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BUILDING NARRATIVE IDENTITY: EPISODIC VALUE AND ITS IDENTITY-FORMING STRUCTURE WITHIN PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

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Abstract: In this essay, I develop the concept of *episodic value*, which describes a form of value connected to a particular object or individual expressed and delivered through a narrative. Narrative can bestow special kinds of value on objects, as exemplified by auction articles or museum collections. To clarify the nature of episodic value, I show how the notion of episodic value fundamentally differs from the traditional axiological picture. I extend my discussion of episodic value to argue that the notion of episodic value readily incorporates the role of narratives into the construction of identity in personal and social contexts. My main contentions are twofold. First, events or experiences from our personal narratives are episodically valuable insofar as they contribute to shaping our narrative identities. Second, when engaged in a collective action, we write a joint narrative with other participants that confers special meanings on the actions of each participant.
Keywords: episodic value; narrative; personal identity; personal narrative; joint narrative

Introduction: The justice's hair rollers

For several months from 2016 to 2017, more than 16 million people in South Korea participated in a number of demonstrations known as the Candlelight Struggle against President Geun-hye Park, demanding her resignation.[1] On March 10, 2017, after an intense series of trials lasting three months, the South Korean Constitutional Court upheld a parliamentary vote to impeach the President, leading to her immediate dismissal from office. On the morning of the Court's announcement of the verdict, acting Chief Justice Jung-mi Lee showed up in court wearing pink hair rollers on her head. She had apparently been too absorbed in her work to remember to remove the rollers before she left her house. When she received national media attention for this, people recognized her as an icon of a hardworking woman so focused upon her job duties that she became oblivious to more trivial

[1] The number of participants varies depending on which institution performed the demography. Here, I use the figures estimated by the official organizer of the demonstrations.

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personal matters such as appearance. It was even reported that the Constitutional Court was considering preserving the rollers (Kim, 2017).[2] If people thought that they were worth preserving, I suppose, it is because they were deemed more valuable than common everyday goods. The value of the justice's hair rollers cannot be entirely explained by their practical benefit. What, then, transforms mere plastic tubes into something bearing special value? In my view, it has to do with the narrative the rollers play a part in constructing. A narrative can bestow a particular type of value, which I term *episodic value*, to the individuals who engage, or the objects involved, in the story-building process. I take this incident to be a standard case where material objects exemplify episodic value.[3] A particular object can exemplify an episodic value by standing in a certain relation to the narrative.[4] The narratives behind the aforementioned incident, which perhaps involve people's collective aspirations to oust the corrupt regime, granted a special type of value to the rollers, converting them into relics representing the people's repudiation of corruption.

In this essay, I attempt to explain the notion of episodic value and how it pertains to the construction of narrative identity within personal and social contexts. In order to clarify the nature of episodic value, I first discuss how it differs from the traditional axiological framework based on intrinsic and instrumental values. Then, I explore how episodic value is related to certain philosophical issues that involve narrative and identity. My main contentions in the essay are: first, that episodic value stems from our narrative agency as story makers, which seems to be native and natural to all human persons; and second, that while engaged in collective endeavors with others, we build joint narratives that bestow special meanings on each participant's actions.

How episodic value differs from the conventional axiological picture

In my essay, episodic value is contrasted with the mainstream approach to axiology. The axiological debates in ethics have mainly been framed in terms of *intrinsic* and *instrumental* values. Intrinsic value is commonly characterized as that which is valuable for its own sake. People disagree as to what kinds of entities have intrinsic value: Several popular perspectives on intrinsic value include arguments in favor of hedonistic entities such as pleasure and enjoyment, and arguments for moral or epistemological virtues such as friendship or knowledge. However, virtually all philosophers agree that intrinsic values are

[2] Despite the media reports, the Court denied that they planned to preserve the rollers. Instead, they later announced that they had decided to preserve the chair the Justice sat on while she read the verdict.

[3] It is possible to say that it was Justice Lee herself, as opposed to the rollers, who exemplified this value, and that the rollers were only imbued with it; i.e., they somehow attracted a certain aspect of the value by being associated with her on that monumental day. In my essay, I do not attempt to provide a complete picture as to exactly what kinds of things bear episodic value and how they are related to other kinds of objects. As to the bearer of episodic value, I lean toward a rather lenient position. In my view, physical entities are not the only possible bearers of episodic value; episodic value may be attached to non-material objects such as events, states of affairs, or a particular period in time.

[4] In fact, things that exemplify episodic value are quite common. Bloom (2010, p. 3) mentions some mundane examples, including the autography of Neil Armstrong and the shoes thrown at George W. Bush by an Iraqi journalist.

non-derivative. For instance, G. E. Moore claimed that intrinsic goods are things deemed to be good when we imagine that they exist "in absolute isolation" (Moore, 1903, p. 236), or "quite alone, without any further accompaniments or effects whatever" (Moore, 1912, 27 ff.). By contrast, episodic value cannot be generated by anything in isolation, since its goodness is parasitic to a particular narrative that is a product of the interactions among various elements such as different individuals, times, and places (or some combinations of them such as events or states of affairs). When people find significance in their participation in an activity or a project, they typically *engage with* it, and this operates as an ingredient of the narrative that bestows significance. Whereas intrinsic value stems from the fundamental natures or properties of certain things, episodic value is generated out of the interrelations or interactions among the individuals or other components featured in the corresponding narrative.

In the dominant picture of intrinsic value, something with intrinsic value has value in and of itself, and intrinsic goodness is a value that stems from a good thing in and of itself; anything else that may be said to be good derives its goodness from the corresponding intrinsic value. For example, it would be nice to occasionally invite your neighbors for dinner because that would be a good way to get close to them. Also, it is good to get close to your neighbors because that helps to cultivate a friendship or to enhance an existing friendship, particularly as friendship is supposed to be valuable in and of itself. In general, according to the intrinsic–instrumental framework, in judging the value of any ordinary object or action, there exists an axiological chain starting from a derivative good that ends with an intrinsic good, which goes $D_1, D_2, \ldots D_n, I$, where each of $D_1, D_2, \ldots D_n$ is something derivatively good and I is the corresponding intrinsic good. Here it is important to note that the goodness of I is the *ultimate* source of goodness of everything else in the scheme. The reasons why each of $D_1, D_2, \ldots D_n$ is valuable are commonly explained by the intrinsic goodness of I. In this respect, their values are instrumental by nature. In contrast, when something exemplifies episodic value, it need not serve as a *means* to achieve some further good. Rather, it represents the significance of the value-bestowing narrative in a creative way by being a part of the story that constitutes the narrative. Suppose a shop owner who sells regional specialties develops an interesting story involving local apples. If the strategy is successful and the sales indeed increase, that would not be because of a change in the quality of the product. After all, the story would not make the apples taste better.

It might be suggested that episodic value can be accommodated in terms of the intrinsic–instrumental framework because by its nature a narrative incorporates something intrinsically valuable. In this line of thinking, perhaps it is part of our nature to adopt favorable attitudes toward a representation of events in the narrative form so that things that are related in the appropriate way to the narrative convey its intrinsic value. In other words, the intrinsic value of a given narrative can be instrumentalized by whatever bears a corresponding episodic value. I believe this picture is misguided for two reasons at least. First, the things that exemplify episodic value do not seem to operate as a *means* to achieve some further end. Something instrumentally valuable has its value only insofar as it contains the corresponding intrinsic goodness. Thus, we can have access to its intrinsic goodness if only we can obtain it. In contrast, when something is episodically valuable by virtue of standing in a certain relation with a narrative, we cannot take hold of the narrative merely by obtaining the object

in hand. The object may signify a portion of the story, but it does not signify the whole story. Furthermore, some narratives may seem insignificant because they are plainly *bad*. It is possible that some narratives are so hopelessly crude or bland that there is not much to appreciate about them. Some narratives may be so contemptible and degrading that anyone who comes to know them might take them to be disgraceful. Some narratives may be complete fabrications so that they tend to obscure the truth from those who seek it. If there are narratives that can be so poorly evaluated from aesthetical, moral, or epistemic perspectives, it is difficult to see how narratives *in general* are intrinsically valuable.

Value-generating narrative and identity

If the previous line of thinking is correct, something can be episodically valuable by virtue of being included in a story-building process for a significant narrative, as opposed to an approach that instrumentalizes a corresponding intrinsic value. Naturally, we might wonder from where episodic value stems. In my view, the fundamental source of episodic value derives from our abilities to create, and respond to, narratives insofar as they contribute to establishing our identities as narrative agents.

To explicate this idea, I first note that episodic value is useful for illuminating some axiological issues that involve personal identity. Given the appropriate technology, the physical and psychological properties of a person can be readily duplicated. However, this sort of duplication process cannot transfer the narrative involving the original person. This consideration may explain, and perhaps justify, why we maintain different attitudes toward qualitatively identical persons. A simple illustration of such attitudes can be found in a science fiction story. In Stanislaw Lem's novel *Solaris*, Kris Kelvin encounters what seems to be his late wife, who had killed herself after fighting with Kris. She turns out to be her exact double generated by the planet Solaris from his tormented memories. Baffled and bewildered, he tricks her into a shuttle and shoots her out into space (Lem, 1961, pp. 52-65). Why couldn't he greet her as he would if he had met the wife he had missed? A possible explanation for this striking refusal to accept the double might be that he does not share any memories stemming from a relationship *with her* that form a narrative of a shared life. Since Kelvin and the double never built a narrative together, the double does not mean the same to Kelvin as his actual wife does. A narrative that generates episodic value may stem from personal relationships or commitments. In developing a relationship with someone, an individual builds up memories of her own while sharing experiences and ideas with her partner. From these memories, this individual can create an interpersonal narrative that is commonly accessible to both partners in the relationship. This sort of narrative is unique and irreplaceable in the sense that any comparable narrative is a different story insofar as it features a different individual, and thus cannot bear the same kind of significance.

A similar point can be made by a more realistic example. When parents lose a child at an early age, it would not be much consolation to tell them that they can have another baby. This is because they will not have shared any part of their lives with their future child, and thus will not have formed a narrative with the future baby. Of course, they may be able to construct a meaningful narrative with the future child, while writing an even more touching story of overcoming adversity. Nevertheless, this would be a different story. The narrative

they made with the deceased child cannot be replaced by another narrative that features someone else.

Episodic value and the constitution of narrative identity

The preceding discussion suggests that the history of an individual's life and her personal narrative plays a crucial role in constituting identity. A growing philosophical debate on personal narrative sheds further light on this point. Our lives are composed of an array of episodes. Some of them may serve as the basic resources of the personal narratives that our identities are built on. In the literature on personal identity, philosophers have delved into the question of what makes an item in an identity-forming profile such as an action, experience, memory, belief, desire, intention, or character trait, properly attributable to a person.[5] This question asks what kinds of and which psychological, behavioral, and dispositional features make a person the person she is. The dominant answer to this issue is that the characteristics that constitute a person's true self are the ones that are incorporated into her self-told life story as represented in a narrative structure—an account of self-articulation known as *the narrative identity view*.[6] While building a personal narrative, we transform a series of events and experiences we have undergone into an organized whole in the form of a coherent and intelligible story. This is a process of conferring meaning on the events and experiences we have had in living our lives.

I should note that episodic value is well-adjusted to the narrative identity view. Some constituents of a person's self-narrative may be valuable to her precisely because the narrative is partly composed of them. For instance, a certain place may be meaningful to us in a way that it wouldn't be to other people because of the role it plays in the personal narratives of our lives. Suppose you obtained a doctorate at a university in Los Angeles. This city, as opposed to any other place, may be significant to you because it is where you devoted your youth to performing research and teaching students, investing a considerable part of it in defining who you are. For some, it is where they finally achieved theatrical success, for example, after a number of failed auditions and working in diners to make ends meet. For others, it is where they grew up and used to play basketball with their local buddies, dreaming of being a star athlete. It confers a different meaning on people's lives, depending on their personal narratives. The same point may apply to other constituents of a personal narrative such as events, objects, and individuals. They come to bear episodic value insofar as they are identity-constituting. Moreover, their significance in a life story rests on the roles they play or played in the personal narrative.

This observation indicates that we have the ability, which we may term *narratability*, as a narrative agent, to create a story of our own lives. By exercising narratability, we transform a mere chronicle of events and experiences into a coherent and intelligible story in narrative form. The multitude of events and experiences that constitute personal narrative are not

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[5] The issue pertaining to this notion of personal identity is sometimes known as the characterization question, as opposed to the reidentification question. See Schechtman, 1996, pp. 73-92.

[6] For some of the influential works on the narrative identity view, see MacIntyre, 2007, pp. 181-225; Schechtman, 1996, pp. 73-162; DeGrazia, 2005, pp. 77-114.

arbitrarily bound together. For instance, if someone's narrative contains a series of events where he passed the final audition for a Broadway show and received a call back informing him that he had been cast for the show, then it is reasonable to think that the two events are connected on a causal basis. Here I do not mean to suggest that all the constituent events in personal narrative are causally interrelated in this way. Various non-causal events may enter into and play a crucial role in narrative. It may be sheer accident that the aforementioned actor came to dream of standing on the Broadway stage. Perhaps a TV show in his childhood, which may not have been broadcast in his area, generated the dream of becoming a Broadway star in his mind. In fact, many of our personal relationships that have a great influence on the development of our personal narratives, including relationships with our parents, are formed as a result of pure coincidence.

In the field of psychology, there is a debate as to what sorts of life narratives contribute to the formation of identity. The traditional framework, sometimes known as the big story approach, focuses on an individual's landmark events and the monumental occasions and experiences that form the milestones of her life history. On the other hand, the small story approach claims that ordinary, day-to-day type small stories are the building blocks for constructing identity.[7] This approach can be achieved by analyzing mundane daily conversations with psychological theoretic tools.[8]

A salient advantage of the small story approach is that it can explicate a narrative identity with multifaceted characterizations. This feature enables a more vivid representation of a person as a narrative agent. In the traditional big story approach, the narrator lays out what she takes to be the momentous experiences and events that shape a coherent and intelligible life story. In this sense, the autobiographical narrative that emerges in this approach typically takes the form of a monologue where the narrator reflects on past events from an external viewpoint. By contrast, given the nature of small talk and conversation, the identity formation process suggested in the small story approach tends to be interactive. Due to this aspect, the small story approach embraces many different forms of identification. While engaging in daily conversations, the narrator typically completes the story with the participation of her peers, each of whom plays a different role. Sometimes the narrator offers, either implicitly or explicitly, various dialectical roles to other participants, while navigating toward different, sometimes even conflicting, positions.[9] This sort of multidimensional

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[7] It is interesting to ask how exactly the two approaches are related to each other. Mark Freeman (2006) claims that they complement each other, insofar as parts of our lives inevitably involve reflecting upon, and thus gaining insights about, past lives. Michael Bamberg (2006), on the other hand, casts a skeptical look at the prospect of successfully incorporating the two methodologies to result in productive outcomes. While advocating the small story approach, Alexandra Georgakopoulou (2006b) maintains that this approach marks a major shift in narrative and identity research.

[8] See, for example, a five-step analysis scrutinizing mundane small stories provided by Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008.

[9] Bamberg and Georgakopoulou offer a fascinating analysis of a conversation among ten-year-old boys and an adult moderator, where one of the boys maintains an ambivalent attitude to being attracted to girls, and thereby drives himself into contradictory positions through his interaction with others. While pretending to be uncommitted and uninterested in girls, he guides his friend to publicly share his own experience with a neighborhood girl, which reveals his covert interest in her. See Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, pp. 382-392.

embodiment of identity formation is clearly missing in the monological representation of a self in the traditional approach.

Another strength of the small story approach stems from its applicability to the re-description of daily narratives. Retelling small stories is a way of revealing two of their significant features—they are context-specific as well as time-specific (Bamberg, 2008, pp. 185-186). A story is context-specific in the sense that the circumstantial components such as the audience differ each time the narrator tells a story. A story is time-specific in the sense that the inner change inside the narrator over time may result in a difference in the content. These features adequately explain why the narrator tells different versions of the same narrative when she retells the story. The small story approach is ideal for accommodating these two features since it takes account of the particular circumstances in which the story is being told—for example, the parameters of the audience in terms of their level of understanding, and the emotional and psychological status of the teller when the narration begins. This approach is also sensitive to the ways in which the participating characters in the narrative are situated to play their roles in illuminating the contents, and how those contents are represented differently each time the story is told.[10] The big story approach, on the other hand, fails to disclose many different layers of narrative that can be made manifest in retellings of the story.

The philosophical debate on narrative identity may be regarded as being in line with the big story approach. However, the notion of episodic value need not be confined to this approach. Insofar as I can see, the axiological theory stemming from episodic value is entirely compatible with the small story approach. To illustrate this point, I would like to point out, first, that human actions can be characterized in multiple ways. A notable example is given by Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 2007, pp. 206-207). Suppose we are witnessing a man working in his garden. MacIntyre points out that we can correctly characterize what he does in many different ways: "digging," "taking exercise," "preparing for winter," "pleasing his wife," and so on. Here, it is important to note that some of the characterizations themselves require different narratives. In some characterizations, the episode including this piece of action is placed within a narrative of seasonal household service, whereas in others it is placed within a completely different context that involves his marital status and relationship. In other words, the gardener may tell (and retell) different stories about what he is doing where the action in question is contextually situated to gain its significance in relation to the narrative of which it is a part. In each case, the characterization of an action can only be given insofar as it is a part of a larger narrative history. Thus, it may be argued that a segment of life gains significance only within the broader context in life.

We may then sensibly ask: How are the constituent events and experiences in personal narrative related to one another? What unites them into a coherent life story? In my view,

[10] Bamberg provides an extensive analysis of two different versions of the same narrative in Liane Brandon's film, *Betty Tells Her Story*, where the narrator Betty gives radically different versions of a story in which she bought a beautiful dress to attend the Governor's ball and then lost it. Bamberg concludes that the discrepancy in Betty's storytelling is best understood as a process that incorporates "two different subjectivities into being," as opposed to the means to reveal her true identity or to ascribe multiple identities to her (Bamberg, 2008, pp. 186-202).

the episodic segments of life are incorporated into personal narratives insofar as they generate lasting value to the author of the narrative, or in other words, to the degree that they contribute to building her narrative identity. A personal narrative differs from a mere chronicle of events happening to a person in that it is both *selective* and *interpretive*.[11] It is selective because not every incident in our life tells us or others who we really are. Within the framework of the narrative identity view, our personal narratives function to define the person that we are. Hence, our narratives should be composed of the episodes that reveal our true identity. In particular, the selected episodes given by a narrative agent reflect the temporary aspects of the person she is—the person who is temporally and contextually situated at the time of the telling, on account of the context-specific and the time-specific nature of a narrative as suggested in the small story approach. In addition, our narrative is interpretive in the sense that we have the authority to determine the significance of the constituent episodes. In constructing our personal narratives, we depict the constituting events from a particular perspective. Thus, the participants of the Candlelight Struggle may regard the Park impeachment as a glorious triumph of the South Korean people over a corrupt regime, whereas others may think of it as an iniquitous action of the madding crowd to get rid of an innocent political leader. Here, the ways in which the component episodes are depicted manifest how we regard ourselves in the identity formation process. Especially, how each of us characterizes things in our respective personal narratives reveals the value systems through which each of us perceives the world. A crucial component of personal identity is rooted in the personal value system; thus, how individuals construe the events in their life stories shows who they truly are. In sum, to exercise narratability is to impose significance upon the constituent events in our personal narratives while shaping our own identities.

Writing a joint narrative

In the preceding section, I claimed that writing a personal narrative describes how we, through our narrative agency, selectively and interpretively organize the constituent events of a life in order to build a narrative identity. If this line of thinking is correct, then each of us writes a narrative in and through the very act of living a life.[12] In other words, by exercising narratability we create a value-generating narrative. In this picture, interactions between different individuals can be understood as existing within a process through which diverse personal narratives are merged into a larger joint narrative.[13]

The experiences stemming from this convergence can be episodically valuable. A typical example can be found when people are committed to achieving a common goal in a collective action. Collective actions are often important sources of meaningful narratives.

[11] Here I follow Hilde Lindemann Nelson (2001, pp. 11-15). She points out that a narrative has four distinctive features: depictive, selective, interpretive, and connective. Of these, only the second and third elements are relevant for our purpose.
[12] Similarly, John Martin Fischer claims that in carrying out an action freely, we write a sentence in the book of our life. In his view, free action is a special type of self-expression. See Fischer, 1999; Fischer, 2009.
[13] While taking the small story approach, Georgakopoulou (2006a, pp. 86-100) illustrates this point by analyzing daily conversations among teenage girls.

While engaged in a collective action, people are bound to build interpersonal relationships with other participants who share the same objective. In cultivating such relationships, each participant is obliged to fulfill the common objective associated with a collective preference. This is what Margaret Gilbert calls a *joint commitment*. According to her, a joint commitment is not reducible to a set of personal commitments of the individuals involved (Gilbert, 2001, 106 ff.; Gilbert, 2006, 125 ff.). Whereas a personal commitment is made when we simply decide to do something, in making a joint commitment, we share mutual understandings of willingness or consent to pursue the common goal along with other participants.

I take it that people's experiences in making the joint commitment and pursuing the goal may form a basis to generate a narrative that confers meanings to them. Let us first note that within the context of making a joint commitment, each act of the participants is seen from a different, particular perspective, and thus obtains a different meaning or significance it would otherwise lack in light of the joint narrative. To illustrate, suppose an infielder throws the ball in a baseball game. This incident can certainly be described as one man's individual action that is connected with the ball's movement through the air. However, within a larger context, this particular action could mean something more than the mere motion of a physical object—the ground-out of the batter, the dramatic ending to the inning, the team's winning the World Series championship, and so on. The action carries such a meaning partly owing to the rules or regulations of baseball. However, this conveyance of meaning is also due to the particular conditions in which the action comes to be taken: A ground-out with no runners on base in a spring training exhibition game is one event, and a ground-out in the final game of the World Series that results in one of the two teams being named the champion is another. Likewise, when people act in accordance with the idea of a collective action, the social norms and institutions, along with others' actions, enrich and contribute to the context in which an individual action is a particular unfolding event, and all together they invest that action with a set of greater meaning.

In my view, such actions can be interpreted as the ingredients of the narrative pertaining to the significance of the collective action at hand. As many scholars have claimed, the construction of a narrative has to do with the practice of human volitions or other types of agencies. Antti Kauppinen (Kauppinen, 2015, p. 203), for example, says that "narratives concern the exercise of planning agency over time and its consequences." Hence, when each of us exercises our own agency within the context of a collective action, our individual actions constitute one part of the joint narrative. In this sense, each participant in a collective action helps to co-author the joint narrative. Their individual actions bear episodic value with respect to the narrative they jointly construct. In other words, an individual action is a collaboration because it is being experienced in some way by the respective perspectives of the various individuals who are in some degree co-participants. As the product of their authorship that gives rise to constitute the joint narrative, their action bears special significance. Hence, to those who participated in the 2016–17 Candlelight Struggle, Park's resignation is something more than a sensational headline in a newspaper. It is confirmation that they jointly wrote a story of victory.

The preceding discussion may shed light on the practical application of narrative identity performed in the field of narrative therapy. A core tenet of narrative therapy is to

separate the psychological issues from the person who has them. This process is known as "externalizing" the problem. According to Michael White and David Epston, who are often regarded as the founders of narrative therapy, externalization is "an approach to therapy that encourages persons to objectify… the problems that they experience as oppressive" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 38). In the process of externalization, the psychological problem "becomes a separate entity and thus external to the person," rather than those problems being mostly regarded as inherent to the person. To put it into the form of a well-known slogan: "the person is not the problem, but the problem is the problem."

White and Epston note that outcomes of this practice are to "[pave] the way for persons to cooperate with each other" and to "[present] options for dialogue, rather than monologue, about the problem" (White & Epston, 1990, pp. 39-40). This positive effect can be particularly striking in sessions with couples or families. White and Epston introduce a case of a family that is concerned about a rebellious teenage son (White & Epston, 1990, pp. 54-55). The parents are worried about their son's future because he is "irresponsible," whereas the son considers their concerns "nagging" and "hassling." However, after the family are invited to cooperate in the inquiry about the nature and effects of the parents' anxieties, they are able to reach a mutual understanding. The parents become aware of the negative effects of their worries on their son ("this anxiety… was crowding him and making it difficult for him to have his own life"), and he, in turn, is able to properly locate their concerns. This enables him to take steps to assuage their anxieties and improve their relationship. In my view, what happened in this therapy can be understood as the process of writing a narrative as a "cooperative endeavor." While engaged in the formation of their joint narrative, the parents and the son externalized the issues in their analysis of the problem, which allowed them to successfully objectify it. Also, as the co-author of the narrative, they tried to view the problem from a different angle, just as co-writers circulate and comment on each other's manuscripts.

Another upshot of narrative therapy is that it enables us to see the problem as the product of a social construct. Jill Freedman and Gene Combs, practitioners of narrative therapy, adopt a version of social constructionism according to which realities are "socially constructed" and "organized and maintained through narrative" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 22). According to their approach, social constructionist clinical practices are based on the worldview that knowledge of reality cannot be "accurately and replicably discovered"—rather, it "arises within communities of knowers" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, pp. 19-20). In other words, reality is not objectively knowable but intersubjectively constructed. In taking the "objectivity" worldview, therapists are liable to ignore particular, individually-localized stories, while looking for the standard underlying structures of a narrative. On the other hand, taking the social constructionist worldview into account, therapists are aware that there are multiple ways of describing realities and thus are likely to concentrate on the marginalized stories of individual people.

I believe that the preceding discussion about collective action and joint narrative may be relevant here. When our action, located within the context of collective action, is construed as an ingredient in a joint narrative, it is natural to think that the meanings conferred to an action may vary depending on the interpretations of the narrative. Hence, when a story is written by multiple authors, each of them can readily strike an accepting attitude toward open interpretations. In adopting this attitude, people in therapeutic conversations are invited to

develop and voice their own stories without being constrained by canonical social norms and institutions.

Conclusion

I have argued that the notion of episodic value can come in handy when conducting philosophical inquiries into and applying therapeutic practices to narrative and identity. In particular, I have suggested that the source of episodic value derives from how we shape our narrative identities and interact with others as narrative agents, which is well-suited to the small story approach in psychology. Our personal narratives often intertwine with the narratives of others in the weaving of a greater narrative. This may happen when a group of people engages in collective actions or other kinds of collaborative activities to achieve a common goal. In so doing, the participants are bound to write a narrative together. Since by its nature a collaborative endeavor cannot be performed by a single individual, a joint narrative cannot be written alone. A joint narrative is composed of various episodes from the involved individuals, which in turn provides identities and social orientations for these individuals, and creates a situation in which they come to see their own actions as a part of the entire community's identity. In this respect, joint narratives are value-generating insofar as they locate the participant within a network of other individuals engaged in the story-building process.

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