Introduction

Narratives and Narrative Impacts

In October 2016 a story began circulating online about goings-on at Comet Ping Pong, a Washington, DC, pizza restaurant. According to the story, the restaurant was a staging ground for a human trafficking and child sex abuse operation run by presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and her campaign manager. On December 4, 2016, a North Carolina man named Edgar Welch stormed the restaurant with an assault rifle and took aim at employees, intent on rescuing the abused children and exposing the operation (Kang and Goldman 2016).

The tales people hear and tell inspire them to take action that is more or less consequential and more or less bold. We vote, demonstrate, and perpetrate violence on the basis of shifting accounts of being in the world. We also choose jobs, friends, and life partners; decide where to live and which groups to join; and decide to quit, alter, endure, or appreciate whatever path we have chosen. Remarkably, stories get masses of people to believe in and commit to the same things. What gives stories their power? This book explores the capacity of stories, or narratives,

to nurture the motivation both to perpetrate harm and to ignore harm done by others.[1] The book builds *narrative criminology*, or the study of the relationship between narratives and harmful actions and patterns (Presser 2009; Presser and Sandberg 2015). My goal is to suggest precise ways of thinking about how narratives promote actions and specifically though not exclusively harmful actions in which large numbers are affected and large numbers are implicated.

As far as arousal goes, there is nothing special about the story that motivates our participation in harm-doing, as opposed to other stories. I am roused, for instance, by a story of having neglected a friend, compelling me to send her a gift. This book sets aside the nature or content of harmgenic stories in order to concentrate on mechanisms of narrative sway.

NARRATIVE IMMERSION

Those who study reading, mostly literary scholars and psychologists, observe that we get "lost" in (Nell 1988) or "seduced" (Chambers 1984) or "transported" (Gerrig 1993) by narratives. Reading can put us into a sort of "trance," hence the "witchery" of stories (Gottschall 2012; Nell 1988). When we are absorbed in this way, we notice fewer inaccuracies in the story, and we evaluate protagonists more positively (Green and Brock 2000). Green, Garst, and Brock (2004) propose that narrative operates "as a cue to a reader to engage in a less-critical, more immersive form of mental engagement" (p. 165). The experience of "immersion in narratives brings about partial isolation from the facts of the real world" (Gerrig 1993, p. 16). Beyond ideational impacts, those who research narrative impacts emphasize emotional arousal (Harold 2005; Hogan 2003; A.M. Jacobs 2015; Nabi and

Green 2015; Oatley 2002; Polichak and Gerrig 2002; Tan 1996). Indeed, narrative's emotional influence may be preeminent, as Green and Brock (2002) state: "Individuals are swept away by a story, and thus come to believe in ideas suggested by the narrative" (p. 325). A good story gets us feeling excited, anxious, disgusted, saddened, or satisfied. We identify and empathize with fictional characters: we come to feel what they feel (J. Cohen 2001; cf. Keen 2007). Absorbed in fiction, we become active participants in the storied events (Iser 1972, 1978; Polichak and Gerrig 2002).

Scholarly investigation of narrative impacts deals mainly with the verbal arts, or literature. It concerns fictional stories recounted by others almost exclusively. But comparable impacts are evident whether the story is fiction or nonfiction (Green, Garst, and Brock 2004; Strange and Leung 1999) and whether the story is received or told. Hence Torossian's (1937) assertion: "The difference … between aesthetic and practical emotional experience is not very great. The same psychological factors of memory and association, as well as those already discussed, are involved in both; except that in a practical experience the feelings aroused are identified with the individual having the experience, whereas in an aesthetic experience the feelings aroused are identified with the contemplated object" (p. 25). A storied reality takes hold of us at all times. And we regularly tell stories about ourselves, in the form of statements we make self-consciously and the internal and "virtually uninterrupted monologue" of which we are barely conscious (Brooks 1984, p. 3). Psychologist Victor Nell (1988) notes that "a narrative continues to exercise its fascination if teller and audience are condensed into one person and the act of telling is reduced to silence" (p. 61).

It is in fact likely that we are even more susceptible to the impact of self-stories (or we-stories) than we are to *other* people's stories. Engagement in the latter requires, at a minimum, an interest in whoever the story is about and what they are going through (Schank and Berman 2002). Yet, we are predictably interested in ourselves and in the real-world narratives in which we cast ourselves. We care about the outcomes of such narratives, and we identify with the protagonist as a matter of course.

CAPTIVATING THE SELF

For some, the idea that we could captivate ourselves might seem bizarre. Not so for the medical researchers whose randomized trials bear out the effectiveness of self-hypnosis on pain and health-related attitudes, among other things. We very effectively cast spells on ourselves *by* ourselves with no one else to distract us. As for stories, neuroscientists observe that most of the same regions of the brain and mental processes are involved when we construct and when we absorb narratives (see, e.g., Mar 2004; Silbert et al. 2014). Both processes demand the ability to order propositions to construct meaning, and both rely on the ability to divine other people's (characters') mental states—that is, to conjure theory of mind.

In addition, both in telling and in processing stories we rely on shared prototypes (Hogan 2003), which brings us to another basis for susceptibility to our own stories. "Our" stories are never completely our own. They draw on "recognizable plots, character types, conventional tropes, genre-specific cues that build suspense" (Frank 2010a, p. 119). Thus, when we inspire ourselves, the ultimate source of the inspiration is collective. The cultural resources we use for telling stories are the same ones

we use for understanding stories. Imagine, for example, my story of a recent breakup along lines of failing to see clearly how frayed the bonds I shared with my partner truly were the whole time we were together. The unseeing protagonist is a conventional character in our culture, the unwelcome revelation a conventional plotline. This story is no less compelling to me and to others for its conventionality.

If notions of trance and witchery seem foreign to *criminology*, consider our homegrown theories of the morally bankrupt crowd, the drift into juvenile delinquency, and the spectacle of crime. Gustav Le Bon (1903) observed that individuals relinquish thinking to the crowd; the individual "is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will" (p. 24), hence "the hypnotizing effect of general beliefs" (p. 141). The crowd is unreasonable; it buys into "the most improbable legends and stories" (p. 32). In David Matza's (1964) theory of drift, the young person gets carried away and into offending. Drift is "a gradual process of movement, unperceived by the actor" (p. 29), an "episodic release from moral constraint" (p. 69). Today's cultural criminologists account for punishment, crime, and other transgressions in terms of energy and verve, underwritten by shared semiotics. For example, Mike Presdee (2000) took note of trances achieved by youth in club culture, who through music and drugs make "pleasure the site of meaning" (p. 122). These scholars and others (e.g., Gadd and Jefferson 2007; McLaughlin 2014) grapple with the suspension of human reasoning in the context of transgression and violence.

Under the spell of narrative one's reasoning is not so much suspended as it is altered. Narrative itself is said to be a *way* of reasoning—temporally, causally, and meaningfully (Bruner 1986). Research from experimental psychology shows that we

are active thinkers even when—or *as*—we are absorbed in narrative (see Gerrig 1993; Nell 1988). Furthermore, we get absorbed within certain social settings and times and phases of life, and not others. A theory based on narrative can expound the nature of getting swept away and into doing harm while not abandoning the idea that individuals are agents living in social contexts who make choices. To properly build such a theory we need, in addition to an account of narrative, an account of emotion. Martha Nussbaum (2001) and Paul Colm Hogan (2003) offer especially useful theories for present purposes.

Nussbaum (2001) identifies emotions as appraisals that "ascribe to things and persons outside the person's own control great importance for that person's own flourishing" (p. 4). Feelings reflect an interpretation of events and circumstances that highlights issues of control and well-being. Even as Nussbaum traces emotional experience to "propositional content" concerning a particular present experience and especially a loss or a triumph, she notes that such experience "involves a storm of memories and concrete perceptions that swarm around that content, but add more than is present in it" (p. 65). Raw material for the felt experience of our appraisals is past experience rendered imaginatively. Hogan (2003) takes the view that our most basic concepts of emotion are rooted in universal stories that relay both eliciting conditions and the effects of feeling some feeling. Thus are narrative and emotion "almost inseparable phenomena" (p. 264). Enriched by insights from cognitive science and Sanskrit literary theory, Hogan argues that stories' suggestive shading of meaning activates traces of memories and thereupon the emotions associated with these. Both scholars tie feeling to signification through the lens of the past. Hogan furthermore conceptualizes shared narratives as engines of signification and

credits narrative ambiguity with provocation. Nussbaum is more attentive to the beguiling theme of control over well-being.

What remains necessary for theorizing *mass* arousal is some sociology of cognition, for as Hagan and Rymond-Richmond (2009) remind us, "a collective explanation is needed for collective violence" (p. 136). Stories act upon multitudes. The cognitive and emotional impacts I am concerned with are communal ones. The work of Eviatar Zerubavel (1997) fills in here, highlighting the enculturation of major processes of cognition, including classification and memory. Of particular relevance to collective narratives: Zerubavel demonstrates that our memories are as likely to be located in impersonal sites as they are in embodied, personal ones. We can begin to grasp how narratives impact aggregates by recognizing that many of the deep associations through which we know the world are shared. I will contemplate the collective rememberings and forgettings through which stories resonate.

Story-making and storytelling are processes, of course. Styles of storytelling shape the "involvement" of interlocutors and audiences (Tannen 1989). Compelling cadence, use of repetition, alliteration and parataxis, posing rhetorical questions, and the like make speech, not merely stories, affecting and persuasive. Of particular sociological relevance: contexts for telling stories, as Polletta (2006) demonstrates, "determine what kind of a hearing particular stories secure" (p. 167). We are more apt to listen to individuals with power, those who stand on the so-called bully pulpit. Whether one's story is accepted, and thus whether it has social influence, also depends on whether one has abided by setting-specific norms of storytelling: for example, in criminal courts "true stories remain identical in their retelling" (Polletta 2006, p. 167), a convention relaxed elsewhere. In addition, in

real-time communication interlocutors shape the narrative that "one" tells and the impact that the narrative has on the interlocutors in turn (Presser 2009). Whether a story "speaks" to us and whether we make a popular story "our own" depends on all of these factors.

Reading theorists' take on active participant involvement pertains here. Broadly, they stress that we bring our own storied experiences and positions, both attitudinal and structural, to the cultural encounter that is reading (e.g., Iser 1978). McDonnell, Bail, and Tavory's (2017) theory of resonance also points to interpretation as actively undertaken. They state: "It is thus only through the effect of signs that meaning-making is completed, and such effect cannot be encapsulated by an analysis of cultural objects but must also take into account the habits of thought and action through which an interpreter experiences such an object" (p. 3).

Recognizing that narrative, like other cultural forms, is a product of social processes, my analysis of narrative influence nonetheless brackets process. I want to say something about the stuff and the structure of narrative that animate action as well as inaction. I want to address why narrative, among cultural forms, is exceptional at propulsion and to determine "the sensible properties" of some narrative that make it especially propulsive (Matravers 1991, p. 329). However, I can only sideline narrative exchange for so long. I consider both what is said and what is not said as exerting an aesthetic impact, and the "not said" especially obviously requires an interpreting agent for impact. The stories we tell ourselves draw on both novel/situated and prefabricated understandings.

Preparing to make sense of narrative arousal, this introductory chapter summarizes the narrative criminological view of

stories as grounds for action, explores the question of narrative truth within the context of narrative impact, and outlines the book.

Narrative criminologists are mostly concerned with the nefarious effects of stories, or how they condition patterns of criminal and criminalized action.[2] Narrative criminology is broadly framed by the symbolic interactionist and social constructionist perspectives within sociology, that we act based on meanings assigned to things. We respond to some version of the world and not to the world per se. Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 37), key architects of that perspective, observe that social construction work is discursive by nature: "The common objectivations of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic significa- tion. Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen. An understanding of lan- guage is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life." Heeding the call for linguistic proficiency, social researchers have highlighted the reality-producing effects of pragmatics such as implied or presupposed meanings, mechan- ics of communication such as grammar, and structures, includ- ing figurative devices and narrative. Discourse analysis is one name for the family of approaches these efforts take.[3] The basic premise of discourse analysis is that discourse matters to *action*. Whereas that assumption is often unstated and unexamined, in various corners of the social sciences it has undergone empirical demonstration.

Within criminology, narrative criminologists have pioneered this work. They take two approaches to the narrative-action

relationship. They either view narratives as suggesting how people should act or guiding action, *or* they view action as a performance of a particular self-narrative. Or they adopt both views, for though distinguishable, these approaches are not mutually exclusive within a particular research project. Both the guiding and the identity-performative perspectives on narrative give an indication of how meanings packaged as stories influence our behavior in ways that other discursive forms do not.

Framing and Guiding

Narratives help us interpret circumstances and events, and those interpretations guide how we respond. One of the principal functions of narratives is to make moral meaning of situations and events. Therefore, it is not surprising that so much research fleshing out the idea of narratives as guides has been done in the areas of social (e.g., protest) movements and criminology. Research on the role of narratives in social movements follows important work on frames, which "function to organize experience and guide action" (Snow et al. 1986, p. 464). This body of work advances a view of frames as shared mental schemes, of what people "are alive to" (Goffman 1974, p. 8) in a situation. Framing scholars always did make reference to discourse and are increasingly devoting even more attention to narrative discourse in particular. Collective constructions of grievances, their causes, responsible parties, and victims evidently take the form of narratives (J.E. Davis 2002; Fine 2002; R.N. Jacobs 2002; Loseke 2003; Polletta 2006). For example, movement organizers present claims in narrative form in order to mobilize participation. Narratives play a decisive role in representing actions whose rightness is questionable (Scott and

Lyman 1968). Philip Smith's (2005) insistence on the fundamentally storied signification of designs to wage war showcases that role:

> The image of an objectively identifiable "enemy" who is subsequently "demonized" by a post facto cultural process or "interests" that need "explanation" to the public is fundamentally mistaken. The "enemy" and "interests" require cultural patterns for their very recognition. In a sense they are talked into relevance—but not existence—through the storytelling, genre guessing dialogical activities of the public sphere. Likewise, any "threats" that need to be dealt with require identification, prioritizing, and evaluation. Here too we have seen that cultural resources are needed: frameworks that allow clues to be assembled and efforts made to guess likely costs and benefits to military action or inaction. (p. 209)

Smith's approach may be contrasted with one centered on propaganda or spin, with which dubious policies are sold to the masses. The concept of propaganda does not go far enough to depict the *fundamental* shaping role of discourse in preparing a group to inflict harm by constructing values, goals, and "truths" about experience and parties to it. In addition, narratives characterize actors, patients, and action, whereas propaganda is more generic as to focus.

War and other mass harms that we call violent are typically promoted by stories of a virtuous protagonist facing off against a malevolent other whose forceful overcoming is necessary for salvation. For example, war enemies are "encoded as polluted," whereas "we" are "encoded as pure" (P. Smith 2005, p. 27). But this is just one manifestation of the general harm logic of *reduction* of targets, according to which they are cast as having few interests or we project our own interests onto them (Presser 2013). How we construct targets is imperative because the most

murderous among us is not generically aggressive but rather aggressive toward particular beings, under some conditions and not others. In the case of mass "violence" we reduce the target to an enemy bent on persecuting or otherwise hurting us. In cases of mass negligence or legal, institutionalized destruction, the target is a simplified and marginalized group or species. We also construct ourselves in terms of capacities, rights, duties, and so forth.

Performativity

The symbolic interactionist perspective has generated a second way of theorizing the discursive grounds of action, one that has action writing or constituting the subject. Instead of acting within a world whose meaning has been forged by stories, one acts to make a story come true. The interest is in meaning-making as opposed to meaning "effects." One good example of "acting for the story" comes from Curtis Jackson-Jacobs's (2004) study of young men who start street fights, including ones they are unlikely to win. They thrill to the prospect of such violence. Jackson-Jacobs explains: "Fighters intend their brawls to make good stories that reveal themselves as charismatic. And so they enact storylines that they expect will both test their character and be applauded by audiences" (p. 232). Jackson-Jacobs refers to narrative "gratifications" and "payoffs," especially the thrill of realizing "a storied self: a self that will become publicly and enduringly admired, immortalised in epic fight stories told for years to come" (p. 231). Jack Katz (1988) makes a similar point about enacting a rewarding story even when the action might be lethal. Katz observes, for example, that for murderers "the dramaturgic aspects of the fatal scenes were specifically appealing"

(p. 300). He explains: "The key emotional dynamic on the path to these ('senseless') murders is a play with moral symbolics in which (1) the protagonist enters as a pariah, (2) soon becomes lost in the dizzying symbolics of deviance, and then (3) emerges to reverse the equation in a violent act of transcendence" (p. 290). As in Jackson-Jacobs's research, violent action permits Katz's actor to perform a preferred self-story and thereby to construct a sought-after identity—a desired character. Another broadly significant case of acting for the story has institutional agents (e.g., states, militias, and law enforcement) manipulating their practices in order to construct themselves as triumphant, fierce, and so forth. The conceptual shift here is to conceive of the institution as a character with a public image. Thus we find police officials instructing officers to make more arrests in order to present the agency as tough on (and effective against) crime, and state regimes implementing policy as political theater.

In both the micro- and macro-level identity-performative cases the agent's cognition is sidelined. Narrative is less how we know the world than it is a vehicle for being known in the world. The acting-for-the-story perspective posits stories as resources for identity-constructing persons rather than as guides to action; hence it takes the desire to realize a particular story or identity to be foundational. We act for the sake of a story; we do not act *based on* stories.

The identity-performative perspective on narrative has obvious affinities with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory of social action and the doing gender approach (Butler 1990; Messerschmidt 1997; C. West and Zimmerman 1987). It is compatible with cultural criminology, for which crime and other transgressions as well as "criminal justice" are creative processes of meaning-making (Ferrell et al. 2004). The emphasis throughout

is on action or practice, which communicates but is not textual in the technical sense of that word. The contributions of this view include its foregrounding of identity, gender identity not least of all; its recognition that we are always sending messages about ourselves to ourselves and to other people; and its provocative formulation of social action as signifying in the first instance. Yet, my inquiry into narrative immersion and impact does not easily align itself with the identity-performative perspective. A culturally favored narrative is already solidly in place from this theoretical position; therefore, the precise workings of that narrative (and how they may change) are not specified. The particulars of narratives have no special relevance to the theory; it may not be possible even to discuss narrative impacts. Going forward, I am keen to unpack the seductions of narrative that inspire crime and other harm, rather than the "seductions of crime" (Katz 1988) as story-making. Here I want to reiterate that these approaches are not logically incompatible. Actions may be "planned to generate an already imagined story of those actions" (Frank 2010a, p. 132), *and* the story may shape how people, including those who conceived it, think and feel. Storytelling may be seen as both strategic and impactful, something we manipulate and something that manipulates us.

NARRATIVE TRUTH AND NARRATIVE IMPACT

The supposed falsehood of certain stories has, in my view, been a distraction to narrative inquiry within criminology (Presser 2016). It has been presumed that only "real" things cause crime. Hence, many analysts who collect and/or appreciate narrative data seek to verify the authenticity of what the narrator has reported. But narratives affect us whether or not they are "true."[4]

Gerrig (1993) writes: "With respect to the cognitive activities of readers, the experience of narratives is largely unaffected by their announced correspondence with reality" (p. 102). Inaccuracies and even outright duplicity therefore should not prevent social researchers from taking stories seriously.

What do we mean by truth? A story is generally called true if it corresponds to some verified reality. False stories are said to be discordant with that reality: they advance untruths or omit essential facts. A general suspicion regarding the truthfulness of harmdoers' stories prevails in part because stories are used to explain one's actions—which include actions held to be unethical. Those held liable for their actions tell stories: the motivation exists to be dishonest in order to get out of trouble and/or to continue doing what they are doing. But stories, always retrospective, also point forward. They give shape to what one will do next. The productivity of stories, rather than their epistemological basis, is what narrativists in the social sciences are wont to expose.

That factual accuracy does not determine the power of narratives should be quite evident from recent world affairs. Consider Pizzagate, the "fake" but influential online news story of Hillary Clinton's pedophile enterprise mentioned at the launch of this chapter. Consider too the more or less fanciful tales used to recruit child soldiers, incite genocides, gain spiritual followers, or outpace political competitors. Stories that cast doubt on anthropogenic climate change take liberties even with established facts, but the impact of those stories cannot be denied. Nor does the accuracy of my personal or mundane stories matter, such as the one I tell myself of someone cutting me off on the road or leaving the milk out overnight. However untrue, they make me angry in the event. The turbulent 2016 race for president of the United States made abundantly clear that

supporters open themselves to the influence of even outlandish stories that they want to believe (see, e.g., Gabriel 2016; Kang and Goldman 2016). Rapid-fire proliferation of information through technological innovation may have primed people to prioritize believability over accuracy on the idea that truth is difficult to nail down. Yet, it has been noted for some time that, among other things, a story's verisimilitude or believability rather than its actual truthfulness determines its impact (Bruner 1986; Busselle and Bilandzic 2008). Emotion scholars agree that it is "the impression of reality created in the subject" and not objective reality that evokes feeling (Tan 1996, p. 67).

I have been discussing examples of stories that recipients *believe* to be *true*. We are led to wonder, though: Are we affected by stories that we *believe* to be *false*? The question has special relevance in the face of seemingly cynical political leadership. Do leaders—does anyone—believe their own duplicitous accounts?

Research demonstrates that we are affected by stories we know to be *fictional* (Green and Brock 2000; Green, Garst, and Brock 2004; Oatley 1999; Strange and Leung 1999). Impacts of the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on nineteenth-century American society (Hanne 1994) and of Richard Wagner's operas on Adolf Hitler (Gottschall 2012) are well documented.[5] Experimental research demonstrates stories' effect on readers' attitudes whether or not the stories are designated as fact or fiction. Few would call fiction false, but neither is it true in the technical sense of reporting on the real-world experiences of real-world individuals.[6] In fiction, "*something* is consciously and openly 'feigned'" (Strange 2002, p. 265; emphasis in original).

Are we also affected by the false story that calls itself nonfiction—what Kermode (1967, p. 190) calls a myth as opposed to a fiction? The notion of true (or false) nonfiction stories is, in fact,

far from straightforward. Accounts of experience in the real world are molded by the unreliable reconstruction of memory, the requirement of adapting to cultural templates and demands, a desire to make ourselves (story protagonists) look good, the requirement of tailoring the story to imagined audiences and the active influence of interlocutors at hand. All stories are selective in which facts they include; they cannot possibly include everything. Faithful copy may be pursued but it is never actually achieved. These considerations connect to the post-structuralist critique of the notion of stories "out there" awaiting representation. In short, truth as commonly construed is an impracticable standard for storytellers.

I suspect, though, that when we question the truth of a non-fictional story, we have in mind a self-interested storyteller who is keeping something under wraps for which the story is cover. We suspect an ulterior motive for telling the story. In fact, most communication is geared toward purposes other than simply to deliver information (Austin 1962). I might tell you a woeful story from my childhood to enlighten you as to my background while also (or actually) trying to bond with you or to make you feel guilty for some slight. I feel no qualms about not revealing this other motive, and my society makes no demands that I do; indeed, it would seem strange if I did. We should thus set aside the idea that having purposes for storytelling beyond sharing makes the story suspect.

Suppose, though, that a story *is* told in bad faith. Are cynical storytellers affected by their false stories—those that package disinformation? That my insincere story influences me derives first from the fact that I am held to act accountably to it. Social sanctions befall those whose narrative is discrepant with what they do. In the short or long run, political leaders are held

accountable for the narratives they tell by those who believed them and by those who did not: consider U.S. president George W. Bush being taken to task for lying about Iraq's president Saddam Hussein having weapons of mass destruction (Stein and Dickinson 2006).[7] Stories, like all other communicative devices, make commitments: the stories we tell obligate us to varying degrees. If our stories lack conformity with intersubjectively supposed truth, other people's trust in us breaks down.

In addition and more to the concern of this book, we ourselves are impacted by what we say and do. Drawing that lesson from various experiments, Daryl Bem (1972) formulated self-perception theory: we infer what we are like and what we believe from our actions. For example, in forbidden toy studies, children who were merely told to avoid playing with a toy or face mild punishment subsequently rejected the toy more than did those who had been threatened with more severe punishment for playing with it. Bem reasons: "If [the participant] has refrained from playing with the toy under severe threat, he can still infer that he may like the toy, but if he has refrained under mild threat, then he could conclude that he must not like the toy" (pp. 20–21). In other words, people gather information about themselves from situational cues, and "private stimuli probably play a smaller role in self-description than we have come to believe" (p. 4). When people say something under conditions lacking obvious coercion, punishment, or reward, they may infer that they are being truthful even to themselves. So, when Jim David Adkisson, alone in his duplex apartment prior to a mass shooting spree at a Tennessee church, wrote his manifesto explaining that he was upset by Democrats, he is likely to have believed he was, whatever his original state (Presser 2012). At the least, that discursive action fortified his belief. Similarly, although those

who tell stories asserting racial superiority or denying climate change may be foundationally motivated to do so for material and/or so-called political reasons, they might come to believe their disingenuous stories anyway.[8]

To summarize, stories, including ones told dishonestly, affect us. But we should not rest with the observation that narratives get to us: we should ask *how* they do it.

INVESTIGATING NARRATIVE IMPACTS

The present study addresses a question the gist of which has been posed by scholars across the academy. Cognitive psychologist Richard Gerrig (1993) takes note of "how little is known about the 'dimensions' of narrative experience—that is the theory of aesthetics that remains undeveloped" (p. 175). Social psychologists Melanie Green and Timothy Brock (2002) remark on how "little attention has been paid to the specific processes by which narrative or fictional communications might have persuasive effects" (p. 316). Literary scholar Jonathan Gottschall (2012) observes: "There is still a lot to be discovered about the extent and magnitude of story's sculpting power" (p. 152). We know that narratives drive collective action and need more information. Why does a story of injustice, degradation, triumph against the odds, or anything else provoke us?

I will tease out both the features that make stories generally impactful and those that make some stories more impactful than others. By impactful, let me be clear, I mean nurturing an emotional response, which may be something on the order of tranquillity, and not merely passion, rage, exhilaration, and the like. My main argument is that the most commanding stories remind us of the precariousness of our existence and offer hope of

unremitting control and infinite existence or at least infinite significance. Their resolution is a recognizably stable self.

The five chapters that follow amount to an investigation of how narrative may drive mass harm. I take mass harm to be any practice in which many people are implicated which causes the suffering of many. Examples of mass harm include terrorism, counterterrorism, animal abuse, imprisonment, systematic sexual violence and tolerance thereof, slavery, war-making, and genocide. These harms are not equivalent, and I am not concerned to classify them except insofar as stories do. My aim is to clarify the ways stories influence thoughts and feelings which in turn encourage a variety of harms.

Chapter 2 examines the discursive processes that support mass harm and amasses a body of evidence of narrative impacts on mass harm. Case studies of mass harm reveal figurative expressions and narratives to be highly consequential. These studies tend to emphasize framing and thus legitimization of action. Figurative language, especially metaphors, and narratives set out harm agents as heroic or decent, harm-doing as acceptable or virtuous, and targets of harm as deserving or beyond concern. The overarching message of this body of work is that language powers action via its capacity to shape propositional content and its uptake. My review opens up the question for the rest of the book of what gives narratives engendering harm their emotional and thus motivating force.

Chapter 3 investigates the affective charge of narrative. It asks why narrative in general invites immersion and why some narratives are especially inviting. The answer I arrive at implicates narrative capacities for integrating meanings, constructing and—especially through story endings—putting a stop to dynamic agency, and moralizing experience. I draw heavily on