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This article argues for a synthesis of George Herbert Mead's conception of the temporal and intersubjective nature of the self with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of narrative identity. Combining the insights of Ricoeur's philosophical analysis with Mead's social-psychological orientation provides a subtle, sophisticated, and potent explanation of self-identity. A narrative conception of identity implies that subjectivity is neither a philosophical illusion nor an impermeable substance. Rather, a narrative identity provides a subjective sense of self-continuity as it symbolically integrates the events of lived experience in the plot of the story a person tells about his or her life. The utility of this conception of identity is illustrated through a rereading of Erving Goffman's study of the experience of mental patients. This example underlines the social sources of the self-concept and the role of power and politics in the construction of narrative identities.

While there is a growing literature on the significance of narrative in psychology (Gergen and Gergen 1988; Sarbin 1986), history (White 1973), and philosophy (Taylor 1989; MacIntyre 1981), narrative is still being taken up by sociology. As David Maines (1993, p. 17) noted recently: "In its urgency to establish itself as a science, sociology missed the opportunity to nurture its narrative character that the Thomas and Znaniecki research represented." However, Maines continues, "another moment now exists in an array of contradictions inherent in conventional sociological practices and the increasing acceptance and sophistication of narrative work in the human sciences."

This article argues specifically for the integration of narrative theory and a sociological conception of the self. Maines has argued for the general applicability of narrative to sociological phenomena (Maines 1993; Maines and Ulmer 1993). His brief comment on the specific relevance of narrative to the sociology of the self succinctly states the central argument of the present article: "I propose that the self-abstracted person, so clearly seen in adulthood, is one who has acquired a biography and thereby can tell his or her life story. A person thus is defined as a self-narrating organism" (Maines 1993, p. 23).

One of the most important consequences of a narrative conception of the self is that it incorporates temporality. Kathy Charmaz (1991, p. 230) has observed that existing sociology typically locates the self in relationships but not in time. While there are a number of sociological studies of the self-concept that incorporate temporal dimensions (e.g., Glaser

and Strauss 1971). George Herbert Mead's work remains a watershed in identifying the significance of temporality for self-identity. I therefore begin by examining in detail Mead's analysis of time and the self-concept. While most sociology has focused on Mead's analysis of the self-concept to the exclusion of his theory of time, a rereading of Mead suggests that temporality is integral to his conception of the development of consciousness. On the other hand, Paul Ricoeur (whose work is then discussed) begins with an analysis of the relationship between time and narrative. This leads into a consideration of narrative identity as a special case of his more general theory of time and narrative. Ricoeur provides a sophisticated philosophical background to his narrative conception of identity that both resolves some problems in Mead's work and elegantly complements Mead's sociological emphasis. The final section of the article rereads Erving Goffman's (1961) 1976) analysis of the experience of the career of a mental patient. Goffman's study clearly illustrates the utility of a narrative conception of identity, and it also provides the opportunity to indicate the implications of the work of some other narrative theorists. Specifically, Goffman's work underlines the institutional sources of self-narratives.

G. H. MEAD'S THEORY OF TIME AND SUBJECTIVITY

With some important exceptions (e.g., Charmaz 1991; Maines, Sugrue and Katovich 1983; Evans and Maines 1995), Anselm Strauss's observation, made over three decades ago, remains valid: "Mead's remarkable theory of time . . . has not been mined for its relevance to sociological concerns" (quoted in Maines et al. 1983, p. 161). Mead's (1932) 1959) theory of time tends to have been linked to philosophical concerns, while sociologists have focused mainly on Mead's (1934) social psychology of the self. This separation of Mead's program has some basis in the different content of his published work, but it does violence to the more subtle implications of his thought. A narrative conception of identity provides a framework for the integration and extension of Mead's conception of time and his social psychology of the self.

Mead's *Mind, Self and Society* (1934) contains only a few references to the relationship between time and the construction of a person's self-concept. As Norbert Wiley (1994, p. 43) has pointed out, there is a temporal dimension in Mead's conception of the "I" and the "me" in that both the "I" and the "me" are discovered experientially in memory images of the things individuals have done in the past (Mead 1934, p. 76). Wiley follows a suggestion from Vincent Colapietro to combine Mead's I-Me dialogue with Charles Peirce's I-You to form a triological me-I-you. This triad maps onto a temporal triad of past, present, future respectively. While there is an "intuitive attractiveness" (Wiley 1994, p. 43) to Wiley's model of the semiotic self that places Mead's "me" in the past, Mead's analysis of the relationship between temporality and the self-concept is more complex.

One section of *The Philosophy of the Present*, (Mead [1932] 1959) clearly describes the significance of temporality for the self-concept. Mead begins with the familiar argument that consciousness arises when organisms include their own "organized attitudes" among the objects that shape their action. "Life becomes conscious at those points at which the organism's own responses enter as part of the objective field to which it reacts" (p. 73). Next he introduces his analysis of time:

Now it is by these ideational processes that we get hold of the conditions of future conduct as these are found in the organized response which we have formed, and so construct

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our pasts in anticipation of that future. The individual who can thus get hold of them can further organize them through the selection of the stimulations which call them out and can thus build up his plan of action. (p. 76)

The imagined "organized responses" that a person either remembers or anticipates, and then responds to, are integrally temporal. They refer to imagined responses in both the past and the future. Mead then draws a parallel between the mathematics of Einstein's theory of relativity and the various, often conflicting, perspectives of reality that can exist in a person's mind. To illustrate his point he recounts the changed experience of the passage of events and time that occurs when "a man in a train passes from the system of the movement of his train to that of the movement of a neighbouring train" (Mead [1932] 1959, p. 81). While the train cannot be both moving and stationary at the same time, the man experiences the train as both moving and stationary, and he can hold both these mutually exclusive situations in his mind at the same time, "passing from one to the other" (p. 81). The point of the illustration is that there is no fixed, preferred system of reference that defines reality. Rather, "let us instead accept passage as the character of reality, and recognize that in passage there is change in the structure of things, and that because of passage objects can occupy different systems" (p. 79). In the same way that, according to the theory of relativity, the measurements of an object depend on the spatio-temporal framework from which it is observed, the meaning a "minded organism" gives to a particular event depends on the spatio-temporal-social-interpretive framework from which it is interpreted.

This illustration occurs immediately prior to another of Mead's more familiar statements about the social nature of the self-concept. He uses the same image of "passing" between perspectives to describe taking the role of the other:

The self by its reflexive form announces itself as a conscious organism which is what it is only so far as it can pass from its own system into those of others, and can thus, in passing, occupy both its own system and that into which it is passing. . . . The organism, by occupying the attitudes of others, can occupy its own attitude in the role of the other. (pp. 82-86)

The idea of "taking the role of the other" is a development of Mead's analysis of the ideational process of the construction of pasts and futures through anticipating and remembering one's own responses and treating these as objects. In other words, Mead's analysis of the formation of a self-concept through role taking develops out of his analysis of the conscious experience of time. The "organism's own responses" that become objects for the person are temporally located. Both memories of the past and anticipations of the future are symbolically organized and manipulated to provide a coherent self-concept that serves to direct current action. In the same way that a person passes from the present into their own remembered or anticipated actions, they also pass into the remembered or anticipated responses of others. The meanings of past and anticipated events change as a consequence of the reframing effects of role taking during the passage of interaction.

The temporal nature of self-understandings has, of course, been central to the work of a number of symbolic interactionists. McCall and Simmons (1966, p. 165), for example, discuss life plans or strategies for interaction and Strauss describes various types of trajectories (Strauss 1969; Glaser and Strauss 1968). However, Mead's work suggests that the self-concept does not simply have a temporal aspect. Rather, temporality is integral to

the self-concept in a more fundamental way. A full explanation of this point requires first a more careful consideration of the human experience of time. The next section reviews Mead's discussion of the interpretation of past events in the present. This is followed by an examination of Ricoeur's analysis of narrative as integrating fiction and history. A consideration of the relationship between the temporal flow of events and their interpretation in narrative then leads back to an examination of the place of time in the self-concept through an argument for a narrative conception of identity.

G. H. MEAD: EVENTS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

The past and, by implication, the future are continually reinterpreted because, according to Mead, the emergent present appears as continually novel and discontinuous with that past. As Arthur Murphy puts it in his original introduction to Mead's *Philosophy of the Present*:

Before the emergent has occurred, and at the moment of its occurrence, it does not follow from the past. That past relative to which it was novel cannot be made to contain it. But after it has occurred we endeavour to reconstruct experience in terms of it, we alter our interpretation and try to conceive a past from which the recalcitrant element does follow and thus to eliminate the discontinuous aspects of its present status. (Mead [1932] 1959, p. xvii)

While the emergent events of the present appear as discontinuous, the reconstructed past appears as continuous and inevitable. Maines and his associates (1983, p. 240) describe how, in Mead's analysis of the experience of the knife-edge present, "the past . . . must be reconstituted in order for there to be continuity insofar as unexpected events create problems of 'bridging contingent factors.'" Continuity in an account provides a unified interpretation of past, present, and future. As will be discussed below, Ricoeur's theory of narrative employment explains how this continuity, or "concordance," is achieved and why it is so necessary for the development of a sense of self-sameness or "identity." Given the process of continual reinterpretation of the past, how are past events related to their interpretation in the present?

David Maines and his associates (1983) provide a useful analysis of Mead's conception of the relationship between mental images of the past-in-the-present and the "objective" events of the past. They describe four dimensions of the past in Mead's formulation. These can be condensed into the two dimensions of the "objective" events of lived experience and their symbolic interpretation. First, Mead describes an "implied objective past." That is to say, "some event had to have taken place in order to exist in present experience as a past event" (Maines et al. 1983, p. 164). Linked to this implied objective past is the "social structural past" that refers to the conditioning effects of the past on the structures of experience of the present. Both these dimensions could be referred to as the events of lived experience.

On the other hand, the past is symbolically reconstructed in the present. The past, Mead argues, conditions action by its reality in the present: "The past . . . is in the present; and, in what we call conscious experience, its presence is exhibited in memory, and in the historical apparatus which extends memory" (Mead [1932] 1959, p. 17). Maines and his associates (1983, p. 164) attempt to distinguish between the symbolically reconstructed past and "the mythical past" on the basis that mythical pasts refer to pasts that are "cre-

ations, rather than re-creations, because they are *not empirically grounded*. They are fictitious" (emphasis added). This distinction between an empirically grounded past and a fictitious one is more problematic than Maines and his associates suggest.

Mead ([1938] 1964) examines the relationship between past "objective realities" and their interpretation in the symbolically mediated past-in-the-present in *The Philosophy of the Act*. He notes that, however "obnoxious" it may appear, the pragmatist assumes "the only test of the truth of what we have discovered [about the past] is our ability to so state the past that we can continue the conduct whose inhibition has set the problem to us" (p. 324). As Maines and his associates (1983, p. 165) put it: "When Mead discussed the validity of pasts he referred not to their empirical verification, but rather to the continuity which secures their position in shared consciousness." They then add: "However, they [the pasts] are empirical in their consequences because they can materially affect relationships." According to Mead in the quotation above, the criterion that people use to assess the truth value of a statement about the past is its consequences for current conduct. That is to say, fiction is empirical because it can affect current actions, and history is empirically accurate to the extent that it facilitates current actions. These two criteria are not identical, but their similarity indicates that the difference between history and fiction is more complex than simply asserting that history is "empirically grounded" and fiction is not. This point is further elaborated in Ricoeur's analysis of the relationship between history and fiction (discussed below).

Mead's temporal conception of the self-concept suggests two central issues that require further explanation. First, the distinction between history and fiction must be scrutinized. This requires a careful examination of the link between the objective events of lived experience and their symbolic interpretation. While the distinction between history and fiction is important, it is not as transparent as some approaches suggest. Second, the sources of the coherence or unity of the self-concept must be clarified. More specifically, a theory of the coherence of the self-concept must deal explicitly with the integrally temporal nature of the self-concept. That is to say, the unity of the self, however transient and changing, is a temporal unity that locates past and future in the present, through the act of role taking. Ricoeur's theories of time and narrative, and of narrative identity, provide a sophisticated response to these issues.

PAUL RICOEUR: NARRATIVE, EVENTS, AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

Ricoeur's analysis of time and narrative scrutinizes the difference between history and fiction. Ricoeur argues that fiction is quasi-historical and that history is quasi-fictive. History borrows from literature not only through using a similar compositional form. History also borrows the "representative function of the historical imagination. We learn to see a given series of events as tragic, as comic, and so on" (Ricoeur 1988, p. 185). The place of fiction in history is to free, retrospectively, "certain possibilities that were not actualized in the historical past" (Ricoeur 1988, p. 191). Although not referring directly to the role of fiction in interpretation, Mead ([1929] 1970, p. 241) made a similar point about the way in which the past is reinterpreted in light of the present and to facilitate future plans: "The past which we construct from the standpoint of the new problem of today is based upon continuities which we discover in that which has arisen, and it serves us until the rising novelty of tomorrow necessitates a new history which interprets the new future." History borrows

from fiction the interpretive forms that allow the past to be reinterpreted in light of new experience that brings potentially contradictory information.

Ricoeur argues that both historical action and interpretive imagination shape narratives. In *Time and Narrative*, he focuses on the way history and fiction borrow from each other. History can be distinguished from fiction by its claim to refer to the "real" past (Ricoeur 1988, p. 5). However, without fictive imagination it is impossible to grasp the past. In the same way that the phenomenology of reading seeks a balance between the signals provided by the text and the synthetic activity of reading, Ricoeur argues for an interweaving of historical events and the imaginative or configurational act of narrating.

Ricoeur's analysis of narrative is broader than a semiotics of the text only concerned with the internal relationships within a text (Ricoeur 1992, p. 301). Ricoeur (1984, p. 53) describes his project as "hermeneutic" to indicate his concern with both the text's internal workings and its relationship to the events of lived experience: "Hermeneutics . . . is concerned with reconstructing the entire arc of operations by which practical experience provides itself with works, authors, and readers." That is to say, we cannot simply discover the world and ourselves through Cartesian reflexivity or through an analysis of language and its structures (Pucci 1992, p. 209). Ricoeur (1984, p. 78) argues instead for a "prior and more originary notion, starting from our experience of being in the world and in time, and proceeding from this ontological condition towards its expression in language." The historical lived experiences of "being in the world" prefigure and lead to the symbolic quasi-fictive narrative interpretation. Ricoeur does not deny the significance of language but explicitly analyzes the relationship between linguistic narratives and practical action.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics emphasizes the reality of lived experience, of acting in the world, as foundational to any attempt to understand the interpretive process. This bears some similarities to Mead's pragmatist approach. In both cases, the central focus is the process of interpretation, examining how past and future are refigured in the present. However, Ricoeur's philosophical framework is more sophisticated and addresses contemporary debates in philosophy and literary criticism. For Ricoeur (1984; 1985; 1988) the text, or narrative, has two "sides" that interface with the events of lived experience. Lived experience precedes a narrative, and narrative shapes practical action. The complete hermeneutic circle of narrative and action involves a threefold process of prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration. The narrative imagination prefigures lived experience by providing a symbolic structure and temporal schema of action. These events are then configured into a story with a central theme or plot that "mediates between the individual events or incidents and the story taken as a whole" (Ricoeur 1984, p. 65). This story, or text, then encounters lived experience again in the world of the listener or reader who refigures the story as it influences his or her choices about how to act in the world.

The events of lived experience have a pre-narrative quality. Life is a nascent story, life is "an activity and a passion in search of a narrative" (Ricoeur 1991, p. 29). Similar to the shaping influence of the text, the quasi-narrative of unexamined experience shapes the interpretive act of narration, although there are multiple possible interpretations. Lived experience, like a text, has no intrinsic meaning. Lives and texts are not configurations "out there"; rather, they become completed compositions in their reading. Interpretations are enabled and constrained by the text, but they are also anchored in the imaginative world of the reader. It is therefore a mistake to assume that lived experience is in some way separate from its narration—as if one were reality and the other fiction. Action is always symbolically mediated, with symbols acting as a quasi-text that allows conduct to be interpreted. A

clear example of this is the way in which events become episodes as part of the plot of the story.

Emplotment is the process that synthesizes experience in a narrative (Ricoeur 1991, p. 21). Events, which just happen, are transformed into episodes that take their place in a unified singular story. Episodes do not just happen, they carry the story along. Events can appear discordant until they are integrated and made sense of in the story. Hence Ricoeur refers to a concordant discordance. Plot is the organizing theme of a narrative. It weaves together a complex set of events into a single story. A plot is not merely imposed but is produced by a complex moving back and forth between events and plot structure until both are fitted together. Further, emplotment endows the experience of time with meaning. This is the central point of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*.

RICOEUR'S THEORY OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY

In volume 3 of *Time and Narrative* (1988) and in *Oneself as Another* (1992), Ricoeur uses his analysis of narrative to develop a conception of self-identity. The self, he argues, is discovered in its own narrational acts. For Ricoeur, following Martin Heidegger, selfhood (*ipse*) is ontologically distinct from identity (*idem*). Selfhood refers to the kind of entity that Heidegger (1962) calls *Dasein* and that is characterized by its ability to reflect upon itself. Identity, on the other hand, is a narrative construction that is the product of this reflective process. Here Ricoeur plays on the double meaning of "identity" as "self" and "sameness." Narrative identity constructs a sense of self-sameness, continuity and character in the plot of the story a person tells about him- or herself. The story becomes that person's actual history (Ricoeur 1988, p. 247).

Mead's distinction between the "I" and the "me" does not directly parallel Ricoeur's distinction between selfhood (*ipse*) and identity (*idem*). Selfhood refers to the reflexive nature of the self as a whole, whereas the "I" refers to the prereflective "response of the organism to the attitudes of the others" (Mead 1934, p. 175). On the other hand, the "me" as "the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself [*sic*] assumes" (Mead 1934, p. 175), has some similarities to Ricoeur's concept of identity (*idem*), that is, the story one tells oneself, or others, about oneself. In contrast to Heidegger who underemphasized the importance of others for self-understanding (Kemp 1995), Ricoeur develops the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas who argued that there is "no self without another who summons it to responsibility" (Ricoeur 1992, p. 187). In other words, identity is not found at some deep center of our personality; rather, "it consists in being recognized by the Others as being the same I and the same person" (Pucci 1992, p. 193). That is to say, Ricoeur's analysis of identity is as integrally social as Mead's conception of the "me," but Ricoeur goes beyond Mead, describing the narrative structure that provides the self-concept with a concordant, temporal unity.

According to Ricoeur identities are neither unchangeable substances nor linguistic illusions. The sense of self-continuity in identity is a product of narratives of self-consistency through life's changes. Narrating a life introduces a sense of connectedness and temporal unity to a person's life (Dunne 1995, p. 149). Narratives are integrally temporal because they configure the events of the past, present, and future into a narrative whole. While narratives can do change, this does not mean that they cannot provide a sense of self-sameness that is substantial enough to justify talking about character as "a persistent unity of preferences, inclinations and motivations" (Pucci 1992, p. 193). The term "narrative

identity" as Ricoeur (1991, p. 32) uses it suggests that "what we call subjectivity is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution. This is precisely the sort of identity which narrative composition alone can create through its dynamism." Ricoeur captures the middle ground between a sovereign self that is invulnerable and impermeable to the influence of others and, on the other hand, a deconstructed self that emphasizes the linguistic sources of the self and the influence of context "to the point where it engulfs, if not annihilates, the self" (Dunne 1995, p. 140). The hermeneutics of the self, as Ricoeur (1992, p. 23) puts it, is equidistant from the cogito exalted by René Descartes and forfeited by Frederick Nietzsche.

Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (1994, p. 690) have recently argued that in postmodern times the self has not dissolved so much as changed its "experiential moorings" or "voicing." They also attempt to identify a "middle ground" between modernism and postmodernism. They argue that in postmodern times the self is fluid but also substantial or "real." The reality of the self is found in the interpretive practices producing the self that are grounded in local, "organizationally circumscribed discourses." These interpretive practices provide the basis for an understanding of the self as more than pure illusion or philosophical smokescreen:

Lives are narratively constructed, made coherent and meaningful, through the "biographical work" that links experiences into circumstantially compelling life courses. . . . The process is artful, a complement to the play of difference, but is locally informed and organized. (Gubrium and Holstein 1994, p. 697)

This suggests two important points. First, some of the characteristics of the self as fluid and multiple have their sources in the empirical social organization of postmodern times. Second, while postmodernists have correctly pointed to the problems of a Cartesian self-substance or a Hegelian transcendental subject that informs many studies of the self, the rejection of these philosophical frameworks does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the idea of subjectivity was simply a philosophical mistake. A theory of narrative identity works out this second point in detail. Subjectivity is more than an illusion, it is "neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality" (Ricoeur 1991, p. 32). Narrative identity is coherent but fluid and changeable, historically grounded but "fictively" reinterpreted, constructed by an individual but constructed in interaction and dialogue with other people. In this way, the concept of a narrative identity clarifies the central issues both of the relationship between history and fiction and of the temporal nature of the self-concept, neither of which were fully worked out by Mead.

Mead's (1934) analysis of taking the role of the other can be seen as exploring the internalization of the intersubjective process of the creation of self-narratives. The internalized soliloquy (Athens 1994) anticipates and reinterprets through narrative. The self dialogues with phantom imagined others who inhabit our thoughts and whose perspective we use as we narrate our past, present, and anticipated experiences. It is common to develop new self-understandings as issues are "thought through." Although nobody else may be physically present, new episodes in our life narrative are recast in the presence of imagined others. To indicate the significance of soliloquies is not to deny the intersubjective nature of the creation of narrative identity. Soliloquies can be understood as internalized or imagined intersubjective encounters. Further, the importance of internalized others in influencing behavior explains the historical and enduring aspects of self-presentation. Lonnie

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Athens (1994) suggests it is the stability of the phantom others with whom we dialogue that sustains a stable sense of self, and not a Cartesian self-substance sometimes implied in the work of some symbolic interactionists.

Narrative identities are necessarily processual because they describe lived time, which is ongoing. Narrative identities are very much in-process and unfinished, continuously made and remade as episodes happen. As a consequence, self-narratives often appear confused and chaotic because of the disordered nature of life and because we cannot be sure how the story will end (Carr 1985). This does not mean they lack a plot, only that it is not simple, clear, or fully worked out. Similar to Herbert Blumer's (1969) argument that the self is not a fixed structure or substance, but a process, Ricoeur (1984, p. 48) emphasizes that narrative identities are not static structures, but the product of an ongoing integrative process. The next section illustrates this process through a rereading of Goffman's *Asylums* (1961).

A REREADING OF GOFFMAN'S "THE INPATIENT PHASE"

In his discussion of the "inpatient phase" in *Asylums*, Goffman ([1961] 1976, p. 139) suggests a "general point may be made about the moral career of inpatients which has bearing on many moral careers." He then describes the general process of the construction of life stories, of which a mental patient's story is a particular type. Goffman's discussion provides a useful illustration of a number of theoretical points raised by a narrative conception of identity. This section rereads Goffman's analysis of the "inpatient phase" in the light of a narrative conception of identity.

Given the stage that any person has reached in a career, one typically finds that he [sic] constructs an image of his life course—past, present, and future—which selects, abstracts, and distorts in such a way as to provide him with a view of himself that he can usefully expound in current situations. Quite generally, the person's line concerning self defensively brings him into appropriate alignment with the basic values of his society, and so may be called an apologia." (Goffman [1961] 1976, p. 139)

Goffman also describes an "apologia" or "line" as a "story." The self-story that Goffman discusses is a form of narrative identity. In the same way that Mead emphasized the process of reinterpretation of the past to make sense of one's actions in the present, Goffman underlines the way in which the past is reinterpreted for use in "current situations." He also points to the influence of society's "basic values" on the construction of the story. One way these basic values can be seen to operate is through culturally acceptable plots for constructing a self-story.

Ricoeur also suggests that shared cultural symbols influence the development of narrative identities. He (1991, p. 33) emphasizes the influence of "narratives handed down in our literary tradition." However, the form or plot of a self-narrative is influenced by a wide range of preexisting narratives, including myths, films, past conversations, and, in Goffman's analysis, patient notes and group therapy sessions, along with the "literary tradition." Margaret Somers (1994, p. 606) makes this point clearly: "We come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making." That is to say, people are constrained by the limited repertoire of available and sanctioned stories that they can

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use to interpret their experience. While there are opportunities for identity to be a creative work of style (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 15), most people tend to adopt the culturally given plots. Whether preexisting narratives or their sources are referred to as "sedimented traditions" (Ricoeur 1985, p. 18), "historical narrative structures" (Evans and Maines 1995, p. 303), or "cultural repertoires" (Somers and Gibson 1994, p. 73), these terms all point to the influence of "basic values" or culturally embedded narrative forms on the construction of the self-story.

Goffman ([1961] 1976, p. 140) identifies two main types of self-story:

If the person can manage to present a view of his [sic] current situation which shows the operation of favourable personal qualities in the past and a favourable destiny awaiting him, it may be called a success story. If the facts of a person's past and present are extremely dismal, then about the best he can do is to show that he is not responsible for what has become of him, and the term sad tale is appropriate. Interestingly enough, the more the person's past forces him out of apparent alignment with central moral values, the more often he seems compelled to tell his sad tale in any company in which he finds himself.

This distinction parallels two of the basic narrative modes identified by Northrop Frye (1957) in his *Anatomy of Criticism*: "In the tragic modes, the hero is isolated from society. . . . In the comic [and romantic] modes, the hero is reincorporated into society" (Ricoeur 1985, p. 16). Similarly, Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen (1988, p. 25) differentiate between tragic narratives that describe a rapid downfall and the heroic romantic narratives where happiness is restored to the protagonist after a struggle. Frye's analysis refers to the literary tradition, whereas Goffman's story types are based on a sociological study of the forms of social experience. Ricoeur argues that the interpretive process involves the interpenetration of fiction and historical experience. This suggests the empirical question: To what extent are experiences involving separation from society, loss or a "dismal" past narrated as tragedies or in other ways? While Goffman's "total institutions" leave little choice for patients in constructing their self-stories, other social contexts are less constricting.

Goffman ([1961] 1976, p. 141) observes that patients in a mental hospital are continually reminded they are "mental patients" and that they have failed in some "over-all way." "The patient often responds to this situation by attempting to assert a sad tale proving that he is not 'sick,' that the 'little trouble' he did get into was really somebody else's fault." Coercion is often central to tragic narratives as a person attempts to remove personal responsibility for the current "dismal" situation (Langer 1991, p. 176). From his field notes of "informal interaction with patients" Goffman ([1961] 1976, p. 141) then provides some empirical examples of stories given by the patients:

"I was going to night school to get a M.A. degree, and holding down a job in addition, and the load got too much for me."

"The others here are sick mentally but I'm suffering from a bad nervous system and that is what is giving me these phobias."

"I got here by mistake because of a diabetes diagnosis, and I'll leave in a couple of days."

In a number of other places in Goffman's analysis similar sets of stories are implied for

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particular phases of the moral career of the mental patient. Although Goffman ([1961] 1976, pp. 125–129) does not provide any examples from field notes, stories about one's self and relationships with others are clearly central to the experience of betrayal when the person begins entry into the career of a mental patient. Similarly, the manipulation of narrative identities is central to the group therapy sessions that Goffman describes. In these sessions, the therapist attempts to "disabuse" the patient of the above face-saving narratives and to "encourage an interpretation suggesting that it is he himself who is to blame and who must change" (Goffman [1961] 1976, p. 149).

Each time the staff deflates the patient's claims, his [sic] sense of what a person ought to be and the rules of peer-group social intercourse press him to reconstruct his stories; and each time he does this, the custodial and psychiatric interests of the staff may lead them to discredit these tales again. (p. 149)

Goffman's examination of the force of the institutionally sanctioned narratives of the hospital staff indicates the role of power and politics in the narrative construction of identity.

Wendy Evans and David Maines's (1995, p. 303) study of incest is similarly an examination of the "politics of storytelling." They demonstrate that conventionalized plotlines used to interpret narratives of incest rendered many victims of incest silent because there was no plausible, culturally acceptable plot within which they could recount their experiences. "The authenticity of pasts in the social and cultural sense is provided by their narrative structures and, in particular, the dominant plot lines that define the cultural meanings of human action" (Evans and Maines 1995, p. 320). Similarly, other studies have demonstrated how the shape of shared linguistic repertoires and acceptable narrative plots have served to silence and oppress women African domestics (McHonza 1995), and women as biographers in general (Reinharz 1994).

Ricoeur (1992) explores the related issue of what constitutes a "good life" toward the end of *Oneself as Another*. As David Rasmussen (1995, p. 166) puts it: "As narrative can thematize action, so it can be the bridge to ethical life." Ricoeur (1992, p. 187) argues that a self-narrative takes on meaning, and an evaluation as "good" or otherwise, through its relationship to the "other" who summons the self to responsibility. He (1992, p. 172) notes that "this dialogic structure, in its turn, remains incomplete outside of the reference to just institutions." Although this aspect of Ricoeur's thought requires further elaboration, it indicates that a theory of narrative identity also has sociopolitical implications.

Toward the end of his chapter on the inpatient phase Goffman ([1961] 1976, p. 154) observes that behind each self is an institutional system: "The self, then, can be seen as something that resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system for its members. The self in this sense is not a property of the person to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connexion with the person by himself and those around him." A similar point has been made by narrative theorists drawing on the hermeneutics of suspicion (Saas 1988), so named because of a suspicion about the supposed transparency and intelligibility of consciousness. Louis Saas (1988, p. 244) argues that self knowledge is always only "approximate, tentative and indirect" and often influenced by "only partially specifiable themes and backgrounds that exist at various levels of implicit and explicit awareness." That is to say, it is not simply the rhetoric of a narrated identity that supports a sense of a unified self. Regular interaction with a network of others, the routines of everyday life, and the presence of physical props are also central to

a person's ability to maintain a consistent and satisfying narrative (Slogoski and Ginsburg 1989). Both Goffman's analysis of the institutional sources of the self in the mental hospital and his later study of the maintenance of "face" (1967) underline this point.

This rereading of Goffman's analysis of the inpatient phase has demonstrated the utility of a sociological conception of narrative identity. It has also provided a critical perspective from which to extend this framework. A narrative identity provides a sense of personal continuity through time grounded in social networks and larger institutions. The narrative integration of lived experience and preexisting plots reflects the influence of power, social organization and the "politics of storytelling." Further, routine activities, regularly used props, and a stable, or predictable, physical environment are also important sources of a sense of personal identity. In contrast to Ricoeur and Mead, who only hint at the issue of power, Goffman's approach directs attention toward the role of institutions and institutionally located power in the construction and maintenance of narratives, including narrative identities. Linking Ricoeur's literary and philosophical hermeneutics with an explicitly sociological emphasis on social organization and practices provides an incisive and insightful framework for the analysis of the construction, maintenance, and change of the self-concept.

CONCLUSION

Temporality is integral to Mead's theory of the self, consciousness, and role taking. The past and future are continually reconstituted, according to Mead, in the light of the "emergent" in the present. This reconstitutive process involves an interweaving of the objective events of the past, the past's effects on the present, and the symbolic reconstruction of the past in the present. That is to say, the "me" does not simply have a temporal aspect. The imagined responses constitutive of the role-taking process are either remembered or anticipated. The "me" that is constructed through this process is therefore integrally temporal. Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity describes this process more fully.

According to Ricoeur, narratives about human pasts interweave historical events and the resources of fiction that provide the narrative plot within which events are interpreted. A sense of identity, or self-sameness, is constructed through the integrating quasi-fictional process of emplotment. The remembered and anticipated events of a person's life become the person's life story. Ricoeur's framework is hermeneutic in that he describes the circle of interpretations in which the "objective" events of lived experience are configured in "subjective" narratives that in turn shape decisions about actions that are again refigured in narrative. "The alternation of telling and living is extended in time and . . . constitutes a causal chain of sorts" (Rosenwald 1992, p. 273).

While narrative identities are constructed intersubjectively, in interaction with others, they are also produced as part of an internal dialogue, or soliloquy. Further, narrative identities are sustained and transformed through the influence of social relationships as mediated by institutional structures. As Goffman's analysis of the career of a mental patient underlines, the construction of self-stories is also an integrally political and power-laden process.

A narrative conception of identity suggests a number of directions for future research. First, the centrality of the interpretative process that has always been integral to the pragmatist tradition is again highlighted. This focus stands in contrast to methodologies that assume interview texts unproblematically reflect reality and to orientations that disregard references to reality as epistemologically problematic. However, beyond the simple obser-

vation that different people interpret different events in different ways, research is directed toward the ongoing cyclical interaction between narration and action. Jacquelyn Wiersma's (1992) interviews over several years with "Karen" clearly demonstrate the mutually influential nature of action and narration. More generally, a narrative approach would focus on how the interpretive resources that people bring to situations interact with the events they experience to shape the narrative that is then produced. The approach also highlights the links between research in the humanities and the social sciences. Ricoeur (1985) examines this issue in considerable detail, particularly in volume 2 of *Time and Narrative*. However, a more careful sociological consideration is still required.

I have argued that self-identity is formed in a narrative. While a narrative configures lived experience, it is not determined by it. Narratives give lived experience a clearer, richer meaning. However, self-narratives are not free fictions: "Humanity, we have said with Marx, only makes its history in circumstances it has not made" (Ricoeur 1988, p. 216). The plots of narrative identities are formed in a complex interaction between events, imagination, significant others, routines and habits, and the structure of the soliloquy that forms a person's self-narrative. A combination of symbolic interactionist thought and Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides an incisive theory of these processes.

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