

Storytelling: How Narrative Identity Can Reduce the Experience of Poverty through Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract: Narrative identity therapy interventions are proven to be effective forms of psychotherapy as they enhance psychological well-being. Narrative therapy enhances psychological well-being by creating coherence and agency in life experiences, purpose in life and social support. The cultivation of these internal resources can also help one to maintain a level of psychological well-being in the face of poverty. Therefore, intervening in poverty with narrative identity could enhance psychological well-being and thus reduce both economic and capability poverty. In doing so, narrative identity would subsequently promote Rawls' justice as fairness and basic human dignity.

Every person has a name, every name has a story, and every story matters. Unfortunately, not all people are led to believe that their story does actually matter. Groups that have been oppressed in society are told day in and day out by the world around them that their story, their struggle, their success does not actually matter. Individuals experiencing poverty fall into this category. Poverty is often intergenerational, young people in poverty have worse academic outcomes than their higher-socioeconomic status peers, women in poverty are more likely to become pregnant at a young age, and men in poverty are more likely to be incarcerated (especially when poverty intersects with race). One of the most important correlates of poverty and each of these associated experiences is its relationship with diminished psychological well-being. Research indicates that the relationship between poverty and lower levels of psychological well-being is consistent across time and age cohorts (McLeod & Owens, 2004). However, intervention by improving soft skills and internal resources of individuals is of particular interest in reducing the effect of this relationship, which can allow for psychological well-being even during the experience of poverty. The soft skill I am particularly interested in for the purposes of this paper is one present throughout the psychology literature in treating mental illness: narrative identity. I believe, and research supports my claim, that cultivating a narrative identity could be an effective way to create the internal resources necessary to experience psychological well-being even in the face of poverty and it may altogether reduce or eliminate the experience of poverty.

Narrative identity is a way of telling your life story that helps to make sense of your past, present, and anticipated future. Narrative identity provides unity of self and purpose in life gleaned from various experiences. This story of self is ever evolving, adapting, and being updated to it's most accurate, integrative version (Singer et al., 2013; Singer, 2004; McAdams,

2008). Through stories, we share experiences, we create shared connections, and we make sense of our life experiences. Because storytelling is a natural process and a normal human experience, it is also used as a method of intervention in treatment for psychological disorder or mental health issues. Narrative identity therapy interventions are proven to be effective forms of psychotherapy as they enhance psychological well-being. As narrative therapy promises to improve psychological well-being by creating coherence and agency in life experiences, purpose in life and social support, this type of intervention would offer an important yet unacknowledged method of reducing poverty. While it may actually reduce economic poverty by increasing soft skills that translate into the ability to work, most importantly, narrative identity would reduce capability poverty. In doing so, narrative identity also promotes human dignity and basic social and economic human rights. Thus, it is our responsibility as a society to consider this type of intervention.

A Shift in the Study of Poverty

Interventions for poverty reduction and recent suggestions for interventions have shifted from a hard-skill, tangible resource intervention approach to focus more on the cultivation of soft skills. At this point in time, the soft skills approach to poverty intervention is still growing, with research suggesting that this is a preferable path of intervention to pursue, but lacking many of the necessary interventions to assess effectiveness. Research on soft skills exists, but not specifically applied to poverty. News articles and opinions posts alike have flooded the media claiming “soft skills” as an attractive tagline for popular press. The New York Times, Huffington Post, Blinker, and TED talks alike have attempted to highlight why soft skills are so important and which soft skills in particular might be of interest, including joy, grit, cooperation, self-reliance, and self-empowerment. Each of these particular articles is informed both by some sort

of research but also what seems like a personal agenda of parents or teachers preaching what they think might be best for their kids. The psychological research on soft skills does, however, tend to align with these conversations.

The soft skills of particular interest in the psychology field include talent and effort (Duckworth, Eichstaedt, and Ungar, 2015), self-control (Duckworth, Gendler, and Gross, 2016), and grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly, 2007). Much of this research points to similar benefits of each of these soft skills. Although important to study individually, narrative identity research provides a more comprehensive approach that could incorporate all of the existing literature on individual soft skills. Poverty interventions in areas fostering hard skills provide tangible potential methods of getting ahead in society but intervention in areas of soft skills provides the ability to actually use and apply these hard skills. Scholars in poverty studies I believe could capitalize on narrative identity as a soft skill worth harnessing in this particular subset of the population.

Basics of Narrative Identity

The field of narrative identity research is relatively new. In 1994, Margaret Somers published an article outlining the importance of incorporating narrative into the psychological study of identity. She proposed moving beyond society-imposed, categorical identities like race, gender and sex, to a more three-dimensional, holistic identity approach. Somers (1994) presents research supporting the idea that narratives help us to create a social identity, and a way of making sense of the world around us, that which we can control and that which we cannot. Somers (1994) references the need for a changed approach to identity creation because of the social norm that has been in place, which is to judge oneself or a group against a norm that has more social power for because of the underlying structure of society: the white, western male.

Arguably, this standard still exists on some level today. Somers (1994) focuses primarily on the plight of women for equality, which has improved in the past 20 years, although women are still not equal to men on all accounts. Unfortunately, still today many groups are marginalized or unfairly evaluated or compared without justification. If this was not still happening, the Black Lives Matter movement and similar social justice causes may not exist. For the purposes of this exploratory paper, I am proposing that the marginalized groups of specific interest are those experiencing poverty. Since Somers' (1994) initial proposition for the exploration of narrative research, the field has expanded to include explorations of the constructs and concepts within narrative identity, the purpose of narrative identity and how one is created – all of which will be explained briefly.

Singer (2004) provides a review of the literature of personal narrative by first defining the purpose of narrative identity as the ability to create and maintain both a sense of purpose in life and unity with self across many different experiences and types of experience across the lifespan. Many psychological researchers place this process and experience of narrative identity at the center of one's personality, such that until someone both knows himself or herself and can communicate this to others, true character and personality may be incomplete. Similarly, the actual process of creating a narrative identity involves the retelling of experiences to the self and to others and how one extricates knowledge of the self, others, and the world from experience. This meaning-making process is particularly important as it satisfies a basic psychological need to make sense of the world and our experiences and it creates interconnected webs of social support. Each of these aspects is crucial in maintaining the full, comprehensive model of the aspects of narrative identity and their importance in personality.

Recent psychobiography research supports the idea that identity and the self are ever-changing, ever-adapting, and virtually irreducible to constituent parts because the parts are entirely codependent (Singer, 2004). By freeing themselves from the reductionist approach, Singer's (2004) research is open to the "complex constitutive influences" from which narratives are created. Importantly, he also addresses question of whether the role of a narrative identity can be causal if it is irreducible and codependent. Regardless, the importance of a narrative identity is not lost because is cannot be entirely reduced to causal terms. The fact that a correlation between narrative identity and psychological well-being and other positive effects is enough in and of itself to warrant the study of and stress the cultivation of a personal narrative.

In addition to purpose in life and social support, narrative identity also creates a sense of coherence and agency which are subsequently correlated with psychological well-being. These four categories will be explained in the subsequent sections: coherence, agency, purpose in life, and social support.

Narrative Identity Enhances Psychological Well-Being

Coherence

Narrations help an individual to make sense of and incorporate pieces of life that may have initially seemed separate, uncontrollable, or unrelated. Stories allow someone to express personal interpretation or meaning gleaned from an event or experience. These stories serve to "entertain, educate, inspire, motivate, conceal and reveal, organize and disrupt" (McAdams, 2008). Stories change over time. Narrative identity creates valuable coping mechanisms for largely stressful and uncontrollable situations or circumstances and it develops a sustainable working model for interpreting ever-changing life experiences. Each day is full of new experiences, new memories to create, and new stories to share. Each phase of life is full of

changing goals and expectations, putting yourself in different situations that consequently elicit different experiences and memories. With each of these changes small and large, people acquire or create different meanings and interpretations of the experiences and memories (McAdams, 2008). Only once one is able to make sense of past experiences is he or she able to fully realize the relation to experiences that may occur in the future. Even as the self and personal values may change, if this change is properly understood and internalized, coherence is achieved. As human beings, we have an innate need for cognition, otherwise understood as a need to understand. Creating this coping mechanism and sustainable working model of coherence in narrative identity, an individual is able to achieve this understanding, regardless of what circumstances come about.

Agency

An additional mechanism through which narrative identity may improve psychological well-being is by creating a sense of agency in an individual and improving mental health. Adler (2012) studied the process of 47 adults creating sets of narratives, analyzing nearly 600 individual narratives and the trends that became evident throughout the process. Over time, these adults exhibited vast improvements in sense of agency and also reported significantly higher levels of mental health. Adler (2012) defined agency as, “the individual’s autonomy, achievement, mastery, and ability to influence the course of his or her life”. While direct causal links cannot be drawn, these relationships indicate that in the process of narrative identity formation, adults vastly improved their sense of agency. This increased sense of agency subsequently results in improved mental health, associated with having the internal resources to make sense of changing life experiences and create valuable coping mechanisms. Additionally, Smith et al. (2000) propose that achieving both this personal agency and interpersonal agency are

correlated with psychological well-being by fulfilling some level of a need for perceived primary control, another innate human characteristic.

Purpose in Life

Meaning making processes (like narrative identity creation) moderate the established relationship between adversity (like poverty) and resiliency. Bonanno (2004) explicates how what he calls the trait of ‘hardiness’ can serve as a protection from extreme stress and result in resilience. Bonanno defines hardiness as, “being committed to finding meaningful purpose in life, the belief that one can influence one’s surroundings and the outcomes of events, and the belief that one can learn and grow from both positive and negative life experiences”. This definition clearly maps onto the conceptualization of narrative identity. Translated, this indicates that the development of hardiness, or what we might call an aspect of narrative identity may be what promotes resiliency in the face of adversity, such as poverty.

Zika and Chamberlain (1992) assessed two particularly vulnerable subsets of a population in order to correlate their sense of meaning and purpose in life with general well-being. One sample was only mothers with young children and elderly individuals with an average age of 69. Zika and Chamberlain’s (1992) study of vulnerable population is specifically applicable to the population of interest here as well. Individuals experiencing poverty are similarly associated with having lower levels of well-being, which was the initial reason for the researcher’s choice of studying mothers and elderly individuals. Results suggested that meaning in life is positively correlated with psychological well-being using the Mental Health Inventory (MHI) and the global general life satisfaction survey. Zika and Chamberlain (1992) propose that finding meaning in life is a critical factor in achieving and maintaining well-being. A greater sense of purpose in life for all people, but especially those in situations predictive of lower well-

being, promotes psychological well-being and a greater ability to function with a purpose on a daily basis.

Social Support

Narrative is important social and culturally. Singer (2004) provides a thorough exploration of how extracting meaning from memories and experiences is a personal journey and is relative to independent development. However, he also notes that none of these experiences or meaning-making episodes are immune to shared culture. The experiences we have, how we interpret them, how we share them and the meaning we extract from them are all interdependent and also co-dependent upon social context and culture. Singer (2004) also proposes that “narratives are inevitably created to meet the demands of social roles” (p. 444). While the developmental period determines the initial ability to create a personal narrative and narrative identity, how the narrative is later shaped is dependent on other sociocultural factors.

McAdams (2008) also explores two aspects of social-cultural contexts: the idea that narratives are told to create and maintain social relationships and that these stories themselves are the context of a culture. The audience of our narratives influences the stories we tell and how we tell them. Telling your story, memory, or recollection of something that has happened to you may help make both cognitive and emotional sense of the event (McAdams, 2008). Such sharing is creating positive social relationships, which are important supports to maintain through life.

Social support can also expand to a broader societal or cultural level. The stories that are shared are largely dependent on what society expects and values. Whether a story is presented with pride or shame and the lessons that are gleaned from it depend on social and cultural norms and expectations. Again, this incorporates an aspect of the effects of discrimination, which are tied closely to poverty and socioeconomic prejudice. “Within any society, different stories

compete for dominance and acceptance” (McAdams, 2008, 247). Women, racial minorities, ethnic minorities and non-heterosexual individuals have especially experienced the wrong side of the of the “power elites” favoring some life stories over others (McAdams, 2008). However, much like the stories that inspired my research, so-called counter-narratives are created to oppose the cultural dominance communicated by the majority and they are created as a way of giving voice to a minority. These are “especially salient among minorities, the economically disadvantaged, and other marginalized groups in society” (McAdams, 2008). Having a voice, a story, and an identity is a basic human right and so fostering the ability of historically and unrightfully disadvantaged populations to recognize and nurture their identity within the context of their past but also with a potential future is an important step is eliminating the disadvantage.

Interaction

While research indicates the individual role of each of these categories of soft skills, it is also important to note that coherence, agency, purpose in life, and social support are all highly interactive. Having proper social support may be critical for some to have before they can fully realize their purpose in life. Or, having coherency in life experiences may lead another person more easily to a sense of agency or control. Although it is impossible to fully tease out these relationships, the role of each of these aspects of narrative identity and psychological well-being is still critical. Narrative identity by definition and in its nature is an entirely individual experience. The relationship between coherence, agency, purpose, and social support for each individual may look entirely different, which further supports the idea that still analyzing narrative identity without trying to tease out these relationships is fully acceptable.

Psychological Well-Being Reduces the Experience of Poverty

Improving psychological well-being may reduce or eliminate the experience of poverty, making some people exceptions to the rule I explained in the introduction. Reducing the experience of poverty incorporates both poverty understood as economic deficits and poverty as capability deficits, both of which will be fully explained. Finally, taken a step further, psychological well-being may go so far as to restore the dignity all people deserve which poverty tends to strip away.

Economic

Narrative identity, as just explained, enhances psychological well-being, which could translate into economic well-being. Most basically, psychological well-being is correlated with and may even predict academic achievement, productivity, and physical health, which all are subsequently correlated with economic advantages in society. Once again, each of these relationships are highly interactive and may not be able to be fully reduced to a causal relationship, but the fact that a relationship exists is enough foundation for studying the implications. Narrative identity is also important socially and culturally and has noteworthy power in fostering community development and personal ties to interpersonal relationships (McAdams, 2008). Feeling connected to, valued in and valuable to one's community (fostered through the creation of narrative identity) could increase the availability of work through social connections and could make the experience of work more enjoyable, allowing for upward mobility or simply satisfaction in the workplace. These experiences may lead directly to a reduction in economic poverty or they may enhance psychological well-being and work through those mechanisms.

Capability

While this simplistic model of reducing income poverty is important, what is perhaps more important in this literature is the ability of psychological well-being to reduce capability poverty, as psychological well-being *is* a central tenant of/example of human capability. Nussbaum's capability approach to poverty proposes ten central tenants of the human experience necessary for living a full and dignified life. An individual lacking the ten central capabilities Nussbaum proposes is understood to be experiencing poverty and so addressing poverty should ensure that every individual possess these capabilities and would subsequently have the ability to life a dignified life. Five of Nussbaum's ten crucial capabilities map directly onto the experience of psychological well-being: senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affirmation; and control over one's environment. Nussbaum's capabilities are therefore directly correlated to the aspects of personal narrative that enhance psychological well-being discussed previously.

The capabilities approach to reducing poverty incorporating personal narrative is purely logical. First, poverty is widely understood as more than just a monetary or income deficit and the definition is widened to incorporate the fuller human experience and the necessary capability and opportunity to succeed. The underpinning of half of the ten capabilities of Nussbaum is a basic psychological well-being. These specific capabilities and the resulting psychological well-being map closely onto coherence, agency, meaning in life and social support cultivated in a narrative identity and weave themselves in and out of the narrative identity literature. Therefore, intervention focused on narrative identity would, in effect, reduce poverty understood as capability.

Dignity

Taking the capabilities approach one step further, the cultivation of these capabilities and opportunities results in the restoration and insurance of human rights and human dignity. Kreide states that “social and economic human rights should make it possible for people to ‘develop’ themselves as they see fit, within reasonable bounds...pursue their version of ‘the good life’” and “developing [individual] capacities demands resources adapted to the individual’s needs” (Kreide, page 162-163). The beauty of narrative identity is that the nature of the concept itself is highly individualized. The creation of a narrative identity depends entirely on what an individual chooses to incorporate. With practice and as this personal storytelling becomes more comfortable, the ideal is that a person’s narrative incorporates all experiences – positive, negative, challenging or rewarding.

An additional ethical approach provides a unique perspective, one of why society should help regardless of whether or not one believes the receiving group is deserving. Haidt proposes, “when people use the ethic of divinity, their goal is to protect from degradation the divinity that exists in each person, and they value living in a pure and holy way, free from moral pollutants such as lust, greed, and hatred” (Haidt, page 188). This idea of divinity, purity and holiness extend beyond any religious practice to simply incorporate holistic living in full appreciation of all emotional and affective experiences. Poverty strips someone from the individual experience of divinity and dignity such that they are subject to the greed, hatred, and oppression of society. Narrative identity could protect this individual divinity and foster its growth even in a world that may be forever riddled with greed and oppression.

Moral Argument

Simply because the correlation may exist between the psychology and poverty literature is not enough to validate intervening in this sense. To do this, I will draw on two examples of

narrative identity restoring capabilities and improving psychological well-being – the stories of MK Asante and Dorothy Allison. These examples of personal narrative and narrative identity are published by now well-educated, resilient, and scholarly individuals who overcame great difficulties in their economically and capability impoverished upbringings riddled with economic poverty, neighborhood violence, family dysfunction, and personal struggle.

Asante

“Write,” she says, hawking over me.
“Write what?” I look around at everyone writing, lost in their own little worlds. I wonder what they’re writing.
“Anything you want,” she says. “Anything I want?” I want to make sure I heard that right.
“Anything.”

At this point in his story, Asante has lived the stereotypical life of a young, black man born into poverty. Although his parents started out married, his mother’s mental illness put enough strain on the relationship that his father left. His brother is in jail and his sister lives at a residential psychiatric facility. Asante (or “Buck” as his peers called him) got involved in the drug game, dropped out of school, and spent time running from the police. Unfortunately, this trajectory is no surprise, and Buck seems to be forging full speed ahead to the land of the expected based on his race and socioeconomic status. Based on his history, society wouldn’t expect much of Buck. Buck, however becomes an exception to the rule. Thanks to Crefeld, Buck learns to write.

I grip the pen and something shoots down my spine, sits me straight up. The pen feels heavy, like it's made of stone.

**At exactly what point do you start to realize
that life without knowledge is death in disguise?**

I stare deep into the blank page and see myself. I feel something I've never felt before: purpose. I don't know what my exact purpose is yet, but I know it has something to do with this pen and blank page. I am a blank page.

Holding the pen this way, snug and firm in my fist, makes me feel like I can write my future, spell out my destiny in sharp strokes.

Today, Asante is an author, filmmaker and rapper, he has earned a BA and an MFA and has been featured at universities, on television and in various new outlets across the country. His story is undoubtedly one of success by societal standards, even though his foundation was and always will be the toughest of circumstances. Part of the reason for Buck's success is that his passion is in writing and sharing stories, but I believe that is also due in large part to the fact that he first was given this opportunity to tell his own story.

The blank page begs me to tell a story – dares me to tell one – one that's never been told before, and to tell it like it will never be told again.

The blank page lights up a room in my heart that I didn't know existed.

I'm standing outside of Crefeld, staring into the endless green of Wissahickon Park, where my purpose finds me.

I hear Uncle Howard's voice in my head as I race through the hallway:
Let the beauty of what you love be what you do.

**This is the come up, writing to the sun come up
I never get enough of the nighttime, so I write lines
That rhyme over linoleum beats, for kids scrolling them streets
Conquer the beast, cock and release**

Buck writes his story. Buck finds his purpose. Buck changes his situation. Given the proper resources, others could, too.

Allison

Dorothy Allison recounts her personal experience of social exclusion from a young age as she and her family, “were the *they* everyone talks about – the ungrateful poor”. According to society, “we were not noble, not grateful, not even hopeful. We knew ourselves despised. My family was ashamed of being poor, of feeling hopeless. What was there to work for, to save money for, to fight for or struggle against? We had generations before us to teach us that nothing ever changed, and that those who did try to escape failed” (Allison, 2001).

Allison goes on to say, “Most of all, I have tried to understand the politics of *they*, why human beings fear and stigmatize the different while secretly dreading that they might be one of the different themselves. Class, race, sexuality, gender – and all the other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other – need to be excavated from the inside” (Allison, 2001). This internal jumpstart can be achieved through narrative identity and I believe this is our responsibility as a society, to fix the wrongs we have caused by excluding certain groups from the full experience of dignity and happiness in our supposedly free country actually riddled with chains and restrictions for those that are not part of the “we” or the “us”.

In sharing her own story, Allison suggests internal healing and interventions that encourage fully embracing the self. She says, “I grew up poor, hated, the victim of physical, emotional, and sexual violence, and I know that suffering does not ennoble. It destroys. To resist destruction, self-hatred, or lifelong hopelessness, we have to throw off the conditioning of being despised, the fear of becoming the *they* that is talked about so dismissively, to refuse lying myths and easy moralities, to see ourselves as human, flawed, and extraordinary. All of us –

extraordinary.” (page 86). Society can and should enable this personal growth, but the true progress comes from inside.

As powerful as these two stories are, what matters even more to me are the stories of people with whom I have interacted on a personal level. Last summer, I got to know and spend time with groups of people largely stigmatized, discriminated against, and even forgotten in society – recovering addicts and people experiencing homelessness. I spent most of my time hearing people’s stories and learning to tell my own. While the programs themselves were great and provided necessary resources to help these individuals get back on their feet and successfully reenter society, the relational support provided and the subsequent personal growth is what really caught my attention. I heard from many people about the changes they were making in their lives and how they were able to internalize, make sense of, and move beyond past experiences, fully embracing the present and the future.

The process of creating a personal narrative is a method of creating, maintaining, or restoring basic human dignity as Asante, Allison, and some of my own friends experienced. At that, I am proposing an argument of personhood. Morally, I believe that every person deserves the opportunity to freely explore themselves as a sort of pursuit of happiness and restoration and maintenance of psychological well-being and that this effort for equality is one of justice defended by Rawls. I also recognize, however, that this pursuit is often restricted by the prejudice, discrimination, and oppression of society for largely stigmatized groups, specifically those experiencing poverty, which is why intervention is necessary.

In Rawls’ Theory of Justice, he defends his proposition of justice as fairness. Justice as fairness has two primary components: that basic rights and liberties be distributed based on equality and that social and economic inequality is just only if compensation for these

inequalities is made. In obtaining both aspects of justice as fairness, Rawls proposes a set of commitments (called primary goods) society has the responsibility to uphold for all people: rights, liberties and opportunities; and income and wealth; and the social bases of self-respect. Together, these primary goods create the the social bases of self-respect which all people deserve. Similar to Nussbaum's capability approach to defining poverty, these are intangible conceptions of necessities of life that are rooted in the idea that citizens are free, equal, reasonable and rational for being proponents of these primary goods. That is, behind the veil of ignorance we would all want these for ourselves, therefore we should aim to provide them for everyone. Each primary good represents a connection with psychological well-being conceptualized through narrative identity that provides support for our moral obligation of society to formulate these bases that provide all people with the opportunity and the capability to be successful.

Part of Rawls' first primary good is the possession of rights and liberties. Therefore, I first propose that psychological well-being is basic human right. There is an interaction between human rights and psychological well-being, such that violation of human rights in any form may result in reduced psychological well-being and ensuring psychological well-being is a basic human right. In Scott's book on the moral aspects of psychology, he thusly defines psychological well-being as a moral right (Scott, 1990). He proposes the human rights are some fundamental basic insurances of physical and psychological well-being, both of which are operationalized by meeting a person's basic needs. These basic needs must be meet intentionally, i.e. by creating just laws, and non-intentionally, i.e. by ensuring society is structured fairly such that no particular groups are involuntarily targets of injustice or inequality. Rawls' rights and liberties proposition addresses both the intentional and nonintentional aspects of the moral rights of

humans, calling for a just society and properly addressing the human rights violated when a just society is not fully realized (i.e., in the experience of poverty). Because psychological well-being is a human right and there are aspects of society that violate this right (poverty) we are morally obligated to address this.

Rawls also proposes equal access to opportunities, otherwise known as fair equality of opportunity. As I explained previously, Nussbaum's definition of poverty as deficits in capability is similarly conceptualized as the opportunity and freedom to pursue one's conception of values and the good life. Merging Nussbaum and Rawls' approaches, an individual would only have equal access to opportunity (Rawls) if he or she possesses the necessary capabilities to living a full and dignified life (Nussbaum). Therefore, in creating and maintaining a fair and just society, it is our responsibility to provide fair equality of opportunity, which can be conceptualized as addressing Nussbaum's ten capabilities, five of which are directly related to psychological well-being and could be properly addressed in an intervention like narrative identity that incorporates psychological well-being as the primary goal.

Rawls' conception of justice as fairness also involves fair distribution of income and wealth. I outlined research-based mechanisms above through which psychological well-being is correlated with economic productivity. This model is a simple representation of the reduction of monetary poverty which, according to Rawls, is a human right which we as a society are responsible for providing. Intervening by addressing psychological well-being is a method of promoting the ability of all to achieve a fair distribution of income.

Finally, Rawls' conception of the social bases of self respect requires that one have a sense of self-worth and self-respect. This final primary good may be best understood as a culmination of the other primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities and income and wealth.

A sense of self-worth is dependent both upon and individual achieving this level of self-awareness, which may occur through mechanisms of narrative identity and on society providing the basic primary goods such that one may live a dignified life. Therefore, Rawls' social bases of self-respect are the culmination of the role of the individual in creating a narrative identity and the society in providing the resources to do so and the structure to validate it.

Intervention

These psychological reparations are worthwhile both to the individual and to society as a whole in the long-run. Repairing and maintaining the psychological well-being of individuals would improve their social capital, enhancing their ability to participate actively in society and the work force. Additionally, this initial improvement of mental health could also reduce later costs to society in the form of health care and incarceration. The benefit is equally as important to communities as well as individuals. "Community constitutes a kind of unconditional inclusion that seems to transcend such economic factors" (Jordan, page 18). That is, regardless of economic situation, and even if we cannot totally eradicate the experience of poverty (although I think that we should), cultivating the personal strengths and identity of each person would put the community on an upward spiral toward more inclusivity and mutual support, which may consequently reduce economic and capability poverty.

Narrative identity in poverty reduction is relevant first and foremost because of a recent shift in the literature away from hard skill interventions, expanding to focus primarily on soft skill cultivation. Most research to this point in the field of narrative identity has been conducted with adults. However, the field is also expanding to include research on the development of narrative identity and personal story in adolescence and even before. Specifically, Nelson and Fivush (2004 and 2004) have examined the development of narrative identity in conjunction with

crucial developmental milestones like “memory abilities, language and narrative, adult memory talk, temporal understanding, and understanding of self and others” (abstract, Nelson & Fivush, 2004). As a crucial piece of narrative identity involves autobiographical memory sharing, the process of creating narrative identity begins early. Fivush and Nelson (2004) cite evidence that “autobiographical memory is referenced to the self and has personal significance as part of an organized life story”. Sharing experiences and autobiographical memories through language begins at a young age. This sharing is important for the self as it helps one to make sense of what has happened and it translates experiences into memories; it is also important for the self as it creates a connection to others through mutual sharing, and it incorporates the self into a basic familial and cultural history (Fivush & Nelson, 2004; McLean, Breen & Fournier, 2010).

There is existing research on incorporating narrative therapy or similar interventions in school settings or for particular groups. Looyeh, Kamali and Shafieian (2012) examined group narrative therapy for girls experiencing ADHD symptoms in the school setting and found that the posttreatment reports revealed a significant reduction of the targeted ADHD symptoms. Although these results are specific to this subgroup of the population, they do provide promising suggestions that narrative identity may also be effective for other subgroups. Publications have even outlined the basics of narrative therapy and creating a narrative identity in efforts to make the practice available to the general public, based on indicators that these sorts of interventions are effective and worthwhile (Morgan, 2002).

Narrative identity intervention on the clinical level is subject to the same obstacles as general mental health treatment for low-income communities. The most evident barrier is the cost of mental health treatment, especially for individuals in poverty with less access to insurance and subsequently, less access to resources (Rowan, McAlpine, and Blewett, 2013). A

more complicated model indicates that the social stigma associated with receiving mental health treatment and perceptions of the system are additional factors that serve as barriers to seeking out or even accepting mental health treatment services (Copeland & Snyder, 2011).

Due to significant barriers to mental health treatment in low-income communities, the intervention I propose is to be implemented with young people in schools, which would also be a more holistic approach applicable to any community. Narrative identity curriculum would be created for all grade levels to be implemented on a weekly basis and teachers would be trained to properly implement this curriculum. The approach would be two-fold: it would involve a personal, individual reflection through writing or art and then there would also be a sharing component. The sharing component is especially relevant in creating and maintaining social support, as is evidenced to be a crucial aspect of narrative identity. The social support would come from peers and also from teachers, and providing this support would be a vital portion of the teacher training. Application of narrative identity in schools would also be accessible for to all students – it is a sort of mental health intervention practice that would not be stigmatized because it would be a normal practice for all children, not just students with diagnosed psychological difficulties or coming from trouble backgrounds.

Some schools within the past few years have incorporated a similar practice called mindfulness. The model of narrative identity curriculum and mindfulness practices in schools would be similar. Teachers trained to implement mindfulness also report personal benefit from learning about the practices of mindfulness. Ideally, teachers trained to implement narrative identity practices would experience similar benefits. Narrative identity is beneficial for people of all ages and experiences, so teachers could benefit in ways similar to students.

Conclusion

In proposing this intervention, I weaved two fields of literature together in a unique way, using narrative identity research to inform poverty intervention studies. Narrative identity researchers spout the benefit of narrative therapy and personal identity as a crucial factor in personality development and restoring human dignity often after experiences of mental illness or other stigmatized psychological experiences (Lysaker et al., 2010). I have proposed throughout the course of this paper and in the stories shared that the experience of poverty itself a stigmatized position in society that often strips someone of dignity (Narayan, 2000). The benefits of narrative therapy are correlated with a general societal definition of success, although access to these sorts of psychological resources are largely limited to groups in society with resources, in the form of social support, insurance, and access to mental health care. Low-income populations already experience significant barriers to mental health treatment, including lack of availability of resources, inability to pay for the resources if they do exist, and a social stigma associated with receiving services in the first place (Copeland and Snyder, 2011). Poverty intervention researchers know that allocating tangible resources feels both more productive and is easier to write policy interventions for, but I hope that throughout the course of this paper I have indicated that psychological well-being may be the real source of more visible and tangible changes throughout the experience of poverty.

Every person has a name, every name has a story, and every story matters. I truly believe this and research from many disciplines supports this idea. It is now time to incorporate these ideas and intervene for the good of all.

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