primary goals of popular storytelling. People interested in using media for social transformation ask: how do we make issues more visible and legible to and for publics? What kinds of representation will incite and inspire desired responses from audiences? How do we render visible that which has been marginalized or invisibilized by oppressive forces, and how do we represent social dynamics that have been previously overlooked?

Throughout my time in the field, I was struck by how universally advocates and people involved in social impact storytelling appeared to prize representation and visibility. Media depictions "raised awareness," and social impact storytelling professionals were actively trying to inspire writers to engage in the work of raising awareness, and to make visible the invisible. Theoretically, however, "visibility" can be understood as a liability as much as a strength. From Foucault, for example, we could gather that when a topic is made "visible" — or a certain kind of subject is made "visible" — this exposes that phenomenon to regulatory power.[153] Subjects may voluntarily conscript their subjectivity to this regulatory power, and it may be a softer substitute for direct state violence, but it is coercive and restrictive nonetheless. From Foucault and others, too, we see that some forms of power are based on the regulation/modulation of subjects rather than the direct exertion of power or the *exclusion* of subjects from participation.[154] It is interesting to think about narrative exclusions and inclusions within this framework. This perspective calls

[153] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. L.H. Martin, H. Gutman, and P.H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

[154] E.g. Foucault , "Technologies of the Self"; Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (Florence: Taylor & Frances/Routledge, 1990); Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

into question the activity of making the "invisible" or untold into the told/visible (the "giving voice" function of "storytelling for social change"). Instead of being a movement toward justice and recognition, it can be seen to constitute a sort of exposure to regulatory violence, conscripting these "lived lives" into a regulatory domain, the public sphere.

Joan Scott describes a sort of academic compulsion to document and discover the overlooked, and asserts that historical narrative, especially, has been used as a tool in the service of that effort. She critiques the ubiquitous notion that to be overlooked is to be oppressed, while to be included/seen is to experience justice. She questions this taken-for-granted notion, and challenges us to look, instead, at what such representations are good for and what they are structuring. She observes the routine privileging of representations "from the margins" that seem to challenge or expose the "hegemonic constructions of social worlds" and critiques our pleasure in and cherishing of "documenting the experience of others."[155] I think it is reasonable to think about whether "social impact storytelling" is up to something similar to the "historians of difference" Scott describes, and that Scott's critiques are therefore useful in analyzing the implications of SIS. After all, SIS advocates are certainly interested in "documenting the experience of others," and are offering up material "from the margins" (recall: "the edgiest most interesting topics we can find"). Material was prized when it was new, previously-unheard, and exotic, thereby challenging Hollywood's "hegemonic constructions" (even as advocates sought the inclusion of topics in these hegemonic cultural constructions)

Scott's assertion is that representation tends to disguise the praxis that organizes it.[156] She suggests that in an eagerness to include or recuperate lost/invisible subjects and experiences within our representative machinery (i.e., within a narrative economy), there is little examination

[155] Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 776.

[156] Ibid., 777.

of the contexts that demand specific forms of exclusion and inclusion in the first place. Instead, the (formerly) excluded are "taken as self-evident" and reified, their differences naturalized, in the process of representing them. This kind of maneuver invites "returns to foundations even by anti-foundationalists," reifying the original premises upon which inclusion and exclusion were adjudicated in the first place.[157] In this particular context, the *experiences* of invisible subjects are sought out and included. Experience becomes the ground upon which representation is authenticated, and exclusion and difference become the criteria by which inclusion is demanded. But throughout this process, *neither* experience nor difference; neither marginality nor inclusion (or representation) are actually interrogated in and of themselves. Scott notes that Frederic Jameson has described this process as "some extreme form of the return of the repressed"in academia wherein, paradoxically, "those most open to interpretive innovation" become the most "ardent defenders of attending to experience."[158] Marginalized, experiencing historical subjects are eagerly sought because their representation is believed to critique history from the margins; meanwhile, marginalization, experiencing, subjectivization, and historical representation themselves are reinforced and reified.

The process Scott describes is strikingly similar, I believe, to the hunger within SIS and Hollywood's narrative economy for the "real person" and their "experiences" to be narrativized and *told* — for these to enter the narrative economy. Throughout my fieldwork, I never heard anyone wonder about why unvoiced experiences and untold stories were so compelling or what conditions might make their representation so necessary. The benefit and validity of previously-unrepresented experiences being rendered story were absolutely taken for granted. This is consistent with Scott's remarks that "experience" functions as the unquestioned "ontological

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[157] Ibid., 780.

[158] Ibid.

foundation" of personhood, a reified category that shores up old essentialisms.[159] But, I'd add, in my field sites experience was only thought of as foundational in this way *if someone has narrated it*, if it enters into the public realm and is represented/narrativized and consumed. Therefore, great urgency accrued to public narrative representation of experiences; this was the "ontological foundation" of personhood and the condition upon which the very categories of person became real.

Scott also talks about the "strategic use of positivist essentialism,"[160] which is important to address here given the highly strategic nature of social impact storytelling advocacy and its efforts after certain inclusions and specific narrative transformations. Let's assume that everyone involved in the clamor to have new stories/issues narrativized by Hollywood knows well enough that popular narratives may shape and misshape their "experiences," that these experiences will change and become alienated from their contexts as they become commodified, etc. Certainly, consulting experts were aware that Hollywood's storytellers would likely twist and reposition content for their own narrative purposes. Let's assume that for those engaging in this work, it is worth it; reifying certain narratives and certain ways of organizing experience is strategically essential. Take the example of the young DACA recipient who told her story to a group of writers, yet elided her queer identity. She strategically backgrounded the complexity of her intersectional identities and foregrounded only her immigration story; she did so in the hopes of inspiring increased representation of undocumented youth in Hollywood. But there were costs associated with this strategic essentialism, and a rather important part of her world was refused or disavowed in this production of an account. It is essential to ask, therefore, what is foreclosed in

[159] Ibid., 786.

[160] Ibid.,791.

the act of “giving voice”? What is sacrificed in offering one’s story (or one’s issues) for translation into broad-reaching entertainment content?

For example, there was little to no serious consideration among social impact media advocates of who owns the *means* of visibility in a narrative economy that demands and agitates so convincingly for visibility. Even “revolutionary” communication is now disseminated through corporate channels, after all. Soloway needs trans “lived lives” (as they put it) to make their award-winning television series and agues compellingly for the show changing popular perceptions of trans subjects. But do we imagine that trans people share in Amazon’s profits? Most of us are willing to entertain the idea that increased (humanizing) media representation at least affords marginalized subjects some *symbolic* privileges (though it is difficult/impossible to find persuasive empirical evidence of this, it is equally difficult to discount). Perhaps these symbolic privileges translate into economic privileges, perhaps not. Political philosophers have argued passionately over the relative justice-enhancing impact of recognition-based versus redistribution-based movements and policies.[161] SIS advocates, though, were deeply and uncritically invested in the notion that narrative practices were capable of changing entrenched and unjust social structures. They were unquestioningly committed to the idea that as previously unvoiced and unknown material enters into the narrative economy, previously dishonored or disavowed subjectivities accrued value and legitimacy.

I would like to argue for wariness about this notion, especially given the way I observed “story” being picked up and mobilized during my research. I think we may have gone too far (as least in the academy) in our sense of a contemporary postmodern ideology that privileges, produces and recognizes fragmentary, fluid, decentered subjects. The characteristics of

[161] Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics”; Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking Recognition,” *New Left Review* 3 (2000): 107-114.

story/narrative that are being/have been taken up in my field sites were very much more like the grand narratives that supposedly died after the postmodern revolution than the postmodern formations that championed fluidity, fragmentation, and creative self-fashioning. They are, instead, stories of heroic redemptions, rags to riches, recoveries; subjectivities "humanized" only to the extent that they can participate fully in narrative genres and reproduce them. Fragmented or hopeless narrative, or narratives of chronicity that stammered in an effort to account for the violence of everyday life, were discarded, after all. It was less, then, that our most dishonored or disavowed subjects entered into the narrative economy and challenged popular understanding of these – it was more that such subjects were transformed as a condition of their inclusion. Narrativity and narrative structure became hegemonic, here.

The Exclusion of Chronicity, Fragmentary "Experience," and Non-Narrative "Subjects"

Many anthropologists have noted that certain kinds of experiences, especially certain kinds of *temporal* experiences, challenge narrativity. Chronicity, pain, and trauma, in particular, have been shown to fragment processes of story-making and representation.[162] Similarly, systemic social and cultural problems and chronic oppression don't make for good TV, don't make a "good story" (at least without being reductionistic, individualizing, etc.). This means that the complex forces, structural factors and social determinants of health and wellbeing — the very factors the people with whom I worked were trying to get into Hollywood's narratives — are the ones that get urged out of conversations with Hollywood's culture makers or reshaped as other kinds of problems. The "best" stories — the most emplotted, the most gripping — just aren't going to be

[162] E.g. Garro, "Narrative Representations of Chronic Illness Experience"; Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*; Mattingly, *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots*; C. Jason Throop, "From Pain to Virtue: Dysphoric Sensations and Moral Sensibilities in Yap (Waqab), Federated States of Micronesia," *Journal of Transcultural Psychiatry* 45, no. 2 (2008): 253- 286.

able to withstand the pressure from the fragmenting enormity of the real. There was a pervasive sense among SIS professionals of the "too-much-ness" of the problems SIS wanted most to narrativize; narrativization itself was a process by which the too-much-ness was worked over and rendered approachable.

Narrative theorists and philosophers have often critiqued language itself when they attempt to contend with that which is non-narrative, that which is in excess of narrative.[163] I believe that this is a mistake, and confuses problems/limitations or constraints within communicative contexts (narrative economies) with limitations in the communicative system itself.[164] I would like to argue that there is not a problem with language or communicative systems per se, but that the "problem" lies within a feature of the social context of language *use* and narrative production. When we talk about certain kinds of experiences resisting language, or language being unable to capture certain kinds of experiences, are we often just talking about the ways certain things resist the kinds of representation or narrativization we *prefer*? Perhaps it would be more accurate to observe that certain kinds of experiences do not conform to contextual demands for certain kinds of narratives or certain kinds of referentiality. Or, perhaps, it might be more interesting to wonder about the ways that potentially-narrating/referential subjects might *prefer* not to represent themselves in the context of a specific demand, or might only do so under duress.

There are a multitude of contexts that constrict and confine what narratives can be, or demand and mandate specific narrative productions. Researchers have observed these restrictions

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[163] I.e. Scarry, The Body in Pain; Scarry, *Resisting Representation.*

[164] Elinor Ochs (2012) has argued against reductionist judgments of language as an impoverished communicative system and has argued against false and entrenched perceived divisions between "language" and "experience." Such entrenched judgments about the capacities of language are also relevant here. Rather than critique language as "insufficient" to intersubjectively communicate about certain phenomena, however, I would shift focus and judgment to limitations in the social context of language use and demands for *certain* kinds of linguistic productions (i.e., narrative rather than non-narrative, etc.).

and demands in the adjudication of asylum cases, addiction treatment, and more.[165] What are frequently demanded of subjects in these contexts are specific, coherent, emplotted narratives, even from those who have experienced world-destroying or self-fragmenting pain and trauma.[166] These should also be narratives that can be repeated consistently across contexts and interlocutors, but do not become too polished or "canned" as they are subjected to practice and repetition.[167] These are tall orders under the best of conditions, but researchers in many social contexts note that access to life-sustaining resources is based on people's conforming or not conforming to these very constricted versions of what narratives can be. Subjects who resist or refuse (or simply are unable) to comply with narrative expectations are often relegated to the margins of society, refused the status of personhood, rejected from political protections and legal validity, denied medical treatment, excluded from social participation, etc.[168] Frequently, what is demanded is a specific, coherent, emplotted narrative that features a protagonist with whom a listener can identify and empathize.

Though the *stakes* are very much different in Hollywood or in the "social impact media" sector than in asylum hearings or emergency rooms, I observed similar restrictions on participants' narrative representations in my field sites. Despite rhetoric about the liberatory

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[165] E.g. Beneduce, "The Moral Economy of Lying"; Carr, "'Secrets keep you sick'"; Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*; Fassin and d'Halluin, "The Truth from the Body"; Agnes Woolley, "Narrating the 'Asylum Story': Between Literary and Legal Storytelling," *Interventions* 19, no. 3 (2017): 376-394.

[166] James Dawes, "Atrocity and Interrogation," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 249-266.

[167] Natalie Nanasi, "Domestic Violence Asylum and the Perpetuation of the Victimization Narrative," *Ohio State Law Journal* 78 (2017): 733-768; Gillian Whitlock, "The Hospitality of Cyberspace: Mobilizing Asylum Seeker Testimony Online," *Biography* 38, no. 2 (2015): 245-266.

[168] Hadi Nicholas Deeb, "Constructing Restructuring: Legal Narrative, Language Ideology, and the Financial Rehabilitation of Iraq," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 73, no. 4 (2010): 109-128; Robert R. Desjarlais, *Shelter Blues: Sanity and Selfhood Among the Homeless* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Marcia Inhorn, Arthur Kleinman, Rachel Hall-Clifford, Nida Hasanat, Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli, Carla Manchira, Steve Ferzacca, et al., *Chronic Conditions, Fluid States: Chronicity and the Anthropology of Illness* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

potential of narratives, there were specific narrative demands in the communities where I circulated that paradoxically constrained political possibilities. This was very clear in the ways that professional advocates constrained and directed the ways that experts, activists, and "real people" depicted topics. In each case, there was always the threat that something would be communicated in excess of the narratives that were preferred. Participants in this narrative economy had to be trained and coached not to share or open to this excess, to stick to the "scripts" and the preferred ways of representing social problems. Hollywood is frequently critiqued for not contending "with all the complexity" of certain issues, but is it possible that popular narrative just simply isn't the format for these kinds of explorations/contentions? Or that this narrative economy simply rejects the inclusion of more fragmentary, uncertain, sprawling representations?

All of the aforementioned authors have shown us that we should be wary when certain kinds of language are demanded in return for recognition or validity. We must always ask ourselves who has access to this language, who is assessing it, what kinds of experiences are invited or shaped by it, what shapes they take, etc. When *people* or *communities* lack narrative resources in a narrative economy, they are very much at risk.[169] But I think we might also wonder whether certain *issues* — perhaps the most intractable, systemic, chronic sort — are non-narrative, lack narrativity by nature (as narrativity is currently predominately understood). Or, conversely, perhaps they appear to us as intractable and chronic precisely *because* they are non-narrative. If so, given that narrative recognition is required for legitimacy, this presents a very challenging certain set of problems for those that seek to use stories to change the world.

[169] Briggs, *Stories in the Time of Cholera.*

Displacement, Dispossession, & Alienation in a Narrative Economy

I described in Chapter Five how there is a division of labor in SIS that differentiates between experiencer-storytellers, advocates, experts, expert-experiencers, and professional storytellers. But what I have not yet addressed is the way that this organization displaces stories from *both* their experiencers and their storytellers. This kind of displacement has political, financial, and theoretical implications; I will discuss three of these implications, here.

In *Humanitarian Reason*, Fassin analyzes the ways that legal frameworks have organized and assessed the legitimacy of experiences, accounts of experiences, and those delivering accounts of experiences.[170] He describes, from Agamben, the example of the "testis" versus the "superstes."[171] Here, a primary experiencer is the "superstes" — the event happened to them — whereas a secondary experiencer is the "testis" — they were witness to the event. Though both the testis and the superstes were *there*, they have differential epistemological authority over their accounts and operate under different kinds of evidentiary obligations. The testis derives authority from their exteriority and objectivity; they have first-hand understanding but were not *directly* impacted. The superstes, on the other hand, provides evidentiary proof of an event by the event's impact on their very person, sometimes by the very fact of their survival.

What is important for my purposes is that the superstes and her account have less perceived legitimacy than the testis; being so close to an event is seen to corrode objectivity. The idea is that the closer one is to an experience, the more fragmenting — and therefore more difficult to recount with accuracy. The testis, on the other hand, can recount — narrate, and is ethically obliged to do so on behalf of the superstes in contexts where authoritiatve accounts are

[170] Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason.*

[171] Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2004); Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*.

required.[172] Both the testis and the superstes have first-person access to the event and are producing first-person accounts. The testis, though, is thought to be able to distance themselves from first-personness enough to provide accounts "appropriate for the objectivity demanded by evidentiary discourses such as law and history."[173] The superstes, on the other hand, "is driven by a subjective impetus to bear witness," but faces institutional or authoritative contexts that are often "suspicious of the subjective authority claimed by the superstes."[174]

These distinctions are similar to the distinctions made in SIS activities between the "expert" and the "real person." The way credibility and legitimacy were assessed and distributed between these parties, however, was somewhat different in SIS than in the case of the "testis" and "superstes." On the one hand, the testis/expert was thought to have more authority than the superstes/"real person" because of their expert yet first-hand knowledge of an issue. They were positioned to "testify" on behalf of an experiencer and with more legitimacy. For example, when a doctor described the course of a disease she had treated in others, this account was perceived to have more factual grounding than the illness narrative of a "real person" who had experienced the disease. That said, these sorts of assessments were constantly fluctuating during my fieldwork. Often, "real people" had considerably more narrative capital than experts; experts' accounts were perceived as alienating and were understood to need to take on more first-personness in order to impact audiences. Also, some *topics* seemed to lend themselves to privileging the experiencer over the expert (especially regarding social issues); others, the expert witness (especially in science and medicine). That said, though, SIS advocates repeatedly asked experts to soften their objectivity, to make their accounts more subjective.

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[172] Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason.*

[173] Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 12.

[174] Ibid.

Moreover, there was a way in which the use of the "professional storyteller" revealed a fundamental distrust in the legitimacy and utility of accounts from *either* the expert or the experiencer. The TV writer was being asked to become a new kind of "testis," perhaps, one who was recruited to this role because of failings of other accounts. Like the humanitarian testis as described by Fassin,[175] Hollywood writers engaging with SIS were essentially being involved in narrating on-behalf-of vulnerable others; narrative on behalf of others was itself considered an intervention on behalf of the persons in need.[176] What was interesting about this was that in order for a writer to feel justified in "giving voice" to topics/experiences, they needed to be provided with *either* the first-hand experiential grounding of the superstes *or* the objective grounding of the testis. SIS's outreach attempted to provide writers with both, thereby transforming them into narrators with epistemological authority. But this also dislodged some of that authority from the expert and the experiencer themselves, who were no longer seen as capable of providing accounts that were viable enough (or credible enough?) to make a difference in the world. Experts and experiencers were alienated from their narratives once the professional storytellers began to speak for them. Fassin describes this process of alienation within the logic of the "humanitarian worker" and her accounts.[177] In Hollywood, though, this alienation took on another flavor – Hollywood writers were also literally *profiting* from telling others' stories, after all. Where was the line between the ally/voice-giver and the appropriator/exploiter?

I think it is useful, in the context of SIS, to think about the idea of narrative alienation. In Hollywood (and perhaps now elsewhere), your "story" can be commodified; it is your intellectual property (or affixed to your "personal brand" as a commodified form of personhood). Like your

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[175] Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason.*

[176] Dawes, "Atrocity and Interrogation."

[177] Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason.*

labor in the Marxist sense, your story is something that you can be alienated from, something from which your ownership can be split off in a capitalist narrative economy.[178] The entertainment industry has for many years made use of codified processes by which you can pry apart the person from his personal narrative: he can sell the rights, he can pitch his own story for sale.[179] The financial implications of these sorts of arrangements, however, are totally elided in the process of SIS. As I've already noted, SIS's vision of itself as working on behalf of social good requires that the unequal distribution of capital (either financial or cultural) not enter the picture in any explicit way. In SIS, then, the storyteller (or the expert) can also offer their account, free of charge, to "master storytellers" who will (hopefully) transform them in a way that, as Jill Soloway put it, makes the "real person" a "subject" rather than an object and confers "privileged protagonist" status upon them. The implication is that it is "privileged protagonist" status that is *just*, and that as more and more persons become or are seen as protagonists, the world will become a more just one.

Judith Butler, however, complicates the presumed luxuries of protagonist status when she discusses the inherent dispossession entailed in producing personal narrative and "giving an account of oneself."[180] Butler asserts that narrative coherence forecloses and disguises the "limits of knowability in oneself and others."[181] Coherent accounts "require a falsification" of sorts, and to hold someone to narrative — to demand that they produce narrative coherence in order to

[178] Hadi Nicholas Deeb, "Remixing Authorship: Copyright and Capital in Hollywood's New Media Age" (PhD Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2014).

[179] Ibid.

[180] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[181] Ibid., 63.

participate in ethical relation with others — constitutes a kind of violence.[182] I will return to some of these ideas in the following chapter when I discuss SIS as an ethical practice. But I think it is important to articulate that Butler's objection, here, is with compulsory/obligatory narrations of self, the kinds of accounts that bar or disguise the deep epistemological uncertainty involved in everyday life with others. Butler objects: "to say, as some do, that the self *must* be narrated…" reveals a "fear that the absence of narrative will spell a certain threat, a threat to life."[183] Self-narrations, then, become defenses against our unconscious awareness that we are the kind of subjects for whom self-mastery and mastery-of-others is not possible. We *cannot* know all that we appear/claim to know in our stories; whether we are testis, superstes, or master storytellers. We falsify, rather than acknowledge this unknowing when we tell our stories. In this, (coherent) narrative involves an inherent dispossession from the truth of our being and being-with-others (which is irreducibly unknown and open-ended).

In other words: I sell myself out when I tell my story. I do so both theoretically and structurally. In the first case, because of the impossibility of giving an account of myself without the inherent dispossession that narration requires. In the second case, because in doing so I participate in a narrative economy that purchases me. Crucially, in social impact media community and in the project of storytelling for social change, I observed a failure to critique or think about these sorts of limits and complications of narrative. There are plenty of criticisms about *which* narratives are not being included ("we need more storylines about women of color!") and arguments about the best/most useful narrative representations. But there was no critique of narrative as a technology for self-production or a technology that limits certain kinds of political

[182] Ibid.

[183] Ibid., 65.

and ethical possibilities. I hope that this chapter and subsequent chapters address this absence of thoughtful critique.

Narrative Demand

SIS participates in a narrative economy that generates and attempts to fulfill narrative demand. Narrative demand was intense and unrelenting in the context of my fieldwork, and I believe that the urgency of these demands was growing and has grown stronger, still, since the period of my fieldwork. The idea of "telling your story" as a political/productive act in and of itself comes out of a context where certain kinds of communication are required for political recognition. In a context where participation in a (capitalist) narrative economy is *essential*, where you cannot even become a subject without a story — you don't *count* unless you are participating in the narrative economy. You are not real unless you do it (or someone is doing it on your behalf). This is sort of a coercive condition for using your voice. The urgency of this telling, sharing, making story — it becomes, I believe, a *moral* urgency. To be good, one must not be silent; one must not fail to participate in this narrative economy. There is the imperative to tell stories to enter into ethical relationship with others, in order to be recognized as fully human and deserving of certain kinds of rights and privileges. But what if you do not have a "good story," or cannot make one, but you still need help? Or still deserve political and legal rights? What if you can't produce a story or the kind of story that will gain purchase in the narrative economy?

SIS was a part of a machinery around narrative that had a distinctly capitalist flavor in its hunger for expansion and insatiability for growth. There was a sense that SIS would not be done with its work until everyone and everything had been incorporated into the narrative economy of popular storytelling. There was no escape from having to "give an account of oneself," and to

have that account made public, in order to be real.[184] There was also the inescapability of the ethical possibility of promoting justice by producing certain kinds of accounts of/for others. This need to be accounted for and recounted by Hollywood meant that there was a constant stream of people, representing a staggeringly diverse array of interests, who were looking to boost or initiate popular representation of themselves or of those on whose behalf they worked. Over the time of my fieldwork, the Center fielded requests from people working on learning disabilities, undocumented immigration, healthy aging, displaced populations, reproductive health and justice, mass incarceration, palliative care, human and sex trafficking, pandemic illness, environmental racism, air pollution, plastics, food deserts, transgender health and wellbeing, and more. The people working on these issues wanted SIS advocates' help in appealing to the entertainment industry, in boosting the representation of their issues in popular media. They wanted, in Soloway's words, to be moved from the column of the "objects" into the column of the "privileged protagonists."

In a hegemonic narrative economy, judgments of communicative relevance and value are heavily weighted toward subjects and topics that have been or are being narrativized. It becomes necessary (or begins to seem to be necessary) for *all* topics and *all* subjects to make their way into narratives in order to be perceived as legitimate and possessing value. Subjects in this context are experiencing increasing pressure to be storytellers, lest they not be perceived as subjects at all. Topics and information must be formulated for consumption *narratively*, lest they not be consumed or processed at all. There was a certain urgency among those advocating for prosocial causes that they might be "left behind" if they did not make it into popular media. This was not just because funders with deep pockets were pivoting toward storytelling and the media (though they were), but also because of a growing sense (false sense, I believe) that the *only* mode of

[184] Ibid.

productive contemporary cultural intervention was through Hollywood and its stories. Story-based interventions were being funded at the expense of other kinds of interventions (recall how policy, "paper," and law were discursively devalued by participants).

Throughout my fieldwork I observed a growing, urgent, persistent demand for narrative representation and self-representation. Despite the seeming ubiquity of the demand to "tell your story" and the sense that one's life and one's concerns could not quite achieve legitimacy without narrative representation, I think we must continue to ask critical questions about narrativity: what it is doing, what we believe it is doing. We must continue to ask: what is narrative and telling your story good for? Who is it good for? Who demands it? Is telling your story, "giving voice" good for everyone and everything? It is our collective investment in commonsense ideas about narrative that binds us to the "narrative demand" — the compulsory narrativity, the sense that orienting to "the good" requires narrativity, and our idea that narrative is the "inescapable structural requirement of human agency."[185] What happens when we question the notion that a life can only take on the form of a good life, can only achieve an ethical character if it is gathered into narrative form?[186] Some have argued that this way of thinking about narrative constitutes "narrative imperialism."[187]

In the next chapter, I examine SIS as an ethical project and attempt to take seriously Galen Strawson's plaintive (if grumpy) plea that we allow for "other types of ethical personality" than the narrative type.[188] I would like to think more carefully about what might be pushed aside by a

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[185] Taylor (1989) quoted by Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," *Ratio (new series)* 17, no. 4 (2004): 452.

[186] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Alisdair McIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981).

[187] Paul John Eakin, "Narrative Identity and Narrative Imperialism: A Response to Galen Strawson and James Phelan," *Narrative* 14, no. 2 (2006): 180-187.

[188] Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 437.

conception of personal and public ethics that so intensely foregrounds narrative demands, and ask whether *other* constructions of experience and subjectivity might be not only ethical, but essential in charting a way forward that permits an openness to the kinds of social problems and experiences that so deeply challenge the SIS model.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Social Impact Storytelling as an Ethical Project

The previous chapters explored SIS as a narrative project, a practice embedded in a narrative economy that generates a demand for certain kinds of narratives and wherein participants seek to answer those narrative demands. This chapter will pivot slightly in order to consider SIS as an *ethical project* and will therefore enter into a conversation with an anthropology of ethics (or an anthropology of moralities). This chapter will also discuss the confluence/entanglement of narrative issues with ethical ones — both theoretically (in academic literature) and practically (in my field sites). I attempt to unpack the underlying logic of an ethics that privileges narrative encounters above other mode of ethical engagement, as this way of thinking about ethics governed the social impact storytelling scene and its investment in a narrative theory of social change. I argue that in these communities, narrative itself came to be conflated with "the good," and narrative practice came to be synonymous with ethical practice. This implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) devalued and foreclosed other modes of moral practice and ethical engagement that may have been important for the kind of social change advocates sought, as well as invoking predicaments that may not have been called up by other ways of understanding morality and/or working for the social good.

People in the professional community where I conducted fieldwork called their work by many names: social impact media, social impact storytelling, conscious media, entertainment for social change, entertainment-education, media advocacy, etc. But they all shared an interest in "social change," "making a difference," and working for a "better world," broadly defined. In this sense, their work was ethical work; it concerned itself with how to accomplish changes on behalf of the social good. Those interested in social impact storytelling share crucial interests with

academics interested in an anthropology of moralities: a concern over how ethical world-building happens, a sense (perhaps) that ethical world-building is imperative, and a curiosity about what kinds of conditions bring about more goodness in us as human subjects and cultural collectives; or how such subjects and collectives conceive of and assess their efforts after a good life. SIS professionals and researchers in the social sciences and humanities also share a mutual interest in the powers and properties of narrative to achieve individual and cultural change in particular, focusing on the ability of stories to ignite, augment, or sediment prosocial changes already underway.

Before getting into how I believe SIS professionals understood and conducted their narrative-centered work as an ethical practice, it is useful to outline some central tensions described by anthropologists interested in ethics and those interested in narrative. Each of the tensions I describe involves two poles, and I argue that they constitute a sort of useful scaffolding for understanding ethical practices' relation to narrative practices. This chapter will not attempt a synthesis of these positions, but will hopefully present a case for the productivity of occupying a middle ground or thinking towards an "otherwise" while holding the extremes of these positions in mind. Below, I will first sketch the four tensions, then circle back to explore the implications of each in more detail.

Theoretical Tendencies and Tensions

Joel Robbins has argued that anthropologists should inaugurate a rigorous "anthropology of the good," launching more comprehensive and deepened inquiries into "the different ways people organize their personal and collective lives in order to foster what they think of as

good."[189] Robbins, here, is naming and elaborating on what is often referred to as the "ethical turn" in anthropology. This ethical turn has generated many new debates and re-invigorated some old ones from anthropology's beginnings about the relationship between human agency and social control, subjective experiences and normative structures, the reproduction of norms and the sparking of social change. Laying out the history of debates in anthropology about morality/ethics, the nuances of distinctions made in various camps, and the philosophical progenitors and inheritors of these discussions is most definitely outside the realm of this chapter. However, I will pick up some of these conversations in order to characterize positions I consider especially relevant to the practice and theorization of SIS.

Cheryl Mattingly has outlined what she describes as two tendencies or positions that characterize those working in the context of this (recent) ethical turn anthropology: what she calls the poststructuralist/unfreedom approach and what she deems the first-person/humanist approach (Mattingly herself affiliates with the first-person/humanist perspective).[190] Mattingly points out that academics of both persuasions are attempting to add to or nuance Durkheimian notions about the moral as social "rules" or "norms" people obey.[191] In doing so, she argues, writers coalesce around two different tendencies regarding the space they give to (and faith they invest in) human agency, imagining, experiencing, and the detailed workings of our ordinary aspirations toward a good life. One orientation honors these first-person, subjective phenomena and their technologies; the other regards these same phenomena with concern and suspicion, asking whether they might be the troubling effects of regimes of power, or whether such orientations are socialized as

[189] Robbins, "Beyond the Suffering Subject," 457.

[190] Mattingly, "Two Virtue Ethics."

[191] Some argue that Durkheim gets an undeservedly bad rap in these conversations, and actually had a more nuanced/synthetic approach than he is often credited for (Fassin, "The Ethical Turn in Anthropology"; James Laidlaw, "The Undefined Work of Freedom: Foucault's Genealogy and the Anthropology of Ethics," in *Foucault Now: Current Perspectives in Foucault Studies*, ed. James D. Faubion (Boston: Polity Press, 2014).

mechanisms of control and persuasion. Those who subscribe to the poststructuralist/unfreedom position often see first-person/humanist orientations as a kind of false consciousness, as a denial of the way first-personness involves our submission to regulatory powers that shape and constitute what we come to think of as our experiences. Those who subscribe to a first-person/humanist perspective, on the other hand, often see poststructural/unfreedom approaches as depriving human subjects of their creativity and agency, failing to honor humans' capacities for innovation within structures and ignoring the unfolding vicissitudes of experience.

These two approaches are different from, but related to Jarrett Zigon's description of two ways of understanding ethics in the "wild."[192] Zigon points out that anthropologists have previously tended to think of "the moral" as something like "the social," involving systems of collective norms and the practices that sustain and reproduce these norms. He echoes some anthropologists, Robbins[193] among them, who have argued for more appreciation of subjects' "choice" and self-construction within these webs of collective norms. Zigon, however, wants to nuance this further, making a distinction between two modes of moral/ethical experience: on the one hand, there is our mostly unreflective practicing of ordinary norms; on the other, our reflective practices in moments of ethical "breakdown."[194] A "breakdown" brings that which operates in the background into the foreground, forcing/inciting a reflective consideration of the moral ordinary. From a phenomenological perspective, Zigon points out, this is much like the difference between Heidegger's notion of the "ready-to-hand" versus "present-to-hand." It is a notion that distinguishes between the familiar thing which, in use, is experienced as an

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[192] Zigon, "Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand." It seems important to note that in her article, Mattingly is talking about intellectual trends or modes of orienting to ethics within academic work, while Zigon is talking about human tendencies/modes of orienting to ethics "out there" in everyday life.

[193] Robbins, "Beyond the Suffering Subject."

[194] Zigon, "Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand."

unproblematic extension of our being and is not the target of inquiry or suspicion but which, in the context of a "breakdown," can instead be experienced as "present-to-hand" and can pull focus, tempting attention and curiosity, or inciting our noticing of its relationship to the given world. The reckoning that a "breakdown" demands may result in a recuperation of the normative way of doing things, or, through reflective engagement, may result in something new.

The tensions and tendencies I have described among those interested in the anthropology of ethics are related in interesting ways to tensions that have been explored by anthropologists researching narrative practices. For example, many scholars make a distinction between canonical/formulaic narrative repertoires, on the one hand, and more fluid, fragmentary, personally-inflected representations, on the other.[195] Ochs and Capps discuss this as the tension between coherence and authenticity: "Tellers are faced with a tension between a need to authentically render personal experiences and a need to apprehend them in a manner that aligns with what is familiar and acceptable to others."[196] Narrators face challenges when they attempt to construct narrative representations that reconcile sociocultural norms, generic plots, or "cultural templates" while also honoring their personal realities, which may not conform, or may be considerably more fragmentary ambiguous, or uncertain.[197] There is much at stake in these challenges, as narrators who have trouble drawing upon cultural plots or whose experiences do not conform easily to templates may have trouble being heard or understood by others, and may struggle to enter fully into the meaningful cultural life of their communities.

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[195] E.g., Michael Bamberg and Allyssa McCabe, eds. *Narrative Identity* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000); Alexandra Georgakopoulou, "Thinking Big with Small Stories in Narrative and Identity Analysis," *Narrative Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (2007): 122-130; Cheryl Mattingly, "Emergent Narratives," in *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*, eds. by Cheryl Mattingly and Linda C. Garro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[196] Ochs and Capps, *Living Narrative,* 222.

[197] Ibid., 206-7.

This tension between cultural templates and individual experience, in turn, is related to the relationship between a story's setting and its "unexpected event"; its backgrounded givenness versus its subjunctive mood. The structuring of this relation between has-been, could-be, and then-was is what constitutes plot. Narrators learn to produce anticipation in listeners (and share in this anticipation themselves) by creating a temporal organization that distinguishes between that which is considered contextually normative, expected, or ongoing and what is considered "tellable," significant, or novel.[198] This often involves the elaboration of "what was going on with us" until, specifically, there is the emotionally-charged and subjectively-significant reporting of "something that happened with *me*" (in a first-person narration, anyway). This is the event which, when positioned in temporal relationship with the setting, becomes an emplotted narrative episode. Narrative therefore structures, emplots, and calls upon norms to return us to the everyday — it formulates, organizes. Yet, narrative also opens us to unfolding possibilities, puts us in suspense, and takes us out of the everyday. Stories offer something other than the normative and habitual, proposing an otherwise to the unreflective everyday of their "setting."

It may be obvious where I am going here. While I do not want to collapse important distinctions between various positions or to construct a rigid binary between these tendencies, I think it is useful to think of narrative problems as entangled with ethical problems, and to consider that the tendencies-in-tension I've described in both anthropology's ethical turn and its narrative turn might share similar orientations to the world.[199] On the one hand, we have unfreedom, canonical structures, norms, unreflectiveness, coherence, the social, and the givenness that characterizes the ready-to-hand. On the other, we have first-personness, breakdowns,

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[198] Capps and Ochs, *Constructing Panic*; Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," in *On Narrative,* ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1980); Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*.

[199] Jarett Zigon, "Narratives," in *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, ed. Didier Fassin (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

authenticity that exceeds/escapes norms, the unexpected, and the sense of discovery that characterizes the present-to-hand.[200] My sense is that many of the social sciences' most spectacular intellectual gymnastics are in the service of recuperating a sense of human agency and creativity from within the unfreedom orientation, or, from the opposite pole, are attempts to account for power and the influence of systems and structures from within the first-person orientation. It seems obvious that an overemphasis on *either* pole is potentially problematic and involves certain costs, invisibilizing certain aspects of living in the world. How, then, can we understand narrative-based ethical practices such as SIS in the context of both of these orientations? Is it possible to do so without favoring one pole or the other?

SIS and Narrative Ethics

SIS is a project in search of "the good," and it is a profession that believes in using narratives as a tool for social change. This section therefore attempts to understand "social impact storytelling" as a narrative-based ethical practice. I think it is useful to hold in mind the sets of theoretical poles outlined above as I attempt to assess SIS's investment in various aspects of these perspectives at various moments, and how these perspectives shape the everyday practices of people involved in social impact/transformational media movements.

Ordinariness/Unreflective Norms versus Breakdown/Reflective Practice

On the one hand, the use of popular narratives to influence public health is an attempt to operate on/intervene into the public's sense of the "ordinary." Certainly, the original conception of entertainment-education initiatives was to do so. In fact, the whole idea of using popular entertainment to communicate health messages (rather than, or in conjunction with educational

[200] C. Jason Throop, "Articulating Experience," *Anthropological Theory* 3, no. 2 (2003): 219-241.

campaigns) is a gesture toward the presumed impact of indirectness.[201] The assumption was that popular narratives shaped the "unreflective everyday" of those who consumed them and that, therefore, intentional adjustments to these stories could potentially induct members of the public into *new* norms. Encounters with narratives that depicted other ordinary ways of living would, hopefully, prompt viewers to begin to conduct themselves with a different set of everyday rules and cultural expectations for the ways we go about our lives. Seeing enough characters practicing safe sex, for instance, would impact the sexual practices of viewers; it was imagined that this might be even *more* effective than directly addressing or topicalizing safe sex (where direct attempts at persuasion spark audience resistance — an issue I return to later in this chapter). Similarly, take the Harvard Alcohol Project (HAP), described in Chapter Three. HAP's goal was to achieve the widespread depiction of designated drivers within plotlines of existing television shows. The point of this initiative was not necessarily to spark the *conscious* deliberation of viewers about their driving or drinking behaviors (although it might do so for some). Instead, its aim was to make the "designated driver" an everyday, ready-to-hand concept. It aimed to change, in otherwise, our unreflective normative ethical rule-following around this particular issue — to create a "new normal" regarding drinking and driving.

On the other hand, though, SIS and E-E seek to prompt active ethical consideration of everyday action through re-framings of previously unconsidered or unreflective behavior. My fieldwork in the emerging landscape of social impact storytelling suggests to me that this is increasingly the goal of contemporary initiatives, and this shift constitutes a departure from the previous paradigm. Whereas old E-E paradigms were more interested in working in the realm of indirect influence, it is increasingly the goal of SIS to make audiences actively reflective and

[201] Also, as I've mentioned, many early challenges in E-E were related to different cultural standards for indirectness – what was subtle in one context was too heavy-handed in another, and failing to achieve sufficient "entertainment" value to distract from the "education" value meant the message would fail.

deliberative about unknown/unthought issues. Talk of “raising awareness” (a constant feature of SIS discourse) was a kind of shorthand, I think, for the operation of moving norms/themes/issues from the background to the foreground of public consciousness, from ready-to-hand to present-to-hand. The work was therefore less about influencing everyday behavior and more about prompting new kinds of ethical action, inciting people to reexamine their moral ordinary with fresh critical energy — something more like Zigon’s “breakdown”[202] — and to accomplish this through encounter with narrative in particular.

Some SIS professionals were concerned about this shift toward directness, however, and wondered if it was a strategy that could work long-term. One advocate explained to me that he had doubts about the overall sustainability of having writers *focus* on social issues in their stories, wondering about what he called “topic fatigue.” Topic fatigue was a fear when too many social causes were too prominent in entertainment content, therefore wearing down viewers and exhausting their attention, making them *less* likely to actually engage with prosocial topics (rather than more so). He therefore questioned the goal of achieving prominent positioning for topics in popular narratives, suggesting that more subtle methods might be in order or might be more useful and sustainable.

1 LA We try to hit home runs.
2 Try to make you think twice about everything.
3 A lot of times we try to hit home runs but maybe all we should do,
4 or all we have to do is hit city-style.
5 Small ball.
6 Make a C-storyline or a B-storyline about the issue.
7 Keep it from being so in your face or whatever.

Whereas a “home run,” as he put it, might be a story that could “make you think twice about everything,” perhaps “small ball” could achieve more ordinary (mostly unreflective) alterations in

[202] Zigon, “Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand.”

viewers. This wouldn't be "so in your face," but might still make a difference to viewers' orientations to priority issues. It is important to remember, though, that the goal of both "small ball" and "home runs" were social and ethical transformation; the goal was that contact with even "C-storyline(s) or B-storyline(s)" could shift viewers to a new way of thinking or being in the world vis-à-vis social justice issues.

This dimension of the practice, though, was oriented to SIS's eventual impact on *viewers*, whereas the everyday concerns of SIS advocates were primarily centered on how Hollywood's *writers* would respond to their outreach efforts. The question of whether (or how much) advocates were aiming to spark ethical reflexivity on the part of writers is a tricky one to answer. On the one hand, advocates were hyper-vigilant about avoiding the appearance of missionizing about their priority topics. They actively avoided being perceived as *seeking* or pulling for ethical engagement on the part of writers. Recall the advocates' explicit reminders that writers did not have to invest in any social change or educational mission, they only needed to become *narratively* interested in priority topics. On the other hand, what was narrative interest or "inspiration" if not active reflective engagement with a topic that had previously been unthought/unreflective for the writer? For example, after a group of writers had gone on a field tour about human trafficking with Center staff, one writer told me,

1 NK	you know I'm still kind of digesting the information I gleaned from the discussions today,
2	but I'm so inspired just as far as wanting to get the word out,
3	educate people,
4	and um,
5	create sort of a platform not just for,
6	you know,
7	people experiencing this kind of issue but for people in society?
8	to recognize that this is really happening in our country and even here in Los Angeles,
9	here in our own home city?

10 It's-
11 it's hard to fathom?
12 But you know,
13 when you hear.
14 You can't help but be moved by that and you want to put that on television,
15 you want to cause,
16 create dialogue about it and stop this problem,
17 so um,
18 I'm super inspired and I'm just really thankful.

These kinds of feelings on the part of writers were considered an unequivocal "win" by people working in the Center. They are also moments that suggest emotional experience and ethical reflexivity in the writer, a moment when he "can't help but be moved" and therefore is more concerned about "people in society." The writer expresses quite clearly that "this kind of issue" had not previously been in his mind and had been "hard to fathom." However, this Center-prompted encounter with human trafficking had "inspired" him "just as far as wanting to get the word out" and resulted in him wanting to "put that on television." He had to "recognize that this is really happening" even "here in our own home city." This reckoning produces an ensuing desire in him to "cause, create dialogue" by "get[ting] the word out."

This instance and others like it seem like clear episodes of advocates having actively attempted to prompt a sort of "ethical breakdown" (à la Zigon) on the part of Hollywood writers, who would then reconsider their orientation to an issue and thereby become actively inspired to write about or "get the word out" — in other words, to engage in attempts to produce ethical reflexivity on the part of even more others.

Canonical Plots & Cultural Templates versus Individual Experiences

SIS professionals oriented to canonical plots and existing cultural templates with a mixture of distrust and desire. On the one hand, existing popular plots were seen as faulty or in

need of correction, and making corrections or adjustments to these broad cultural narratives were a large part of the advocates' work. Existing cultural templates about health were often factually inaccurate, for example, or canonical stories were thought to inadequately connect health problems to their social determinants. Perhaps they sustained stereotypes, or promulgated "rags-to-riches" or "crisis-to-cure" (as one advocate put it) fairytales rather than adequately depicting the struggle of marginalized populations to access equitable health care, etc. SIS advocacy and outreach can certainly be seen as attempts to adjust and correct these flawed canonical plots. There was often a spirit of critique involved in the practice. One person I interviewed told me:

1 LJ It's essential,
2 essential to go up one level and to think about-
3 think about how we actually begin to unspool some meta-narratives.
4 Narratives about health.
5 Narratives about civic health.
6 About the interconnections between poverty and health.
7 Narratives about inequality.
8 Narratives about American identity.[203]

I believe that what this advocate referred to as "meta-narratives" should be understood as cultural templates – popular ways of telling stories about "health," "civic health," "poverty and health," "inequality," and "American identity." Meta-narratives on these issues, when "unspooled," could then be altered in the service of social change and a more just world. The logic was that more ethical narrative portrayals of these issues circulating in the culture would produce more ethical cultural orientations to others on the part of the public. One advocate, speaking to a small group of Hollywood writers, asserted passionately,

1 GB Much work must be done before-
2 before our cultural stories.

[203] Again, I am struck by the availability of speech registers that are sermon-like, with parallel structures, poetics — the missionizing rhetorical style (Bambi B. Schieffelin, "Christianizing Language and the Dis-placement of Culture in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea," *Current Anthropology* 55, no. 10 (2014): 226-237) belies the social impact media community's animated disavowals.

3 About the most important issues of our time.
4 Are accurate, compassionate, and inclusive.

The professionals in this industry went about this work of correction of "cultural stories," a labor in the service of the ethical reeducation of those producing "cultural stories" that were not "accurate" enough, not "compassionate" enough, and not "inclusive" enough when it came to "the most important issues of our time."

Despite SIS's critical orientation to existing "meta-narratives" and "cultural stories," though, this definitely stopped short of a postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion about the regulatory violence of master narratives. It was not a problem for advocates that popular narratives were and could be a means of social control. Instead, there was a deep investment in these as tools for just this reason. For example, at one of the Center's events on mass incarceration, a self-defined writer-performer-activist spoke to the usual audience of Hollywood screenwriters and their guests at a panel at the Writers Guild of America, West:

1 BG We allow,
2 we allow,
3 Chomsky talked about in the 1970s manufacturing consent.
4 The idea that if you get the public riled up around you know,
5 the fear of certain people who are not,
6 who are seen as less than people.
7 Seen as savages.
8 Seen as subhuman in some way,
9 you know,
10 you get people rallying behind and voting for the wrong thing.
11 So we actually use the tools that we have at our disposal to change that awareness.
12 To humanize folks who have been dehumanized.

The panelists nodded enthusiastically as people in the audience murmured their agreement to this mission. Notably, there was no perceived problem with Hollywood's capacity to be "manufacturing consent." Popular narratives had the power to "get the public riled up" or incite "fear of certain people," constructing them as "savages" or "subhuman in some way." But use of

popular narratives for a project aimed at influencing public opinion wasn't seen as the problem whatsoever. It was just that people were wielding this power for the wrong reasons; they were the wrong *kinds* of narratives. For this writer (and, I assume, the agreeing audience-members) the idea was that a more ethical form of "consent" might be manufactured — one that did not "get people rallying behind and voting for the wrong thing," but that "use[d] the tools that we have at our disposal" to "humanize folks who have been dehumanized" and to, we assume, get people "rallying behind" and "voting for" the *right* thing. Essentially, to pervert and paraphrase Audre Lorde, the master's tools *could* dismantle the master's house[204]; tools for social control could and should be repurposed as tools for social justice transformation.

The advocates' enthusiasm for popular cultural narrative as a force for shaping (better) subjectivities and (healthier) societies appeared to be unrelenting, and I was struck by how it was almost always asserted uncritically. The people I met did not appear to question whether existing narrative templates or canonical plots were sufficient to provoke social change writ large or whether such narratives even *could* accommodate more just, "compassionate," "inclusive," and "accurate" representations of the sort that elucidated interconnections between complex social issues. Popular narratives were just understood to require some tweaking — or the insertion of some new narrative subjects and new material — if they were to accomplish these lofty aspirations. Moreover, the use of entertainment for such purposes was not ever imagined by participants to be problematic from a social control/propagandizing perspective.

What was particularly interesting about this in terms of a specifically narrative ethics, however, is that advocates tended to use *individuals'* stories to challenge and compensate for the

[204] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983).

failings of existing popular plots. They offered up case studies or personal narratives as correctives that they believed could, if integrated, "change the narrative" at a societal scale. "Real people" with "real stories" were offered as counterpoints that could then be used by those who produce the "canonical plots" — Hollywood's "master storytellers." The more fragmentary, individual stories of "real people" were the raw materials that could be translated into popular, emplotted canonical narratives; this was thought make the canonical narratives *better* and more morally impactful. Personal narratives, in other words, were thought of as *reforming* rather than corrosive of canonical cultural templates.

There was the pervasive sense that the kinds of narrative accounts that were endowed with authentic first-personness were more ethical accounts than those that were offered by experts or fiction-makers. First-person narratives were imagined to serve as correctives to the "unreflective norms" espoused by the canon. On the other hand, however, it would not have been thought of as sufficient for people to simply put these personal stories into the public sphere; these narratives also required plot work. They had to be *transformed* into the kinds of popular plots that would succeed in Hollywood's narrative economy in order to have impact — in order to accomplish changes on behalf of the social good.

The Setting versus The Unexpected Event

As I've already explained, contemporary iterations of entertainment-education and social impact storytelling have at this point expanded well beyond medical/health content (or what was previously considered "health" content) in order to address social justice issues and the social determinants of health and wellbeing. The profession has been attempting to design interventions that work for addressing more systemic/structural and cultural problems. This has proved

challenging for advocates for a variety of reasons, some of which I have already discussed in previous chapters: Hollywood professionals' perceptions about expertise and what requires consultation, writers' and advocates' resistance to appearing too political/missionizing, and such broad societal problems seeming intractable or unwieldy in their scale, to name a few. But there was also the difficulty of transforming chronic, structural problems into first-person ones, into problems that would seem narratively relevant for Hollywood's writers. Perversely, the structural nature of problems sometimes got *lost* in this effort, as problems are "humanized" and "personalized," and as chronic, systemic issues are transformed into narratable "events."

There was a significant irony in this. When advocates turned their eye toward "social determinants," they were, in effect, attempting to topicalize and emplot the "setting" of whatever story they might be telling. For example, if chronic structural inequality was the social context (setting) which determined someone's health outcome (an event), advocates wanted to find a way to focus on the determinant rather than the health crisis it explained. The setting needed to become the unexpected event, somehow; chronic structural inequality needed to move from the background within which a plot unfolded and become the plot itself. Advocates therefore needed to seek the "eventness" in the setting in order to offer up accounts that tantalized writers with story-potential. This was a process that frequently (if not always) collapsed the very "settingness" of the problem that the advocates hoped would be depicted and absorbed by viewers. Their efforts, perversely, could transform "setting" into something that does not seem like a structural/setting issue at all; that ironically invisibilizes the setting and makes it into the "unexpected event."

For example, as I've already mentioned, the Center's advocates were funded to conduct outreach to the entertainment industry on mass incarceration. As part of this outreach, they

endeavored to explain the “school-to-prison pipeline” and its systematic over-disciplining of boys of color in educational settings, a chronic problem which feeds young people into a system of juvenile detention and mass incarceration that disproportionately effects African Americans. They hoped that writers would find a way to explain the chronic, structural forces that has criminalized generations of Black men in America. But the advocates were insistent that explaining or depicting the systematic macro nature of the issue would be a “turn off” to writers and would fail to inspire storylines. Instead, they had experts use case studies and found a “real person” to tell his own story of incarceration at a panel discussion. But when this young man told his own captivating story of early disciplinary action at school — an event that initiated a chain of other events that placed him in juvenile detention and eventually landed him in federal prison — the immediacy of each “unexpected event” along the way ironically *backgrounded* the very chronicity of the problem at hand.

Similarly, the narrativization of “the problem” into an event often failed to capture the chronic, recurrent, everydayness of the problem itself. The everyday experiential quality of the issue seemed to be as difficult to depict narratively as the macrostructural forces or statistical evidence that might describe the issue at large. “Real people” who the Center asked to engage in outreach were often very much aware of this and sometimes sought to draw attention to it. For example, a formerly-incarcerated person on the same panel I mentioned above attempted to point out this predicament to the room full of writers:

1 RP I mean,
2 a lot of what you see on television is Hollywood.
3 I think S* alluded to the fact that yes,
4 there’s gonna be content,
5 there’s gonna try to be accurate information,
6 but because it’s film,
7 because it’s television and because it’s on the screen you know,

8 there has to be you know,
9 something in there that's happening for people.
10 Um I I-
11 I'm always disturbed by movies and so forth because these things are not really the real-
12 It is-
13 it is real-
14 It is-
15 it is true that-
16 that what's real.
17 That the stuff that's just not gonna make it on TV,
18 these are the real issues,
19 the way it really just is,
20 the inhumane treatment,
21 day in day out,
22 the degradation that takes place,
23 all of the inhumanity that's a part of everyday life,
24 it's not really,
25 it's not really for a story to really give up,
26 you know,
27 the essence of what's happening in prison what's happening to human beings.

This is a provocative example of the way that "the real," the "day in day out," and the "inhumanity that's a part of everyday life," are aspects of someone's experience that may resist emplotment and may fail to conform to a popular story's need for "something in there that's happening for people." This individual, attempting to explain what may typically be missing from Hollywood portrayals, stumbles again and again over "the real," and what "it is," revealing through his very performance of this string of stuttered speech in lines 11-16 demonstrates how difficult it might be to narratively represent "the way it really just is." The systematicity and chronicity of "inhumane treatment," the very "essence of what's happening in prison" (what could be thought of the "setting") is "not really for a story to really give up." People may try to be "accurate," or to provide "content." But it is difficult to narrate "the degradation that takes place" systematically, chronically, as an "event," as a "something happening."

If popular narratives shape citizens' ethical action in the public sphere as much as SIS advocates believe they do, then narratives about mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline are culturally and morally essential; they are likely required to prompt more ethical treatment of young Black men in this country. Yet, if it is the *systemic* nature of people's criminalization and marginalization that needs to be accounted for rather than the "eventness" of individuals' incarceration, how are advocates to work through the problem of using a narrative form that resists representations of chronicity and demands eventness?

As I've already mentioned, many anthropologists have encountered and described this problem in a number of contexts where phenomena resist narrative demands (pain, trauma, mental disturbances, chronic illness).[205] What is troubling from the standpoint of using narratives to engender a more ethical orientation to others is that these narrative-resistant phenomena appear to be those that might *most* demand *most* urgent ethical responses from us as onlookers. What, then, are the ethical costs of linking justice and care to narrativity and emplotted representation, when certain kinds of human predicaments that very much demand ethical engagement seem to push back against our narrative requirements?

First-Person/Humanist Ethics versus Poststructural Perspectives

Where would SIS fall in Mattingly's schema that differentiates between two orientations to ethics?[206] Are these first-person/humanist projects or poststructural ones? On the one hand, it would be easy to characterize SIS as a project oriented deeply to the power of first-personness. It uses *stories* and seeks "lived lives" to offer as prime examples of ethical working-through. Like a

[205] Desjarlais, *Shelter Blues*; C. Jason Throop, *Suffering and Sentiment: Exploring the Vicissitudes of Experience and Pain in Yap* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), etc.

[206] Mattingly, "Two Virtue Ethics."

humanist approach, it prizes first-person narratives of ways we, as humans, endeavor to strive for and construct goodness in our lives. It attempts to make even population-level moral problems feel more *personal* to Hollywood's writers and their audiences. It also subscribes to a belief that access to first-personness gives writers permission to engage in the moral project of narration: hearing someone's story; going on a writers' field trip empowers you to write about it. Like first-person/humanist approaches, too, it views an overemphasis on structures, systems and policies as — at worst — a kind of violence against individuals' autonomy and experience (at its most extreme) or — at best — an insufficient or ineffective way to engage in ethical projects (recall the devaluing of "policy" changes over changes in individuals' hearts and minds). Through this lens, then, SIS could be seen to foreground human agency and to be involved in attempts to rescue the irreducibility of experience from the flattening and generalization of expert language, statistical description and structural analysis (therefore: belonging to the first-person/humanist position).

That said, though, SIS is explicitly invested in the project of shaping social norms and rules, and is actively attempting to rework the social and structural status quo. It is interested in interventions that can illuminate the ways that we are shaped and constrained by social structures as well as (problematic) norms and regulatory systems that have previously gone unnoticed in everyday life. There is an irony in this, given that SIS could *itself* be easily seen as a regulatory endeavor — a means of social control, a sort of ethical or health-oriented propaganda that attempts to discipline populations through our casual consumption of its messages. Are we then dealing, here, with a profession where people are using the discourses and ideologies of first-person humanist ethics in order to engage in a regime of moral governance? Moreover, is this a case where a first-person orientation to ethics has become so pervasive as to constitute the kind of "unreflective norm-following" of an unfreedom/poststructural orientation in and of itself? It is

certainly worth wondering if participants' uncritical orientation to first-personness/narrativity (as the ultimate technology of social change and personal freedom/self-making) is *actually*, as some have argued, the mechanism by which we are being conscripted and controlled.[207]

It would also be easy to come to the conclusion that SIS is either theoretically or self-defeating as an ethical project, in that some aspects of its practices undo the other aspects. But from another perspective, it could be considered a dialectical practice — one that perhaps integrates both poles of the debates I have outlined here. If we understand the practice as a dialectical one, this may represent a recuperation of first-person virtue ethics, at least as understood by Mattingly, rather than a slippage into a sort of structure-blind, power-blind false consciousness.[208] Mattingly notes that a first-person approach to understanding people's experiments with the moral ordinary allows us to explore "how social conditions become dialectical for people living with them."[209][210] Here, it is not so much that social conditions control us or that our experiential first-personness bucks this control, but instead that individuals involve themselves in ethical projects that make use of ordinary norms in extraordinary ways, or that we use existing repertoires to work through new contradictions and find a way forward despite paradoxes – in other words, a dialectical practice (Mattingly 2014).

But even Mattingly's dialetical vision of everyday ethical experience is hard to apply to the ethical workings of SIS for a few different reasons. First, Mattingly is interested in the

[207] Rose, *Inventing Our Selves*; Žižek *First as Tragedy.*

[208] Mattingly, "Two Virtue Ethics."

[209] Ibid., 27.

[210] She differentiates this dialectical movement from Zigon's movement between the unreflective mode and the reflective one provoked by "breakdown," asserting that she does not want to distinguish between "ordinary action and its norm-governed morality from something that could properly be called a deliberative ethical moment" (2014, p.26-27). But I don't really think she's differentiating that much from Zigon when she talks about ethical processes as those in which people come to critique third-person categories from a first-person perspective, etc.

dilemmas, experiments, workings-through and compromises of the “moral ordinary” for *those themselves living in it*. But SIS is an explicit effort to engage with and impact *others*’ moral ordinary, *others*’ experiments and workings-through., the ultimate goal of which is not necessarily even intersubjective contact but, instead, a mediated and imaginative intersubjectivity. It attempts to use narratives to impact narrative-consumers’ own ethical orientation through exposure and engagement with the narratives they are consuming. Mattingly’s describes ethical work as often involving the critique of third-person categories from a first-person perspective.[211] SIS’s narrative ethics, on the other hand, asks us to critique our first-person perspectives from popular narratives’ third-person perspectives.

This, I think, is a different sort of ethical project altogether. SIS expands Mattingly’s questions about how social conditions come to be dialectical for us and is more concerned with the question of how social conditions become dialectical for (imagined) *others*. What differentiates SIS from the kinds of ethical and narrative work previously described is that where previous academic work has been very much concerned with first-person narrative construction of experience, SIS is concerned, primarily, about the impact of *consuming* these narratives rather than producing them. It is concerned with narratives as ethical *products* that penetrate the everyday life-world of viewers, provoking ethical reshaping, yes, but in a deferred way. Here, the face of the other is one that is seen on the screen in (perhaps) *imagined* relation to the self. A different set of moral imperatives spring forth from this imagined relation than when one is confronted first-hand with an ethical predicament, as it usually the case with ethical theorization that contends with our contact with the other.[212]

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[211] Ibid., 26.

[212] Emmanuel Levinas and Philippe Nemo, “Ethics and Infinity,” *Cross Currents* 34, no. 2 (1984): 191-203; Zigon, “Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand.”

A second and related issue is that Mattingly makes a point of asserting that the people she is interested — the everyday virtue ethicists — in aren't engaging with "grand ambitions to change the world or a political cheeriness about their capabilities."[213] This, in particular, is *very* different from the kind of ethics being pursued among SIS professionals. The goal of social impact storytelling is absolutely "grand ambitions," "political cheeriness," and a robust sense of empowerment and enhanced "capabilities" in audiences. For advocates and activists, this sort of political cheeriness and grand ambition is *ethical energy*, and it is their constant aim to generate it in the populous at large. Which brings me to the next dimension I would like to explore — that of ethical demand and ethical resistance.

Ethical Demands, Ethical Resistance; Narrative Demands, Narrative Resistance

Both contemporary SIS professionals and E-E advocates over the last 30 years have positioned narrative at the heart of their efforts to change the world for the better. But what makes SIS somewhat different from E-E is its changing relationship to ethical engagement and ethical demand. Both public health-oriented E-E campaigns and SIS projects have used narratives to trigger individual changes in attitude, knowledge and behavior which (ideally, anyway) cumulatively change the public status quo on issues related to health and, more recently, social justice. But SIS projects use popular narratives to ignite first-person *motivation*, ostensibly to engage in new action on *behalf* of others (not just to produce changes within the narrative-consumer him/herself. It explicitly aims to *inspire* people to act on behalf of others and, crucially, centers this experience of inspiration and empowerment as the focus of the effort, rather than the action that might issue forth from this empowerment. SIS's ethical priorities — when it comes to

[213] Mattingly, "Two Virtue Ethics," 27.

the public, anyway[214] — are ethics with a very different sort of telos than usual, if such aims can technically be considered a telos at all.[215] SIS consistently privileges "inspiration" but rigorously avoids specificity when it comes to the question of inspiration-towards *what*, preferring to remain mostly agnostic to the particular ends of action.[216] It positions inspiration and desire towards making the world a better place as the ends in and of themselves. The goal is, therefore, a phenomenological shift — a shift in feeling-toward and attention-toward a topic on the part of the public.

In the context of SIS, I was surprised to discover that participants orient toward the same phenomenological aspects of moral values about which a handful of anthropologists have theorized. For example, Jason Throop writes extensively about the ways that "moral values can be understood as residues of collectively structured modes of selective attention," and how attentive consideration to particular modes of experience, particularly suffering, may constitute moral ways of being.[217] Or, as Throop also references, Kathryn Linn Guerts discusses how attention is somatically patterned in culturally-appropriate ways; these patterned modalities constitute context-specific parameters for being and experiencing oneself as ethical.[218] Cheryl Mattingly attends to how people struggle in the context of everyday tragedy to not only act ethically but *feel*

[214] One could argue that there is a telos for SIS's ethics in relation to writers, perhaps: more storylines on priority topics. But they disavow this goal when they talk to writers — although they constantly label their aim toward "the good," they totally avoid any discussion of specific visions of this good or specific "asks" re: political or activist action.

[215] Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," *The Journal of Philosophy* 60, no. 23 (1963): 685-700; Andrea Falcon, "Aristotle on Causality," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/aristotle-causality/. Clearly teleology is an enormous field in ethical philosophy and I am unable to do this literature any justice here.

[216] This is both because of the constraints of the model, which requires that no one be perceived as asking anything of writers or, by extension, of audiences (avoiding the genre of campaigns that seeks donation, seeks calling your senator, seeks any kind of political action).

[217] Throop, *Suffering and Sentiment*, 12.

[218] Kathryn Linn Geurts, "On Rocks, Walks, and Talks in West Africa: Cultural Categories and an Anthropology of the Senses," *Ethos* 30, no. 3 (2002): 178-198.

ethically: to sustain hope, for example, as an ethical practice.[219] Saba Mahmood writes about Muslim women's use of embodied religious practices to engender certain kinds of moral and religious sentiments; though here (quite differently than SIS) ethical practices *precede* ethical sentiments rather than the other way around.[220] What is interesting about all these examinations, however, is their orientation to certain kinds of *experiences* as ethical rather than (or in addition to) certain kinds of actions or behaviors as ethical. These scholars note contexts where modes of attention or affective phenomena are configured as moral and experienced as well as assessed culturally as moral. This is also the case within the particular framework of SIS, where a kind of phenomenological shift — feeling, perceiving and experiencing an issue differently — is understood as almost identical to engaging in a different ethical *action* toward that something, a more just and moral reshaping of cultural orientations toward the good.

Televised narratives were thought to be useful for social change efforts because they could generate this kind of phenomenological shift, this inspired change-of-state regarding viewers' feelings and experiences. Specifically, stories were thought to confer upon viewers a sense of motivation and empowerment. As I have mentioned, SIS advocates frequently told me that they were "in the inspiration business." This meant both that they were in the business of inspiring writers and that, one degree removed, they were also in the business of inspiring the public. These dual inspiration goals were rarely differentiated from one another in an explicit way, nor were they theorized or thought to involve different practices (though, clearly, they did). The two target audiences often collapsed into one another. One advocate told me, "I want people to see something that, like, triggers a moment of insight, like, a revelation." When I asked whether the

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[219] Mattingly, *Moral Laboratories.*

[220] Saba Mahmood, "Ethical Formation and Politics of Individual Autonomy in Contemporary Egypt," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2003): 837-866; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

“people” she hoped would experience a revelation were writers or TV viewers, she simply answered, “both!” During a different interview, another advocate explained,

1 GB We are giving them new ways to tell new stories to amplify this moment that we’re in.
2 It’s,
3 it’s in this moment right now that popular culture has this incredible power to help people have a new sense of,
4 like,
5 how they can be change-makers,
6 how they can be catalysts,
7 how they can be people who set in motion new contagions of civic good and social impact.[221]

We can assume from context that the recipients of “new ways to tell new stories” this advocate is talking about are writers to whom he conducts outreach — those to whom he is in the business of “giving” content. It is not clear, though, whether he means also that *writers* are those who will have a “sense” that they can be “change-makers,” “catalysts,” or people who spread “contagions” of civic goodness or if he means something else. There is some slippage here, and it seems as though the advocate may be expressing his expressing his hope for what *audiences* would experience as they encounter “popular culture” and culture’s “incredible power to help people have a new sense of” their power to “set in motion” “social impact.” What is striking to me about this excerpt is its focus on “sense,” and the idea of someone *feeling* like a “change-maker” or a “catalyst” who can set things in motion. There is not, however, any specificity about how this change in *sense* transforms into “social impact.”

There was a lot of focus among SIS professionals on how their work might give people a *sense* of capacity for change, or a *feeling* of power and inspiration. I will talk about this more in the next chapter, which focuses more carefully on the affective dimensions of SIS and attempts to

[221] Again, the reader may be struck by how much this sounds like political stump speeching or preaching. Again, the structure of the discourse belies the espoused disavowal of politicking and persuasion!

join these conversations. But it is important to note that this concern for engendering cultural inspiration, this urge to "amplify in this moment right now" also has significance in terms of ethics. I think that many of the people I encountered in my fieldwork would agree with philosopher Simon Critchley[222] when he declares that "what is required…is a conception of ethics that begins by accepting the motivational deficit in the institutions of liberal democracy," and that "what is lacking at the present time of massive political disappointment is a motivating, empowering conception of ethics that can face and face down the drift of the present…an ethics that empowers subjects to political action, a motivating ethics."[223] SIS is one technology for producing (or attempting to produce) a *motivating* ethics in the public sphere. Like Critchley's arguments, SIS's practices begin with the notion that the public's lack of engagement (or diminished engagement) with significant sociopolitical issues is due to people's lack of *motivation* in the midst of widespread and deep disappointment — in other words, an absence of certain ethical affects (motivation) can be attributed to the presence of other kinds of affects (disappointment). From this starting point, it is easy to understand how people might understand the answer to social problems to be rooted in solving public disappointment; it is easy to understand how people interested in the public good might conceive of an ethics grounded in popular *empowerment* and *motivation* toward contemporary political processes and sociopolitical realities.

Critchley's idea of a "motivating ethics" is useful for understanding why SIS focused on storytelling in particular as a mode of intervention. First, stories were thought to make certain kinds of *demands* on those who consumed them — to call up different modes of engagement and

[222] Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (New York: Verso Books, 2014).

[223] Ibid., 8.

encounter than other types of efforts after the social good (such as more didactic forms of communication or, say, direct policy interventions). Second, stories were thought to evade or disguise the *explicitness* of these ethical demands — to soften them, and thus to soften people's indwelling *resistance* to these demands. Recall advocates' worry over "topic fatigue," or people feeling perpetually sold and manipulated into caring about social issues. The rest of this chapter will discuss both of these factors and describe how the centering of a specifically *narrative* ethics constructed a practical and political predicament for advocates. Ethical demands were thought to invoke resistance, so SIS positioned them within narratives that were thought to overcome this resistance. But narrative demands *also* invoked resistance, and advocates struggled to manage this further resistance and its implications while still engaging people's ethical sentiments and sensibilities.

At the heart of the SIS community's orientation to motivation and empowerment was a belief that contemporary political institutions and existing norms and policies that structure just and ethical participation in our society were inadequate and had simply failed to create a just world. But there was also an ideology that the social problems currently requiring remedy were different in *nature* from those that could be solved by change taking place at a policy level. These problems were understood to require the affective or motivational reorientation of the populace — and that, participants believed, could *only* be accomplished through the function of narrative. For example, the Center held an event that focused on immigration and people impacted by undocumented status. The panel, as usual, included an academic expert, a few "real people," a filmmaker, and an activist who was himself undocumented. During the discussion portion of the event, the academic expert had made a plea to the audience that they engage in civic action

regarding immigration reform, voting for candidates who supported comprehensive and humane reform efforts. The undocumented activist spoke up immediately afterwards:

1 JR But people ask me why film,
2 why culture.
3 Right?
4 And if we just look at what's happened with LGBT rights,
5 I don't know about you,
6 but I still feel a sense of whiplash?
7 Um,
8 the changing culture on LGBT rights,
9 and on LGBT people.
10 it's not about the rights,
11 it's the *people*.
12 We've gone through,
13 I think to me,
14 the fastest civil rights movement this country has ever seen?
15 Right?
16 And can you imagine that happening without *Will & Grace*? ((audience laughs))
17 Right? ((audience laughs))
18 We need that exact same kind of cultural change on immigration.
19 And we don't have it.
20 So yes, of course I'm for immigration reform.
21 But I have to tell you this.
22 What we're facing is beyond pieces of paper.
23 When you have American citizens,
24 feeling completely alienated by their own communities.
25 That's more than.
26 A piece of paper can't solve that.
27 Right?

Here, this activist makes an argument that distinguishes between "cultural change" and "changing culture," on the one hand, and "pieces of paper" or policy reform on the other (or, as the academic suggested, voting). He asserts that what "a piece of paper can't solve" is the *relational* experience of people "feeling completely alienated, the feeling that constitutes the experience of being undocumented in American communities. "It's not about the rights," he tells us, it's about "the people." The idea is that systemic discrimination and marginalized communities is an

interpersonal problem, one that can't be solved by legal action. That legal intervention would only *codify* the culture change. The key is for people to *feel differently*; that's "why film," and "why culture."

This was a common orientation among SIS professionals as well as the activists, funders, and volunteers interested in the practice. Narratives, unlike rights and papers, were thought to motivate and inspire a more emotional understanding of what is also a political problem; they were understood as essential because they invoked a relational form of ethical engagement from those who consume them. Narratives were understood to present the "humanity" of a social issue by making a person's experience accessible and helping the viewer feel-for/feel-with that person. As I mentioned before, a story was understood to impact people more than "the facts" would because it presented the face of the other, humanizing her and therefore demanding of us that we engage differently, engage better, engage more with her predicaments. Stories were useful tools for changing hearts and minds (and, additively, society itself) because of their capacity to do this. But, there were drawbacks to this demand, as well. As many ethical philosophers and anthropologists interested in emotion and intersubjectivity have asserted, the other's face is by nature overwhelming; the vulnerability, responsibility, and interdependency revealed in its exposure is almost too much to bear or can be affectively flooding for an onlooker.[224] Viewers who are having an ethical experience through their identification with a character may be having this sort of encounter with the irreducible vulnerability of others, and may *resist* this intrusion. We may want to look away, either from this exposed face or from the sprawling and systemic nature of the problem which confronts and exceeds us; we may turn away from structural violence and abjection. Or we may engage in something like "passive empathy," or a consumptive mode of

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[224] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*; Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999); Throop, *Suffering and Sentiment*.

identification that does not demand ethical responsibility of the onlooker.[225] The job of successful SIS is not only to present the ethical demand, then, but to overcome viewers' resistance to that demand such that they will continue to watch and extend themselves in the narrative.

There was a distinct disavowal of "demand" in the world of entertainment advocacy and quite a bit of open conversation amongst advocates about how to mitigate demandingness and maintain both writers' and audience's engagement despite it. The advocates' talk of the "inspiration business" was a way of distancing themselves from demandingness — rejecting the idea of persuasion, pitching, proselytizing or lobbying the writers; rejecting the idea that viewers would feel preached to and be "turned off." There was concern about the way SIS might invoke a feeling of pressure rather than empowerment, and many people I talked to voiced feelings of being caught between demands to be ethical and demands to be entertaining, both of which were part of the narrative economy in which writers worked. There were, in other words, ethical demands and narrative demands. These were inextricably entangled in this setting. One writer spoke to me about the pressure they experience when trying to engage in what they called "conscious storytelling" in the context of her work on a popular network TV show and over the course of her career:

1 LM Conscious stories,
2 conscious content is not quite the full equation.
3 It's also,
4 we have to tip the scale so that socially conscious things are cool and fun and entertaining without being too much,
5 without being a depressing documentary.
6 We have to strike a balance between market pressures,
7 internal pressures,
8 social good pressures.
9 It's a lot.

[225] Megan Boler, "The Risks of Empathy: Interrogating Multiculturalism's Gaze," *Cultural Studies* 11, no. 2 (1997): 253-273.

10 We are so saturated with different causes and stories and I feel sometimes overwhelmed.

This very politically-aware writer espoused a motivation to produce “conscious content” and “conscious stories,” but acknowledged that conscious content could not be “the full equation.” Writers engaged in this movement had to “tip the scale so that socially conscious things are cool and fun and entertaining,” so that audiences wouldn’t look away, so that the content wouldn’t be “too much.” This writer makes one of the rare explicit mentions of “market pressures,” but also mentions being “saturated with different causes” in such a way that she felt “overwhelmed.”

Part of this sense of “overwhelm” is, I think, a natural outgrowth of an ethics that invests in *motivation.* It is an inevitable consequence of an ethical industry that grounds the solution to problems in people over policies, relationships over rights, while centering popular narratives as the locus of ethical possibility. There are new challenges thrown up by social movements that privilege individuals’ changes in self-state (through encounter with storytelling) while remaining agnostic to how or whether one might spur collective action or define what changes in behavior might be sought in the public sphere. Writers and SIS professionals alike struggled to manage to construct stories that motivated and affectively moved people toward ethical experience but that *also* avoided making overwhelming asks, political appeals, or demands that would be a “turn off” to audiences. There was a delicate balance required if they were to maintain the appeal of the narratives themselves.

Critchley argues for a “conception of ethical experience based on the exorbitant demand of infinite responsibility” toward other beings.[226] SIS, on the other hand, operates within a conception of ethical experience based on (indirect) affective involvement with others and their predicaments through entertaining popular narratives that would, it was thought, cease to be

[226] Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding,* 40.

entertaining were they to contend with the full significance of something like ‘infinite responsibility’ or structural violence. This meant that SIS professionals were constantly working both to invoke and defer people’s sense and experience of responsibility toward the characters and materials they encountered in stories. They had to work against the desensitization of viewers. Their aim was to provoke enough sense of ethical demand that viewers felt empowered to change the world, but not so much ethical demand that they felt dispirited, turned away, or understood that they could never possibly meet the “exorbitant” demand of the other and his/her predicaments.[227]

[227] Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

So Many Feelings: The Problem with Affect as a Social Change Catalyst

One early afternoon at the Center, a group of nine volunteers, a part-time intern and two full-time staff members sat around a large, sunny conference table, chatting and snacking on hummus and baby carrots. Most of the people gathered already knew each other from volunteering previously at one-off events sponsored by the Center, but the group had recently formed a more cohesive connection because they'd been meeting more often than usual over the course of the previous five weeks. Center staff had bumped up the meetings' frequency in advance of a series of outreach events the Center was planning. These events were organized around the topic of "mass incarceration and racial justice" and would include performances, panel discussions, screenings, and a prison visit where writers would take a tour behind bars and hear stories from incarcerated people involved in a prison education program. More than usual was at stake; a particularly high-profile foundation was funding this series of events and the Center's leadership hoped to secure future programmatic support from this funder. Moreover, the Center was taking this opportunity to collaborate with a high-profile Los Angeles nonprofit for which many celebrities and Hollywood professionals volunteered and to which many Hollywood professionals donated money. This was therefore a uniquely good networking and relationship-building opportunity for the Center's future work. Everyone knew, in other words, that this particular series of events needed to impress. Hopefully the outreach would yield follow-up requests for consultation from writers who were already working on — or, better yet, had been inspired to work on — incarceration-related storylines.

A few minutes after the meeting was scheduled to begin, one of the Center's full-time staff members began the ritual, by now familiar to me, of initiating a short "meditation" followed by a "check-in":

V1, V2, V3, V4= volunteers
S=staffperson

1 S We're going to start with our meditation.
2 Two minutes.
3 Followed by our check-in.
4 V1 Ugh, I love you.
5 Right?
6 I never get to-
7 V2 I knowwwww.
8 ((other audible confirmations))
9 S Everyone ready?
…((Two minutes of silence; phone timer goes off))
10 ((audible exhales; someone laughs softly))
11 V3 It's always –
12 V1 I know, right?
13 S It can be hard to get that silence.
14 ((scattered confirmations))
15 S Ok.
16 I'll start.
17 This week I'm just really checking in with my connection to this issue?
18 As it-
19 as we get busier,
20 you can just get,
21 what am I going to say,
22 what food are we doing,
23 is Spencer* going to get his liability form.
24 And forget why we are here.
25 That real people are –
26 this impacts real people.
27 Real communities.
28 So I'm just really checking in with-
29 wow.
30 Wow. ((tearful emotion voice))
31 This is the reason I do this work.
32 Checking in with that.

33 V2 Mmhmmmm And that's why we do this work with *you*.
34 V1 Yes.
35 Amen.
36 This week-
37 this week has been really hard.
38 For a lot of reasons that have nothing to do with this.
39 But that's w-
40 that's why this is so important.
41 To realize what's real,
42 and really feel-
43 *feel* it.
44 You know?
45 And this is why we do this work.
46 Not just get it done but-
47 making it matter.
48 It has to *matter*.
49 ((audible confirmations))
50 V4 I can be next. (…)

I include this longer transcript of interaction because it so clearly demonstrates how centrally advocates positioned the role of affect in their work. In this one stretch of everyday talk, there are tears, talk of how one must "really *feel* it," and assertions about how one might manage not just to "get it done" (the work) but "mak[e] it *matter*." We can see how important it was to the people doing this work to not "forget why we are here" but to, instead, ritually maintain their emotional "connection to this issue." As they engaged in meditative silence and checking-in, they invoked and re-asserted the imagined beneficiaries of their work, the "real people" and "real communities." This re-upped their emotional commitments to "do this work" — not just to "get busier" but to maintain affective connection to "why [we] do this work." On this particular day and in this particular meeting, the "check-in" process went on for nearly forty-five minutes as each person spoke in turn, each with marked emotion. A (shorter) ritual "check-out" process also signaled the end of the meeting.

When I'd entered the Center as a newcomer, the amount of time the advocates and volunteers spent on check-in and check-out and the overt sentimentality of their exchanges during meetings had been startling to me. I quickly noted that whatever the manifest "business" on the agenda for these meetings — things like finalizing schedules, editing copy for promotions, checking in about briefing speakers/consulting experts and ushering attendees through prison visitation procedures (i.e., Spencer and his liability form) — was only a fraction of the work being done in such gatherings. That said, the meeting time wasn't exactly taken up by casual socializing or interpersonal bonding, either, although that was clearly a secondary purpose. Instead, participants were involved with a kind of emotional labor that I came to understand as inextricable from the Center's work itself. As in this transcript, people ritually "checked in" with their own emotions and those of others *about the work*; people repeatedly invoked and performed the affective significance of "the work" in their own lives or for the "real people" in question. People often declared and tearfully re-declared their affective commitment to whatever issue was at hand, or to the project of using storytelling for social change more generally.

In the beginning, I wondered whether this was a particularly tenderhearted crew or whether these kinds of exchanges constituted a unique feature of the Center's workplace culture that organized participants' emotional expressions as a kind of emotion work[228] (which I'm sure they were, at least in part). Over the time of my fieldwork, however, I came to understand that this sort of foregrounding of affect was also common at other organizations' events and networking occasions I attended, was common during my interviews, and was a typical feature of the textual materials I collected. It was, I think, an everyday manifestation of the way people

[228] Hochschild, *The Managed Heart.*

involved in social impact storytelling understood the effectiveness of their broader work.[229] It was a workaday instantiation of the mechanisms by which they understood hoped-for social change would be best achieved; mechanisms that involved the invocation of particular affects through popular narrative and (hopefully) the widespread engendering of moral sentiments through the public's popular engagement with these narratives. On a more workaday level, for the Center's advocates and others with whom they worked, it involved the invocation of affects through narrative practices (first-person accounts, case studies) that they hoped would engender creative motivation on the part of Hollywood writers. As discussed in previous chapters, all of these were narratively-focused practices, and were also ethical practices in their focus on the pursuit of the social good. This chapter will explore the way these practices focused on affects in particular, as well as some of the implications of this affective focus.[230]

Among those in social impact entertainment/social impact storytelling, feeling-for and feeling-about social issues and marginalized populations were configured as essential preconditions for individuals' more just and ethical orientation to these issues and populations. Participants in this scene not only worked to sustain their own emotional relationship with social issues; advocates explicitly sought to invoke emotion in the Hollywood professionals with whom they worked, the experts with whom they consulted, and the funders whose support they courted.

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[229] I also think this performance of emotional commitment to "the work" is a common feature of social justice workplace cultures more generally (as well as the culture of other mission-oriented workplaces) where people are typically poorly paid and the funding structure requires the use of extensive intern and volunteer labor, therefore requiring staff to sustain high levels of their own and others' motivation that is not financial – some level similar critiques of academia (Sarah Ngu, "'Do-Good' Exploitation," *Jacobin*, March 29, 2017, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/03/miki-agrawal-thinx-feminism-controversy; Miya Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love: And Other Lies About Success & Happiness* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015); Kelly J. Baker, "The Flaws of 'Do What You Love,'" *Chronicle Vitae*, September 15, 2015, https://chroniclevitae.com/news/1140-the-flaws-of-do-what-you-love.)

[230] I do not want to make an artificial distinction between the "ethical," the "affective," and the "experiential" by splitting the conversation between two chapters. But I am also not ready to presume that *all* intersubjective engagements or modes of attention are ethical/moral, though I agree with Throop that "moral sentiments" involve working through "existential asymmetries" in our human lives/relationships ("Moral Sentiments," 151).

They believed that “the work” should generate a sort of affective electricity, and that this charge could transfer from storytellers to the story-consumers, “igniting” (their term) the populous and thereby instigating dreamed-of social change. The advocates I worked with were constantly using and adapting strategies for invoking their own and others’ affective involvement in social issues; pulling for individuals’ personal emotional investment in whatever topic they were working on. When advocates declared that they were “in the inspiration business,” it was in large part participants’ *emotions* they were talking about inspiring.

The advocates’ belief in the utility of emotional involvement was inextricable from their commitment to narrative as tool for promoting social change. Within a community that invested in a narrative theory of social change, stories were thought to be the best (and sometimes only) way to coax story-consumers into caring for others — whichever others who were the current foci of the advocates’ work. Although people involved in social impact storytelling frequently referenced an abstract hope that the public would engage in ethical action on the basis of this care, the direction or contours of these potential actions were not the advocates’ concern and they remained resolutely nonspecific or outright refused (as a matter of principle) to tell anyone what to do. Telling people how to take action was associated with coercion and bossiness, and was considered an ineffective way to contribute to social change with people who were thought to powerfully resist such coercions.

For example, I interviewed a media justice advocate who had a public health background and had worked in health communication and marketing before moving to his current role in a media nonprofit focusing on community health and community mental health. He told me,

1 JD We can finger-wag,
2 we can provide the most compelling scientific data.
3 We can tell people logically.
4 And nothing moves them like appealing to the heart.

5 And so this is why public health professionals have a lot to learn from Hollywood writers and producers about how to appeal to the heart.
6 We can use th-
7 their knowledge,
8 use their resources,
9 they can use ours.
10 That's if we can *get* them there, anyway.
11 See that working with us is worthwhile.

This person makes a clear distinction between the different repertoires available for taking about social issues: "scientific data," "finger-wag[ging]," and "logic" among them. But the prized genre through which to "move" people is "appealing to the heart." Hollywood's writers are seen to have privileged access to this kind of emotional appeal, and "public health professionals have a lot to learn" about this practice. The advocates job, then, was to "*get* them there," to get Hollywood's "writers and producers" to "see that working with us is worthwhile" and that advocates like him have resources to offer in exchange for the resources they sought from Hollywood professionals.

This chapter explores the ways that SIS advocates went about the delicate work of "appealing to the heart" and how they engaged in emotional work with content experts and Hollywood professionals in the hopes of "*get[ing]* them there." It discusses what kinds of affects SIS professionals sought to draw from writers and audiences, what they perceived as impediments to hoped-for public feeling and hoped-for ethical change-making, and how they endeavored to overcome these barriers in their goal of creating (or inspiring others to create) a better world. It also discusses what I see as SIS professionals' workaday procedure for promoting social change, which conceives of affective involvement as a precondition for ethical action and narrative as the privileged generator of that involvement. I focus, especially, on the way sufferers and suffering are foregrounded in a framework that aims to invoke *compassion* as the basis of ethical action. I also explore how the transience of affects and the fact of audience resistance demands that

advocates constantly innovate and escalate in order to generate more (and, ideally, more durable) *feeling* on the part of viewers. If, as I suggest, affects are used as the grounding of political participation and ethical engagement in the SIS framework, then strategies for managing affects are being foregrounded at the expense of other ways of inviting or scaffolding political participation and ethical orientation to others. This, too, has consequences for the kind of subjects that advocates choose to depict in their work and what kinds of stories were perceived as most impactful. I argue that during my fieldwork, advocates were turning away from the sufferer and toward the "survivor," in part due to audiences' resistance to continuous and overwhelming affective demands on behalf of the "sufferer."

Resistance

From its beginnings in the 1970s and 1980s, entertainment-education has been explicitly working to mitigate public *resistance* — both active and passive — to health messages. As I recounted in Chapter Three, the paradigm was originally conceived in order to more easily introduce publics to information that public health professionals were having difficulty distributing to the public or that the public did not seem to be absorbing/integrating satisfactorily. The idea was partially that popular media could give more people more access to information through wide broadcast. But early E-E advocates also asserted that embedding health content in entertaining storylines would make public health concerns more *appealing* to engage with and easier for the public to understand. This was necessary, on the one hand, because health information was too boring and therefore needed to be sparkled up and made more entertaining and compelling. It was also thought to be too difficult or technical to reach people in the abstract. A story, however, could situate complex content within a plot that would make average viewers

both invested in and capable of understanding the material. Finally, health communication workers were contending with the growing realization that people might actively resist or dispute health messages because these messages challenged existing cultural norms and ways of understanding health, illness, and how to live well. Stories were thought to be able to overcome all of these aspects of audiences' resistance — pragmatic, cognitive, and cultural. Narratives were thought to accomplish this, in large part, by capturing audiences *emotionally*, framing health communication through the lives of characters perceived as "beloved family and friends" (as the Center's Director put it). Love of characters and sincere empathic investment in their predicaments were thought to erode audience resistance to health material.

Contemporary advocates operating within the SIS paradigm continue to articulate this reasoning about stories, emotional involvement, and audience resistance. For example, I observed that they often applied this logic as they briefed academic experts on how to communicate with writers. I audio recorded one advocate as she was briefing a medical expert prior to a scheduled consultation call with a writers' room. The advocate had already suggested to the expert that he use personal examples wherever possible, and that while he should feel free to use medical language as needed, he should avoid too much jargon and should be sure to explain whatever medical terms he used as he went along. She noted that writers might be too polite (or too embarrassed) to ask him for clarification about these terms in real time. She went on,

1 NB First of all,
2 you're telling something that's scientifically complex,
3 there are lots of facts.
4 It's not easy to understand for a layperson.
5 But if you can give them-
6 So the trick is to take that complex medical information that you know,
and translate it into something that the average person *wants* to figure out,
7 A story that means the data matters.

Here, the expert was expected to use case studies to ease writers into an understanding of "scientifically complex" material. "Facts" and "complex medical information" were understood to pose a cognitive and communicative barrier; these needed to be narratively translated (into case studies or "personal examples") in order to reach their target. The goal is not only to make difficult material easy to understand for the "average person," though, it is also to make it seem like something "the average person *wants* to figure out" (again, motivation figures prominently). The key is to offer "a story that means" the data *matter*, conferring significance beyond scientific or intellectual value and having affective relevance to the consumer. This framing by advocates was routine during pre-consultation briefings with academics, who, frankly, often seemed a little miffed by advocates' exhortations to curtail their expert language and may have been insulted that the "mattering" of their data or importance of their research areas would not be self-evident to writers. They were, after all, being asked!

Beyond this barrier, though, there was also an awareness that experts might encounter writers' *emotional* resistance to certain kinds of information. For instance, an advocate and I debriefed after a consultation between a writing team and a psychiatrist who specialized in working with veterans suffering from PTSD. I noted, aloud, that the writing team had seemed a little taken aback during a specific moment of the consultation, and asked the advocate to tell me what she'd thought. In the moment, the expert had just told a story about a US Marine who had presented with PTSD symptoms despite never having experienced combat during his deployments. The expert — following the advocate's instructions beautifully, I thought — used his story to elucidate something about clinical patterns in PTSD onset, explaining to the writers that veterans' (and others') responses to traumatic exposure were idiosyncratic. He used the story to explain that because most members of the military were recruited from poor and rural

communities and/or communities of color in the United States, the data suggest that many soldiers have already experienced significant trauma or witnessed violence prior to their military service. Their post-combat PTSD might be thought of not as the result of combat, exactly, but instead as the cumulative result of multiple traumas over a lifetime (with a deployment being only the precipitating trauma/proximal cause, not the ultimate cause).

The writers had seemed troubled by this framing, and unsure about how to incorporate it. There had been a protracted silence, followed by a writer's abrupt return to their previous questions about dissociation and hallucination. After we'd hung up from the call and I expressed my surprise, the advocate commented that this kind of impasse was not unusual to observe during consultations. She told me:

1 LG	They're telling stories that may be a little bit fraught right?
2	There are emotional impacts to these things.
3	You're asking people to behave in ways that are not necessarily-
4	that may be contrary to certain long-held beliefs they have,
5	or that are morally complex for them.
6	All of these things are barriers that people put up in order to adopt your point of view and the reasons why you have to be a really great storyteller.
7	Like she was actually.
8	PTSD wasn't what they thought.
9	It's the truth about human beings.
10	Humans are-
11	they're not wholly rational.
12	They are intellectual sometimes,
13	but emotional people.
14	Here's an argument you can't beat.
15	I don't feel that way.
16	You just can't beat that.
17	There's no answer to the "I don't feel that way" argument.
18	But we have to,
19	in some ways answer the "I don't feel that way" argument.

This assertion by the advocate was interesting because it acknowledged that encounters between experts and writers might involve significant moral complexity and require all parties to contend

with the "emotional impacts" of "these things." This advocate believed that the emotional resonance of a story told by a "great storyteller" could help overcome "long-held beliefs" or "barriers" posed by issues' technical complexity (as in the previous example) or moral complexity (as in this example). A story, unlike an intellectual argument, could "answer the 'I don't feel that way' argument." This statement from the advocate is also interesting because of the advocates' sense that she and the expert were asking the writers "to *behave*" (emphasis mine) in different ways than normal (rather than, say think or feel differently). Her rationale was that humans, as "emotional people," needed *emotional* reasons to shift their "point of view" — but here, the change in "point of view" has become a sort of "behavior change" in and of itself. I will return to this notion later in the chapter.

In some sense, this orientation to the role of affect in mitigating resistance is no different than the way affect has been centered in the practice of E-E from the start of the field. E-E has always positioned the ability of entertainment media to captivate and its invocation of emotional involvement as the essential ingredients that would help people overcome their resistance to the "education" part of the entertainment-education hybrid. During my fieldwork, however, I also observed a slightly more complex notion of audience resistance operating in these settings and being discussed by professionals in the sector. This understanding of resistance concerned audiences' intuition that they were constantly being "sold" on issues or perspectives. Advocates oriented to the necessity of avoiding any framings of content that would heighten audiences' awareness that they were being "pitched,"[231] because this awareness would be accompanied by resistance that would collapse their effort altogether.

[231] As I've explored more thoroughly in other chapters, advocates were deeply concerned about *writers* feeling "pitched" and that any whiff of a "pitch" would ignite undoable resistance in the writers, who had to be approached very carefully. Experts and new outreach coordinators were carefully briefed about the need to offer *resources* to

During my fieldwork, I attended an evening event where a little over one hundred people had convened to discuss "social impact media" in Hollywood writ large. Most attendees seemed to be coming to the mixer straight from work, and they gathered in the modern conference and meeting space of a high-rise building surrounded by studio lots. From the nametags at the entry table, I gathered that most participants came from a range of media and social justice nonprofits, but there were also a healthy number of people in attendance who were involved in the entertainment industry (writers, actors, agents) and who were also engaged in various social justice efforts ostensibly unrelated to media. Over the course of the night, people met in corners and overflow rooms to brainstorm and network about potential collaborations and directions for future work, engaging in small-group discussions about how they might make the entertainment industry more involved in social change. At one point, participants moved into formal "break-out" groups, then returned to the larger group to report back about their conversations. As part of this reporting process, one person declared,

1 P1 People are by and large suspicious nowadays.
2 They realize that every single moment of their life they're being sold something.
3 Whether it's a way of thinking about something or product they should buy,
4 or a story they want to invest in they're always being sold something.
5 And at this point it's absolutely critical for anyone who wants to bring someone to his or her point of view to undermine that distrust,
6 that immediate distrust that takes place between the storyteller and the listener,
7 that says this is just spin you're putting on,
8 it's just a morality tale, it's a political move.

This person pointed to the problem of having to work against audiences' "immediate distrust" (resistance). There was an understanding that the public was suspicious of being constantly "sold" to, not only regarding products and services but also regarding "way[s] of thinking about

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writers and position themselves as *in service* to writers' agendas, rather than as someone coming with an agenda of their own.

something" or "a story they want to invest in."[232] Advocates were incredibly concerned with this dynamic, of course, as well as with *writers'* distrust about "the spin you're putting on." How were people interested in social impact storytelling supposed to coax suspicious people into "investing" in stories such that they would come to feel differently about social issues? What kinds of strategies would "undermine that distrust"?

Participants appeared to agree that the way forward was making *better* stories. Like the person quoted above, the idea was that advocates could be more effective for writers and audiences alike if they could make stories in the social impact storytelling space seem less like "morality tales" or "political move[s]" (as one interviewee put it). Participants understood that "political" or "morality" material would be sniffed out easily as an attempt to *sell,* to *spin*, and would therefore become aversive to audiences. The way out of audience aversion and resistance, the advocates asserted, was high-quality storytelling, storytelling that really *moved* people to whatever cause or issue was being depicted rather than the kind of media that was focused on making a rational argument or informing the public. This might involve "spin," of course, but a good story might make the "spin" compelling enough to disguise its agenda. These, in other words, were emotional appeals designed to disguise other kinds of emotional appeals.

The deeply emotional and inspiring nature of stories was consistently foregrounded over other kinds of argument-making. At a small, private networking gathering at someone's home, I met one writer-producer who was interested in "social transformation" and was considering how she might use her place in Hollywood's writers' rooms to get the public more engaged in social justice. During one of our interviews, she explained to me,

1 JH I came to writing as a lawyer.

[232] Are viewers sick of — resistant to — being constructed as neoliberal consumers and subjects of advertising? Or is it only moral claims that they are understood to resist to strenuously? I was never able to ascertain the answer to this question.

2	which means that my point of view was always the best idea wins,
3	I marshal some evidence,
4	I convince people of something,
5	and that's it.
6	But it ends up that it doesn't really work that way,
7	right,
8	that you're not actually just making that kind of an argument.
9	A story works because it makes an emotional argument as well.
10	The quality of your thing and the quality of the story or the thing that wins,
11	it's the emotional part,
12	that's the convincing in this.

This writer speaks to the fact of needing to focus on the "quality of the story" and "the emotional part" as "the convincing" element and "the thing that wins." This is opposed to the kind of public messages that might focus on "evidence" or an effort to "convince people of something," which were associated with legal argumentation and the idea that "the best idea wins." These were understood to be fundamentally different from storytelling and the way that a story might "work" to change someone's mind. "A story works because it makes an emotional argument as well," and the emotional aspect was therefore foregrounded. "That's the convincing in this."

Throughout my fieldwork, however, I heard many conversations about the dual utility and *precariousness* of using stories as "emotional arguments." On the one hand, there was much talk of how SIS professionals should make material that would be narratively involving and "appeal to the heart" rather than documentary-style or polemical material that would be a "turn off." On the other hand, there was concern that decades of constant attempts to persuade publics by pulling at their emotions had produced a dynamic of suspicion wherein audiences could not be swept up easily and were difficult to engage in this way. Many advocates I spoke to over the course of my fieldwork referenced, with a shudder, media that played too blatantly upon audience affect by portraying people's abject suffering and social need. "Feed the Children"-style campaigns or melodramatic "After School Specials" were a sort of cautionary tale for SIS professionals who

now wanted to avoid the on-the-nose, egregious appeals to audiences' heartstrings (and importantly, purse strings). Was not the "immediate distrust that takes place between the storyteller and the listener" referenced above born of people's efforts to use storytelling to move and manipulate the listener in exactly this way? Yet, advocates continued to highly prize the kinds of storytelling that would invoke highly-charged empathic and affective responses to their issues. Was it just that these issues needed to be buried more deeply in stories so as not to trigger resistance? Viewers' emotional involvement was a tricky phenomenon indeed, one that seemed to be inextricable from the phenomenon of resistance, one marked by potential distrust, but one also very much sought and desired as the essential engine of social transformation.

From Compassion to Inspiration; From Sufferers to "Survivors"

In social science literature over the past decade, there has been much concern over a perceived preoccupation with traumatized subjects; writers have observed an academic and cultural infatuation with "the sufferer," the "victim," and, especially, the political category of victimhood.[233] Lauren Berlant describes a "contemporary culture of true feeling that places suffering at the center of being."[234] Wendy Brown argues that a sense of woundedness has become the ultimate basis for a sense of identity, resulting in a political climate wherein states of injury (once ratified and validated) form the foundation of political subjectivity.[235] Didier Fassin declares that there has been a shift from "a politics of justice" to a "politics of compassion, which

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[233] Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry Into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Robbins, "Beyond the Suffering Subject."

[234] Berlant, *Compassion,* 7.

[235] Brown, *States of Injury*.

has the sufferer as its object."[236] Subjects seeking political legitimacy, justice, or life-sustaining care are required to frame themselves as sufferers worthy of compassion. This is an individualizing procedure inextricable from a first-person narrative economy. It is a process some argue problematically foregrounds personal worthiness, subjective judgments, and communicative competence rather than collective responsibility and a more structural approach to justice. Žižek, for example, argues emphatically against "empathic identification," "moral sentiment," and an "ethos of responsibility" toward the "sufferer" as the basis of political organization.[237] He argues that these are poor substitutes for collective interests and social solidarity, and are dangerous distractions from political work that could build these forms of engagement and collectivity.

There are other good reasons, however, to be concerned about prioritizing compassion as a political affect and using depictions of individual suffering to invoke political participation or activate the public's social justice sensibilities. SIS professionals were well-aware of the risks and limitations of a practice aimed at generating compassion, even as they continued to champion empathic narrative involvement. Quite simply, too much suffering was understood to invoke audience resistance. In the context of a "booming market in compassion" with "suffering as the language of the present"; in the midst of "the modern incitement to feel compassionately — even while being entertained," there are enormous affective demands placed upon audiences to feel and feel-for sufferers.[238] Any bid for a spectator's emotional involvement or investment is

[236] Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*, 211.

[237] Žižek, *First as Tragedy*.

[238] Ibid., 10.

accompanied by the spectator's desire to reject, refuse, or turn away from the sufferer. There is "an aversion to a moral claim on the spectator to engage."[239]

This was a particularly thorny problem for SIS advocates, who very explicitly wanted to use stories about social issues to make claims on spectators and to provoke engagement on behalf of the social good. The advocates used stories — often of suffering — to construct audience members as emotionally invested spectators to that suffering. Audiences' emotional investment and compassionate engagement with the predicaments of characters was part of what made SIS impactful; it overcame audience resistance of the kind I discussed in the previous section. But it could just as easily *invoke* audience resistance. The advocates knew that once audience-members were constructed as bystanders to suffering, they could choose to *refuse* the moral claim this bystanderness placed upon them (by turning away; by changing the channel). SIS professionals therefore struggled to compellingly depict the social issues they were concerned about ("appealing to the heart") *without* calling attention to the demand or moral claim placed on the other, of course, who might find such demands aversive. Yet, isn't the function of SIS to provoke such self-reflexive ethical moments? There are paradoxes involved in this practice. The affective and ethical demand (no longer separated from one another) must not approach reflexivity or salience for popular audiences or Hollywood writers if the whole endeavor was to come off successfully.

Toward the end of my fieldwork, I was hearing more and more SIS professionals orienting more often to tales of "empowerment," "resilience," and "stories of survival and hope." I began to encounter copious discourses on "solutions-oriented storylines" and frequently heard advocates critiquing stories that were too "depressing" or that gave people an "emotional hangover" (as one person put it). The advocates had long-ceased waging the eye-roll-inducing explicit campaigns or

[239] Berlant, *Compassion*, 10.

sad-sack after school specials that called attention to themselves in the 1990s, but audiences had acclimated to the new standard and were sick of the embedded storylines, too. There was a growing awareness that the use or overuse of affect-invoking material had produced public exhaustion about social issues and had begun to backfire in the form of desensitization and cynicism. The SIS professionals I spoke with therefore believed that they needed to functionally depoliticize and lighten/brighten the narratives they were offering if this material was to continue to be inspiring and effective and motivating of moral engagement. Rather than depicting social *problems*, advocates appeared to be pivoting toward the depiction of *overcoming* these problems; there was a shift underway from a focus on sufferers to a focus on survivors. For example, one project claimed to "facilitate more positive and action-inspiring depictions" of social justice topics. An excerpt from the grant associated with this project is indicative of this turning away from "the sufferer" as a privileged subject:

> Modern media provide the public with a staggering number of stories on the challenges confronting our modern world, but these accounts often leave the public feeling overwhelmed by "what's wrong" rather than informed about "what works." Solutions-oriented portrayals of the diverse ways that people all over the world are creatively addressing and positively impacting social problems can expand viewers' sense that positive change and problem-solving is possible even in the face of seemingly intractable social issues.

Here, we can see advocates' concern about preserving and promoting viewers' *felt sense* that "positive change" and "problem-solving" is possible. The effort is less focused on providing specific solutions or demanding specific actions, and more about generating more and more affective energy with which to address "seemingly intractable social issues." The feeling to be

avoided is the feeling of being "overwhelmed," the feeling of being helpless or impotent in the face of complex "challenges facing our modern world." That is a very long way from the idea of "infinite responsibility" in encounter with the Other's face as the very precondition of ethical engagement.[240]

It is interesting to think about this turn, in SIS, away from "what's wrong" and toward "solutions" and "positive change" in light of recent anthropological interest in "the good" as well as in resilience and hope.[241] Didier Fassin suggests that humanitarian movements shifted away from a focus on representations of political violence and structural oppression toward a focus on individual suffering because we could not tolerate the scope and horror of political violence.[242] If a previous turn *toward* "suffering" was a refusal to acknowledge political violence, is a subsequent turn *away* from suffering toward "the good" a further extension of this refusal? What might we make of this, especially in contexts where the explicit aim is to ameliorate injustice and address "seemingly intractable social issues"?

Affective Demand and Feeling as Ethical Action

What is interesting and, perhaps, troubling, is that this move away from sufferers and compassion and towards survivors and inspiration does *not* substantively reconfigure a fundamental focus on affects as the foundations of social justice work and positive social change, nor does it deviate from a dogged commitment to narratives as the generator of such crucial affects. Emotional responses to stories are still foregrounded in this framework; advocates are

[240] Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*; Levinas, "Ethics and Infinity."

[241] Robbins, "Beyond the Suffering Subject"; Mattingly, *The Paradox of Hope*.

[242] Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*; I wonder, though, whether it was really "us" who couldn't tolerate consciousness of the scope and horror but, rather, that our privileged modes of communication could not accommodate or structure such topics and that we failed to expand the kinds of communication and representation (perhaps less narrative, less codified) that might have allowed for public access to this material.

simply focusing on different emotions. Whether confronted with the compassion-invoking sufferer or the inspiration-invoking survivor, audiences are interpellated into a construct where stories make "a claim on the spectator to become an ameliorative actor"[243] — or, I think more accurately, a claim on the spectator to *feel* like an ameliorative actor. In either case, we can feel for/feel with the narrative subject, thus answering his or her moral claim, or we can turn away, defaulting to the status of immoral bystander.

According to Lauren Berlant, this particular kind of ethical demand for our personal and affective investment in representations of others' lifeworlds is possible when "social interdependence" is "no longer deemed structural, but instead is conceived as relational, individual."[244] This is a circumstance in which our moral citizenship and ethical personhood is defined by our *feeling* for others, our experience of our "sympathetic agency" and an "abstract intimacy practiced from the ground up" by a community of individual bystanders.[245] These are moral sentiments in the *absence* of action and care towards the other, but they are thought to perhaps lead to action in some abstract way. Emotion is so central to ethical subjectivity and moral citizenship in this framework that it is unsurprising that those who subscribe to it would so devotedly stoke engines of affective production to invoke and re-invoke sentiments (in both themselves and others). SIS advocates' social justice work involved continuous efforts to engender feeling in themselves and in the populous in order to generate social change. It was understood that these affects were a precondition to ethical action, although the advocates were agnostic to what form the action in question would take. SIS advocates saw themselves as working toward social justice by engendering the publics' emotional investments in social issues;

[243] Berlant, *Compassion*, 2.

[244] Berlant, *Compassion*, 2.

[245] Berlant, *Compassion*, 3.

what the public then did with these investments was in large part beyond the scope of their concern.

This is related to Fassin's analyses of humanitarian movements and what he asserts is a contemporary era of "humanitarian reason," a time in which popular appeals for social action are often based on the elicitation of sympathy for individual sufferers rather than solidarity with or support for the political rights of others.[246] Fassin carefully documents and critiques processes of "subjectivization" in humanitarian movements, which involves looking away from the *social* origins of suffering and locating them in individual stories, individual subjects. Social suffering disappears as political and public problems are transformed into individualizing accounts of empathy-inducing pain; this process invokes sympathy rather than solidarity in the onlooker. Fassin notes the "insistent highlighting of individual stories"[247] among humanitarian workers rather than other portrayals of collective social problems. This, by now, should sound awfully familiar. Fassin argues that in moments where the sheer scale of a problem would overwhelm us (or, I would add, our emplotted narratives), we seem to prone to reducing the issue, collapsing it into a representation of pain/suffering of a person or re-condensing it into a personal narrative rather than a more potent representation of violence/carnage (which would be more oriented to collective responsibility).[248]

I want to note again how entangled are the processes of "subjectivization" with "narrativization," and how inextricably linked these are, in turn, to a notion of ethical engagement and responsibility. Narrative, here, is the process by which a structural-scale problem becomes a digestible, individual-scale problem that offers openings for other individuals to engage with, care

[246] Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*.

[247] Ibid., 61.

[248] Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*..

about, or understand the issue. Story opens up certain ethical affordances — people can care; people can empathize. But it also constructs serious limitations: people probably cannot perceive the structural forces that produce such suffering, and probably aren't collectively orienting to structural factors in such encounters. Recall the trouble advocates faced when attempting to narrativize chronic, systemic, and macro social issues. Yet, they doggedly persisted in their belief that these had to be made into popular stories in order to inspire and empower the public to orient more ethically to these social injustices.

Žižek problematizes "humanization" for similar reasons to Fassin's critiques of humanitarianist subjectivization.[249] For Žižek, to "humanize" is to domesticate the subject, to render someone worthy of compassion, to extend narrative subject status to them. Žižek critiques this "detoxification of the neighbor" because it constructs a context wherein people *have* to become certain kinds of subjects in order to receive the benefits of a just world.[250] For him, this constitutes a sort of false consciousness in which justice appears to be conditional; one is afforded human status only on the basis of one's detoxification through compassion-invoking representation that grants inclusion only when a subject can be felt-for in the right way (a social organization he deems unjust). Žižek declares, "when making ethical judgments, we should be story-blind."[251] "Humanizing" narratives, after all, often "subjectify"/subjectivize the structural. Žižek urges wariness about "collective forms of 'telling stories about ourselves" — these forms of narrativization that are supposedly in the interest of the formation of social movements through fellow-feeling, but end up maintaining an individualist framework.[252] He claims that "false

[249] Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 44.

[250] Ibid., 48.

[251] Ibid., 40.

[252] Ibid.

humanization" is supplied or peddled in the public sphere in a way that sustains the very form of capitalism that dehumanizes people in the first place.[253]

Whether or not we agree with Žižek, here, I think it is worth thinking about SIS as a project that is certainly interested in detoxifying the neighbor by asking the public to feel in certain ways. I think it is essential to question the consequences of a narrative economy in which individual stories are thought to be the only way to frame systemic struggles. Bracketing any arguments about capitalism for the moment, Žižek and Fassin's critiques beg the essential questions: What does it mean to be "humanized" in this way? If the only way to be "humanized" or to become "human" is to be represented in the marketplace of narratives or to conform to the form of "stories about ourselves," is it any wonder that there is an intense drive to get *in the story*, to reach Hollywood's storytellers as purveyors of this ratified humanness? What might be lost or discarded in such efforts?

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[253] Ibid.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

A Summary

This dissertation has explored the practices of entertainment media advocacy and social impact storytelling in contemporary Hollywood, from the methodological roots of these efforts in entertainment-education advocacy as a public health communication strategy, through their evolution into a focus on inspiring Hollywood professionals to engage in the popular narrativization of a more diffuse variety of social concerns. The project set out to understand the underlying ideologies of social change and theories of communication that shaped participants' everyday practices and relationships with one another as they aimed to "change the world through the power of stories." The dissertation sought to know something about the way so-called "social impact" topics (and efforts after impactful public storytelling on these topics) were being formulated, transformed, and articulated within the context of a contemporary Hollywood that appears to increasingly orient to social justice concerns or, at least, increasingly situates its popular narrative-making vis-à-vis discourses about social justice and social change, as well as broadly-stated humanitarian ideals and commitments to a better world.[254]

Chapter One situated the study in terms of previous social science research on cultural constructions of health and illness, narratives and narrativity, cultures of Hollywood production, the anthropology of ethics and moralities, and critiques of humanitarianism. Chapter Two detailed the ethnographic methods used during fieldwork and describes the final corpus of ethnographic data, including audio/video recordings of interactions and interviews, field notes, and textual

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[254] Rhetorically, at least — a recent report by suggests that this has not yet yielded considerable results or changes in gender or racial diversity, at least within the culture/context of Hollywood industries themselves (Darnell Hunt, Ana-Christina Ramon, and Michael Tran, *Hollywood Diversity Report: Setting the Record Straight*. Rep. Vol 4. (Los Angeles: Ralph J Bunche Center for African American Studies, 2017).

materials. Chapter Three explored the history and underlying logic of entertainment-education, described a middle-range adaptation of the model for US contexts in the 1980s-early 2000s, and discussed emerging contemporary trajectories in the form of social impact storytelling (SIS). It examined how participants assessed and understood previous and existing entertainment-education models, as well as how they understood their work to require adaptation due to recent pressures. It described the rationale for shifting existing practices in light of evolving popular cultural contexts, especially a changing Hollywood marketplace that was understood to be particularly sensitive to preaching, pitching, and politicizing while simultaneously craving and asserting its relevance in terms of the "social good."

Chapter Four addressed what I refer to as "narrative theory of social change," a social change ideology that achieved the status of commonsense among the people with whom I worked and which champions "the power of story," positioning narrative as the privileged mode through which to engage in efforts after social transformation. It discussed the constituent assumptions about the properties of narrative and the power of popular storytelling that were embedded in this ideology, as well as the pressure this ideology exerted upon participants to bring ever more topics into narrative circulation. Chapter Five continued this discussion of narrative ideology and narrative circulation by exploring social impact storytelling as a narrative economy. It argued that the social impact narrative economy problematically invisibilizes the influence of *financial* capital while splitting off and redefining the parameters of *narrative* capital. The chapter described how this particular narrative economy produces a division of labor between participants who have varying degrees of control and varying degrees of epistemic authority over their own or others' stories/content, as well as producing a dynamic wherein people possess asymmetrical access to social and financial capital on the basis of these stories. It described some of the unique

communicative predicaments related to these asymmetries and social impact media advocates' attempts to preempt or resolve them.

Chapter Six attempted to examine and disentangle these asymmetries, and sought to better understand the ways such issues impacted the narratives that might be produced in and through advocates' efforts. It argued that some narratives were valued more than others in the social impact narrative economy, and detailed the specific kinds of narrative transformations that were undertaken in the service of these specific narrative demands. It considered what kinds of experiences and topics might be elided or discarded by privileging such transformations, arguing that representations that involved chronic, structural, and perhaps overwhelmingly painful or intractable social problems — ironically, those very problems that advocates most wanted and needed to address — posed the most difficulty for advocates during narrativization. It also argued that a tremendous narrative demand was generated in the context of a narrative theory of social change and a particular narrative economy where *every* subject and *every* topic appeared to urgently require popular narrativization (and, significantly, specific *kinds* of narrativization) if they were to be seen as worthy of public attention, humane responsiveness, ameliorative action or actionable redress in an unjust world.

Chapter Seven delved further into this sense of narrative urgency and explored participants' sincere concern about the "social good" in light of recent anthropological work on ethics and moralities. It attempted to work through the entanglement of narrativity and ethics in the practice of social impact storytelling, including tensions between a focus on first-personness and the vicissitudes of moral experience versus a more structural/macro focus involving a particular interest in the disciplinary force of moral norms. It described what kinds of ethical actors and actions were hoped-for and worked-towards by advocates and their collaborators. It

explored participants' beliefs about how, exactly, the consumption of Hollywood's entertaining narratives invoked or constrained specific kinds of ethical engagements — especially affective/attentional reorientations toward social problems — particularly the ways that encounters with televised topics might shape unreflective norms or, instead, prompt active ethical reflexivity on the part of viewers. It also began to engage with the issue of audience/participant resistance, participants' opposition to experiencing ethical demands, and the various ways that advocates attempted to work around the possibility of audience "turn off" and turning away in the face of certain kinds of narrative depictions.

This discussion continued in Chapter Eight, which focused more specifically on the role of affect in social impact storytelling. I observed that professionals involved in social impact media were constantly, almost doggedly oriented to the critical role of affects such as compassion, inspiration, compassion-fatigue, and disgust ("turn off") in their work. Chapter Eight therefore discussed how participants worked to engender motivating affects in each other and in others (TV writers and TV audiences), and how they sought to make topics *feel* as though they mattered for participants. It explored participants' theories about what constituted effective versus ineffective uses of affect in the service of their social change mission — especially their sense that certain depictions would be dispiriting and therefore work against the cause of social justice. The chapter describes a recent shift from the "sufferer" to the "survivor" as the privileged subject of social change narratives, at the expense of other kinds of subjects. Again, the chapter noted that certain kinds of social issues, certain kinds of experiences, and certain kinds of subjects were routinely disavowed or deemed ineffective to "inspire" the public toward positive social change in light of these assessments, and it ends with concern about the costs of these exclusions.

The Bigger Picture

In a series of papers, Nancy Fraser outlines two positions regarding work towards social justice, the “redistribution” approach and the “recognition” approach.[255] Fraser explains that a redistributive vision of justice focuses on reorganizing economic processes and emphasizes efforts after structural equality and legal/policy interventions on behalf of marginalized populations, while a recognition-focused approach focuses on cultural capital — reorganizing the cultural meaning, social status and subjective experience of various marginalized identities. Fraser, in the end, argues for a “bivalent conception of justice”; rather than championing one position or the other, she argues that justice would actually require both.[256] Maldistribution and misrecognition are entangled, but not identical, though she notes that the “mutual irreducibility” and “practical entwinement” between the discourses associated with the two modes make it difficult to talk about and research them as distinct.[257] She insists that enhanced recognition would not solve all our problems with redistribution, and redistribution would not solve all our problems with recognition. Fraser also discusses a problematic decoupling of economic distribution and the structures of cultural prestige (recognition) in the context of late capitalism.[258] Because of this decoupling, cultural value can resist market value, and maldistribution cannot be inferred from misrecognition (and vice versa). For Fraser, the answer to this decoupling is to make visible “the

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[255] Fraser “From Redistribution to Recognition”; Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics”; Fraser, “Rethinking Recognition”; Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*.

[256] Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition,” 5.

[257] Ibid., 6.

[258] Ibid., 7.

cultural subtexts of nominally economic processes and the economic subtexts of nominally cultural practices."[259]

Fraser's discussions are useful here because it seems clear to me that SIS's fantasies about the revolutionary possibilities of Hollywood are grounded in an ideology about *recognition* and a commonsense investment in the link between social status and economic capital. All of the people I met during my research seemed to very much believe and invest in the idea that TV shows could change the landscape of cultural recognition/cultural status which would, as an extension, change outcomes related to economic status and the distribution of rights and privileges (i.e., would impact poverty as a social determinant of ill-health). This was a belief held sacred among participants: that changing the popular narrative about a topic would change people's hearts/minds about that topic; that changing people's hearts and minds about that topic would change the material reality of that topic (without, you will by now understand, any specific policy mandates or actionable directives along the way). Recall Soloway's gleeful declarations, discussed in Chapter Four, about *Transparent*'s ability to *create privilege* from the very positioning of trans subjects as protagonists. I observed that people involved in social impact storytelling were naively invested in the notion that they could generate/transform social statuses of different social categories through compassionate narrative depictions of these subjects and their dilemmas; they also seemed to believe that this would confer not only increased *social* capital, but contribute to ameliorating the impact of structural inequality upon these social groups.

I acknowledge that it is difficult, if not impossible, to figure out whether this proposition about social change is true. Did funny, charming, lovable Will (of *Will & Grace*) being piped into living rooms across prime time America result in audiences advocating for (and achieving) more equitable wages, more equivalent health outcomes, less systemic discrimination and violence for

[259] Ibid., 8.

LGBT citizens? Do humane and complex portrayals of trans and queer characters on *Transparent* result in increased professional opportunities, decreased stigmatization, and more chances to work and love for trans people without the threat of violence? Maybe, maybe not. It seems rational to assume that such depictions contribute to culture change, which may then contribute to political change. My ethnographic research suggests, though, that the social impact storytelling model (as it exists now, anyway) is not at all in a position to systematically assess such impacts. Yet, the drumbeat around "the power of stories" grows louder, appears sexier for funders upon whom social justice nonprofits almost entirely depend. The people I talked to very much believed that funding (and competition) for story-based projects was increasing — even as funding for direct interventions and community services was steadily waning/disappearing altogether.

I must admit that I find it troubling that grandiose claims to revolutionary social change and the social value of popular narratives are being promulgated in a context where the role of financial capital, wealth, philanthropic influence and commoditization are absolutely disavowed and invisibilized. It seems that even those most committed to leveraging popular media for prosocial purposes are foregrounding — in Fraser's framing — recognition rather than redistribution – recognition *without* redistribution.[260] I wonder, too about a slippage into the idea that cultural recognition is *itself* redistributive — something for which I do not think there is at all enough evidence to invest in at scale. Is there not a constitutive hypocrisy in socially-conscious Hollywood's distinct monetization/marketization of ostensibly anti-market/justice-seeking ideals and principles? Is this not yet another example of the "constitutive impurity" that Jameson argues characterizes capitalism?[261] Is social impact storytelling anything more than "yet another systemic

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[260] Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition."

[261] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

modification of capitalism itself" that sustains and supports the social structures that it ostensibly wishes to disturb?[262]

I would like to argue for a wariness of social impact media and its associated practices as an iteration of "pop justice": the overlay of popular media and social justice movements. At the risk of anthropomorphizing late capitalism and endowing it with agency, I think it is very likely that social impact storytelling is an ingenious and opportunistic adaptation of late capitalism, and that these efforts are a clever way to stitch the idea of social justice, ethical experience, and moral sentiments to a thriving business practice without much trouble. Social impact entertainment — as a model — seeks to expand/adapt entertainment models to incorporate moralities and ethical themes — "the good." Pop justice can easily be understood as capitalism's latest adaptation to its current incipient ethical crisis in that it both creates and fulfills ethical demand on the part of viewers (who might long for otherwise, but who are either satiated or repulsed by the ethical sentiment they experience during exposures to ethical demand).

I also find it troubling to observe how narrative and narrativity are being wielded as (or have become) such a potent hegemonic force among those seeking social change and social justice in this country. The hegemony of narrative form is particularly troubling in light of so much anthropological research on the ways that certain kinds of human experiences (perhaps those that *most* demand social justice intervention) are precisely those that resist or fragment canonical narrativity. If more and more social issues are urged into canonical narratives — indeed, if they *must* be narrativized in order to receive popular support — this is fundamentally exclusive of profound domains of human experience and human need. This, I believe, is a problem.

[262] Ibid., xii.

Somehow, we went from entertainment being seen as a pacifier of the people — a peddler of false consciousness and propaganda, something that cheapens morals and constructs population-level illusions and psyche-tainting false investment in bad ideals — to the idea that entertainment is our only hope for global change, the prosocial engine for social movements and personal redemptions, with the ability to awaken the people, prompt ethical revelations and reorganize cultural norms for the better. Clearly, these are not unlinked extremes, as both invest so totally in the power of popular media (the power of Hollywood) to construct our ideas and feelings about our worlds. But then what? This dissertation has critically examined one domain of such intentional influence and has described some of its limitations. I believe that a blind faith investment in a narrative ideology of social change is constraining political and creative movements by driving them in particular directions at the expense of crucial others; shaping certain kinds of advocacy efforts and limiting our sense of what is possible. In the midst of an insatiable demand for more stories and a corresponding demand for more feeling, more emotional response to issues, there is a disturbing slippage: the idea of encouraging unmediated action/direct intervention slips away and the importance of feeling-for takes its place; the idea of mediated narrative experience as ethical experience takes the place of real world engagement with others. To be narrativized and felt-for was an end in itself, the end result of a pop justice sensibility that valorized recognition and representation above all other kinds of attempts to build a better world. In SIS, hegemonic narrative practices and a limited view of what constitutes ethical involvement converged. I would urge a healthy dose of suspicion about pop justice movements and their reliance on discourses of story-power, especially SIS's valorization of narrative representation (even as it devalues other kinds of representation), as well as its centering of subjective experiences of fellow-feeling and inspiration as the locus of justice, concurrent with its

devaluation of structural, policy-based, or redistributive justice projects. It seems painfully clear to me that even our deepest involvements in televised narratives do not (alone) a better world make.

Appendix A

Transcription Key

::: Colons indicate the elongation or stretching of the sound that immediately precedes them.

, Comma indicates continuing intonation.

. A period indicates falling intonation.

? A question mark indicates rising intonation.

! An exclamation mark indicates emphatic intonation.

= An equal sign indicates that there is no break or pause between words.

— A hyphen after a word or a part of a word indicates interrupted speech.

(0.4) Numbers in parentheses indicates the length of a pause in tenths of a second.

(.) A period within parentheses indicates a micro-pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds.

Word Underlining indicates emphatic speech.

((word))Words in double parenthesis indicate transcribers' description of sound, gesture or embodied action.

Adapted from Sacks, Harvey, Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (1974) and Paul Ten Have (2007).

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