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Lene Arnett Jensen

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## Identity, Politics, and the Cultural Psychology of Adolescence

Phillip L. Hammack and Erin Toolis

### Abstract

This chapter outlines a theoretical position on culture and human development grounded in cultural psychology's theses of psychological diversity, mutual constitution, and linguistic mediation, as well as a view of identity and narrative linked to critical perspectives on language and power. Adolescence represents the life course moment of cultural reproduction or repudiation, as adolescents begin to form identities positioned in relation to existing narratives about the social order. A pronounced role for politics is proposed in this perspective, as cultural actors and narratives are not neutral in relation to existing power structures. Adolescent identity development is inherently political and assumes a role in the maintenance or challenge of a particular social order. Culture and human development are thus linked to politics in ways less frequently recognized in existing theoretical positions in cultural and developmental psychology. Empirical examples from research examining narrative identity development in distinct contexts illustrate the theoretical position.

**Key Words:** adolescence, culture, cultural psychology, politics, narrative, identity, language, development

*In the period between puberty and adulthood, the resources of tradition fuse with new inner resources to create something potentially new: A new person; and with this new person a new generation, and with that, a new era.*

—(Erikson, 1958, p. 20)

*Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others.*

—(Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294)

During a hot 2007 summer in the suburbs of Chicago, a group of Israeli, Palestinian, and American adolescents gathered as part of a 2-week experiment in coexistence. They met daily for structured dialogue and then ate, played, and laughed together. In many ways, their experience of

adolescence seemed remarkably similar. They could speak a common language—English. (English fluency is common among both Israelis and Palestinians, although their first languages are Hebrew and Arabic, respectively.) They were excited about the same music and movies. Their food preference was uniformly pizza or hamburgers. Most of all during those 2 weeks, they wanted time together, apart from the adult staff, to explore their connections with one another.

An intercultural gathering such as that among Israeli, Palestinian, and American adolescents might at first glance suggest a new kind of uniformity to the adolescent experience—a universal engagement and enchantment with the “global” culture of music and film and a universal desire for autonomy from adults (Arnett, 2002). But Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans inhabit distinct national identities that are asymmetrically

positioned; these distinct identities do not possess equality with regard to politics and power (Rouhana, 2004). American adolescents exist in a context of global “superpower” status and hegemony (e.g., Chomsky, 2004). Israeli and Palestinian adolescents exist in a context of long-standing national conflict and asymmetrical status, with Palestinians lacking formal statehood under continued Israeli military occupation (Gordon, 2008; Rouhana, 2004).

A closer look at this 2-week exchange revealed the way in which Israelis and Palestinians competed for the attention and sympathy of American adolescents—being the group positioned closest to the “global” culture of Hollywood films and pop music and also the “outside” group with regard to the long-standing national conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Embedded within the dialogue exchanges that occurred among these youth during those 2 weeks was the rhetoric of conflict (Pilecki & Hammack, 2014). As Israelis and Palestinians engaged in conversation, they reproduced the stalemate of narratives that characterizes their national conflict (Hammack, 2011*a*) and revealed the place of adolescent identity formation in the larger process of social stasis and change.

In this chapter, we present a theoretical position on adolescent identity, politics, and culture and review empirical work that illustrates its potential to link diverse disciplinary perspectives on culture and human development. Through the lens of cultural psychology (e.g., Shweder, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978), critical theories of language and power (e.g., Volosinov, 1929/1973), and classic theoretical formulations of adolescence (e.g., Erikson, 1968), we articulate a co-constitutive perspective on culture and adolescence in which we imagine adolescents as both cultural “products” and “producers,” seeking to strike a theoretical balance with regard to agency and structure. We situate our perspective within cultural psychology’s anchoring theses and suggest an empirical approach grounded in narrative. Cultural psychology’s emphasis on language as a form of mediated social practice (e.g., Vygotsky, 1934/1962), coupled with the long-standing recognition of identity development as a critical process of adolescence (Meeus, 2011), leads us to theorize narrative identity as a key construct of interrogation for the cultural psychology of adolescence. We recognize that there may be other theoretical and methodological approaches that link identity and politics in adolescence, but we suggest that the emphasis on language inherent in a narrative

approach makes it particularly amenable to a cultural psychology analysis.

Making the political nature of narrative identity explicit through the concept of master narrative engagement (e.g., Hammack, 2011*b*), we argue, reveals the role of adolescence in social and political action. Thus, we conceive of identity not as a static category or personal trait but rather as a social and cognitive process anchored in engagement with language in its structured, storied form in relation to an existing “verbal-ideological” community (Bakhtin, 1981). Our perspective on narrative identity development in adolescence is anchored in the oft-neglected (in developmental psychology) political aspect of narrative identity (cf. Somers, 1994; Suny, 2001) because we view cultural reproduction or repudiation as an inherently political process—a process concerned with the reproduction, consolidation, or revolution of power dynamics and hegemonic social relations.

We begin with a brief review of the study of culture, identity, and adolescence, grounding our discussion in three theses of a cultural psychology approach. We conceive of a cultural psychology of adolescence that emphasizes issues of identity, power, and language. We then present an integrative perspective on culture, identity, and adolescence that places narrative at its theoretical and empirical center. We highlight research examples that illustrate the vitality of this perspective and conclude with suggestions for future research.

## **Identity and the Cultural Psychology of Adolescence**

Emerging in the industrial era as a distinct period of the life course (Kett, 1977) and marked by its transitional nature between the halcyon days of childhood and the burden of adult obligations, adolescence has captured the imagination of social scientists and the public for more than a century. With the formal establishment of developmental psychology in the 19th and 20th centuries, adolescence gradually came to be recognized as a critical developmental period for theoretical and empirical interrogation (e.g., Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1959; Freud, 1958; Gesell, Ilg, & Ames, 1956; Piaget, 1972). As ideas about adolescent “storm and stress” (Hall, 1904) gave way to concerns of “youth rebellion” and cultural upheaval in the mid-20th century (Erikson, 1968; Keniston, 1971; Mead, 1970), adolescence became a concern not just for developmental science, but also for an anxious populace uncertain of the outcome of cultural change.

Today, we take the developmental period of adolescence as an inevitable moment of biological and social transition for individuals (Casey, Jones, & Somerville, 2011), occurring with increasing universalism (although not uniformity) across the globe (Brown, Larson, & Saraswathi, 2002; Schlegel & Hewlett, 2011) as processes like globalization create common contexts of development (Arnett, 2002; Jensen, Arnett, & McKenzie, 2011; Larson, Wilson, & Rickman, 2009). Contrary to prior ideas, adolescence does not necessarily inevitably entail "storm and stress" (Arnett, 1999), but it does involve social and biological change (Casey et al., 2011).

Adolescence, however, is not simply an individual experience; it characterizes a cultural process in which an entire cohort within a community engages with an inherited system of social practices, including language, to either reproduce or remake the social order (e.g., Erikson, 1968). The cultural psychology of adolescence, we contend, represents the study of adolescence as a process of person-setting co-constitution, primarily through the study of language practices, tool use, and mediated activity (e.g., Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa, & Goldsmith, 1995; Shweder, 1990; Vygotsky, 1934/1962, 1978). These practices, however, are not neutral in relation to existing social orders (Bakhtin, 1981; Volosinov, 1929/1973). Hence, the cultural psychology of adolescence is, in our view, the study of how configurations of power are maintained or challenged in the course of a generation and how individuals participate in this social process in the course of their development through a process of narrative engagement (Hammack, 2008, 2011b; Hammack & Cohler, 2009). Identity, understood as a process by which individuals navigate personal and social forces to develop a workable "configuration" that provides meaning and coherence (Erikson, 1959; Schachter, 2004, 2005), provides the empirical window for a cultural psychology of adolescence.

Our theoretical position is rooted in three anchoring theses of cultural psychology. First, cultural psychology's thesis of *psychological diversity* suggests that we be chiefly concerned with "divergences in mind, self, and emotion" (Shweder, 1990, p. 1). Hence, one empirical goal of a cultural psychology of adolescence is to document particularity in the mental processes that occur at this life course moment. Second, cultural psychology's thesis of *mutual constitution* conceives of persons and settings as dynamically co-constitutive. The idea of mutual constitution assumes that social and

psychological life occurs within the context of a received cultural meaning system but that within that system individuals engage in practices that may alter the received system. Through participating in cultural practices (e.g., Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff et al., 1995) or internalizing cultural "schemata" or "models" (e.g., D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Shore, 1996) or rebelling against them, cultural actors shape and reshape the inherited meaning system.

Our third anchoring thesis—cultural psychology's thesis of *linguistic mediation*—provides a richer account of precisely how mutual constitution occurs and a way to study psychological diversity in adolescence. The idea of linguistic mediation has a long history in the social sciences and posits that language assumes a central role in shaping thought (for review, see Lucy, 1997) and that language is fundamentally a form of tool use and hence a form of social practice (e.g., Vygotsky, 1934/1962, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) makes the distinction between "social speech" and "inner speech," positing that the internalization and appropriation of social speech guides our activity in the social world. In other words, as we engage with words and their meanings in a given sociohistorical context, we become cultural actors who participate in what Bakhtin (1981) calls a "verbal-ideological community," with implications for sociopolitical development. Consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) ideas about social and inner speech, Bakhtin (1981) argues that our utterances are populated by the voices of others—namely, those of authority in some verbal-ideological community. Hence, our words are not just our own; they are made in and through others.

These central theses of cultural psychology have gradually become incorporated into adolescent research. Diversity in the social and psychological experience of adolescence has become particularly well-documented, with research on variability now expanding across the globe (e.g., Arnett, 2012; Brown et al., 2002). Perspectives on psychological diversity in adolescence have increasingly taken a critical approach in which the Eurocentric bias of developmental science is recognized. For example, Nsamenang (1995, 2006, 2011) reviews the history of developmental research in Africa in both anthropology and psychology, illustrating the way in which European and American values and norms have been either explicitly or implicitly imposed on the study of the African life course. He argues that human

development in an indigenous African psychology must be understood as cyclical, rather than linear, and that norms regarding African development must be indigenously conceived. In his framework, social selfhood begins to assume prominence in the African life course in infancy, as the child is named. The place of the individual in a community is thus highlighted from the earliest age, in contrast to European and American societies, which place greater emphasis on the individual and the nuclear family than the community and the extended family. In most African societies, adolescence is characterized by initiation rituals into adult roles, which are highly cherished.

Research explicitly concerned with cultural psychology's thesis of mutual constitution has focused on self and identity, although more rarely among adolescents than might be expected. The contrast between North American "independent" or "egocentric" selves and Asian "interdependent" or "sociocentric" selves has proved a highly generative anchor for cultural psychology's empirical agenda (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010; Shweder & Bourne, 1982). Recent approaches have integrated consideration of intersectional and class-based approaches to examine the relationship between social inequality and individual psychological processes (e.g., Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012; Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012). Cultural psychological approaches to mutual constitution have thus gradually shifted to incorporate a view of culture as linked to power and inequality (Gjerde, 2004), as opposed to a "neutral" system of meaning (e.g., Fryberg, 2012). This research has generally not, however, focused on adolescence or assumed a developmental perspective.

Cultural psychology has focused more on specific processes, such as self or identity development, than on developmental phases, such as adolescence itself, in the cycle of mutual constitution. Consistent with the thesis of mutual constitution, we view adolescence as the moment in an individual's life course and a society's course of history in which, to paraphrase Erikson (1958), an old order is preserved or toppled. This order, we contend, is culture itself—the system of meanings, symbols, representations, language, and customs that cohere within a human community. The empirical interrogation of identity among cultural actors reveals this process at work and provides a window into cultural constitution as an active process. Our

general thesis, then, is that the cultural psychology of adolescence is more than the study of variability in a particular stage of human development. Rather, if anchored in the theoretical position we develop in this chapter, the cultural psychology of adolescence is the study of social and political stasis and change itself; it is the study of how individuals psychologically reproduce the conditions of culture in the course of their development by constructing a narrative identity.

How precisely do individuals engage in these processes of social reproduction and change? We contend that language, and particularly the use of language in narrative and discourse, provides a window into this process in action. Cultural psychology's thesis of linguistic mediation is implicitly prominent in recent anthropological research on adolescence. A number of recent studies in sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and the anthropology of education have examined the relationship between language and ideology in adolescence, either explicitly or implicitly through the lens of the linguistic mediation thesis. Researchers have focused on adolescent language and its relation to power with regard to ethnic or national identity (e.g., Avni, 2012; Charalambous, 2012; Echeverria, 2003; Woolard, 2013), class or socioeconomic status (e.g., Hicks, 2004; Pichler, 2006), and gender (e.g., Georgakopoulou, 2005; Peterson & Calovini, 2004; Pichler, 2006). This emerging field of study, situated primarily in anthropology, emphasizes the way in which adolescents' experience of the social world is mediated through language and linguistic practices that are not neutral with regard to intergroup relations. A more explicit theoretical integration of linguistic mediation in the cultural psychology of adolescence may generate new cross-disciplinary collaborations that can link culture, language, and power in an integrative way. We return to this research to review particular examples following the next section, in which we provide a fuller description of the idea of narrative identity.

In sum, adolescence emerged as a cultural concept in the context of industrialism and its shifting implications for labor and social organization. Originally conceived as a universal and inevitable moment of "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904), adolescence is now recognized as assuming diverse processes and forms across the globe (e.g., Arnett, 2012). An approach anchored in cultural psychology's three key theses of psychological diversity, mutual constitution, and linguistic mediation

offers the potential to interrogate the dynamic link between self and society. In the next section, we integrate these perspectives into a coherent framework for the study of identity, culture, politics, and adolescence.

## **Narrative and the Politics of Adolescent Identity: An Integrative Approach**

### ***Narrative: What Is It?***

Language is socially organized into “discourses,” or coherent accounts that convey meaning about events, ideas, or concepts and categories (e.g., Foucault, 1972; Parker, 1992). That is, words come together through the acts of speakers and writers to convey an idea, a sentiment, a stance or position, and both social and psychological life are dependent on this “conversation of gestures” (Mead, 1934). Language thus assumes a form that creates coherence and is positioned in relation to a verbal-ideological community (Bakhtin, 1981).

A central form of discourse is the narrative or story. A narrative represents a “spoken or written account of connected events” (Narrative, 2013). In our view, narratives represent the symbolic tools through which adolescents begin to participate in cultural regeneration or resistance. They do so through a process of master narrative engagement in which they begin to make decisions about inherited narratives of identity, history, and social organization that either uphold or challenge the status quo through their form, thematic content, and ideological setting (Hammack, 2008). Hence, adolescents make decisions (conscious or otherwise) to participate in an existing verbal-ideological community by adopting its language or to form a new community and, in the process, a reformulated culture. In challenging existing narratives, adolescents alter the basis of shared meaning in a verbal-ideological community.

A narrative approach emerged in the social sciences around the same time as cultural psychology to challenge the received paradigm of human development (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Cohler, 1982; Sarbin, 1986). Cohler (1982) challenged the standard ontogenetic view of human development, suggesting that human development be conceived as an interpretive science focused on the development of a personal narrative across the life course. Bruner (1990) posited that we make meaning through narratives—a process that guides our intentional action in a community—and suggested that cultural psychology (and psychological science more broadly) ought to devote greater empirical concern

to narrative. In the two decades that followed these and other early formulations, a narrative paradigm has come to thrive in psychology and beyond (see Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; McAdams, 2011).

The majority of psychological theory and research on narrative focuses on individual processes and the function of narrative meaning-making in relatively small-scale contexts. The development of the life story has traditionally been studied from an ontogenetic perspective, tracing its development across the life span (e.g., McLean 2008; Pals, 2006; Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007). Furthermore, the majority of these studies focus on middle-class, white, Western participants. Although the act of storytelling itself may be universal, research suggests that the value and practice of narrative identity, as well as its form and content, are culturally variable (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006). Thus, there is a need to explore more macroanalytic cultural and historical variation in narrative construction.

Empirical research on narrative identity has revealed the significance of social and cultural context. However, Bhatia (2011) suggests that narrative research must go beyond attempts to understand an individual story within the context of a single culture and rather must consider how globalization and intercultural conflict shape individuals’ experiences of sameness and difference. Furthermore, dimensions of cultural power and social position have gone relatively unexplored, apart from an interest in gender differences (e.g., McLean & Breen, 2009; Thorne & McLean, 2002). Although much research has focused on how environmental factors contribute to the shaping of a story (e.g., McLean, 2005; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009), rarely has research explored how stories shape our environment and sculpt our narrative landscape to effect societal change. In addition, the majority of empirical work on narrative in psychology has implicitly adopted an ontogenetic perspective that seeks to chart narrative identity development within a Platonic idea of universalism in human development (e.g., McLean & Lilgendahl, 2008). An approach situated within a cultural psychology framework favors the study of particularity, variability, and narrative meaning-making in relation to an existing social order in historical time and place.

### ***Why Narrative?***

Our vision of narrative takes a more macroscopic perspective on the role individual actors play

in social stasis and change. We propose that narrative is the tool through which cultural participants use language to reproduce or recreate culture. They do so through constructing personal narratives not just about their own life events in the form of a life story, but also about the events, ideas, and values of a verbal-ideological community. Through this narrative identity, they provide a window into the process of culture in action (cf. Wertsch, 1998).

A narrative approach is particularly useful in our view because it offers a clear path to the translation from theory to research practice. The narrative concept is invaluable to the empiricist because it refers to an actual tangible “product” of human creation, even as its form may change across the life course (Cohler, 1982). As opposed to more intangible concepts posited to exist in minds or in cultures, such as the “schema” or “cultural model” (e.g., Shore, 1996) or “collective memory” (e.g., Halbwachs, 1992), a narrative exists in concrete form. It may exist in a piece of literature or film, an educational textbook, or in a recorded verbal interaction or interview. Narratives thus assume some form accessible to the social scientist. They represent language embodied, either through cultural artifacts widely available (e.g., Brockmeier, 2002) or through the intimacy of a particular exchange (e.g., Mishler, 1986).

Narratives provide direct empirical windows into the central questions of a cultural psychology of adolescence. The study of how narratives converge and diverge across time (e.g., different generation-cohorts) and place (e.g., different nationalities) speaks to cultural psychology’s concern with psychological diversity. The study of the relationship between master narratives (i.e., existing cultural scripts about events and social categories) and personal narratives (i.e., life stories) provides a window into the processes of mutual constitution and linguistic mediation as they occur. Narrative is thus an empirical tool for the cultural psychologist who seeks to transcend levels of analysis and consider persons and settings as dynamically co-constituted. In the remainder of this section, we illustrate the utility of an approach that emphasizes narrative in the study of adolescent identity and culture by highlighting research that either explicitly or implicitly embodies this approach.

### ***Example 1: Identity, Narrative and Conflict***

We began this chapter with discussion of an intercultural exchange among Israeli, Palestinian,

and American adolescents. At the surface level of interaction, these adolescents shared much in common in terms of their engagement with a global culture of media, including music, film, and social media such as Facebook. But in their conversations with one another, as discussion turned directly to the conflict that has divided Jews and Arabs in Israel and Palestine for generations, we found evidence of particularity in the adolescent experience. Accounts of victimization, for example, assumed distinct forms, as Jewish Israelis presented a narrative of justified political violence (or “righteous victimhood”) while Palestinians presented a narrative of collective dispossession, humiliation, and desperation (Pilecki & Hammack, 2014). Narrative became the site of contest between these two groups of adolescents, the mechanism through which they reproduced the rhetoric of conflict through their own appropriation and dissemination of its foundational narratives (Ben Hagai, Hammack, Pilecki, & Aresta, 2013; Hammack, 2011*a*).

The social and psychological significance of narrative for identity is particularly apparent in settings of intractable conflict (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2013; Hammack, 2011*a*). Radically divergent interpretations of history and collective memory construct polarized narratives through which rival human communities construct a sense of identity and shared meaning. Personal narratives of Israeli and Palestinian adolescents collected during the second Palestinian intifada illustrate these dynamics. Jewish Israeli adolescents narrated redemptive life stories in which personal (e.g., divorce of parents) and collective (e.g., political violence exposure) challenges were framed as surmountable through resilience and strength (Hammack, 2009, 2011*a*). Palestinian adolescents, by contrast, narrated “contaminated” life stories (McAdams & Bowman, 2001) in which personal and collective challenges were framed as insurmountable in the larger socio-political context of continued military occupation (Hammack, 2010*a*, 2011*a*; see also Barber, 2008, 2009). The personal narratives of adolescents thus mirrored in form and tone the master narratives of national identity that circulated with regularity in Israeli and Palestinian societies during this time of heightened violence (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2004). The structure of personal narratives thus secured the reproduction of the narrative conditions of stalemate in the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis during this historical moment (Hammack, 2011*a*).

Other conflict settings beyond Israel and Palestine reveal similar dynamics at play in the



relationship among youth, narrative, and conflict. At the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, Ullah (1990) revealed the way in which youth develop their identities in talk, negotiating the meaning of various social identities relevant in the conflict (e.g., "Irish" vs. "English"). In the context of postwar Croatia, Daiute and Turniski (2005) found that youth engaged with variable discourses on the conflict between Serbs and Croats, and they constructed personal narrative accounts in relation to both dominant discourses and their own interpersonal experience in the postconflict period. These are just two additional examples of the way in which adolescents assume an active role in shaping culture through a process of narrative engagement (for further examples, see Hammack, 2010b).

### **Example 2: "Youth Talk" and Positioning Identity in Adolescence**

Identity is performed and indexed through language, which has both normative and subversive potential. Empirical studies on "youth culture" and "youth talk" have explored how adolescents exhibit social creativity and explore, reproduce, and resist social norms and categories on a microinteractional level by positioning their identities through speech acts (Charalambous, 2012). This line of research asserts that identity work is being done even in fleeting, everyday conversations through "small stories" (Bamberg, 2004; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) and that these conversations are situated in relational history and cultural context. Because the construction of the self is inherently dialogic, this research examines how adolescents position themselves in relation to others.

This approach is valuable in understanding how adolescents interpret, enact, and negotiate social constructs such as masculinity and femininity. Georgakopoulou (2005) examined the conversations within a friend group of four adolescent women in Greece over the course of 2 years, starting when the women were 17. Discussing men whom they were romantically interested in was a popular topic of conversation, and Georgakopoulou found that the women used a variety of linguistic resources to construct men and masculinity in conversation. The women invoked gendered identities, drawing on stereotypes, intonation, and nicknames to cast men either as "tough" or "soft" and infantile, and, in doing so, both reproduced and challenged dominant discourses of masculinity. As participants dialogically constructed men as "the other," they

simultaneously explored their sexual desire as well as their femininity and gender identities.

Similarly, Rampton (2011) used a sociolinguistic approach to study the ways in which British adolescents use exaggerated, "stylized" Cockney and posh accents, which represent binary ideological categories, to perform class identity and navigate social situations. In doing so, these adolescents called attention to hegemonic socioeconomic stratification and challenged the rigidity of class categories by moving between them. This work points to the active agency of adolescents in negotiating the existing social order through language, which is inherently political and constantly shifting.

Charalambous (2012) provides another example in her study of Greek-Cypriot adolescents taking a Turkish class in a political and historical context in which interethnic conflict had rendered the speaking of Turkish a controversial practice. These youth used playful speech to engage in taboo conversations that challenged dominant Hellenocentric views of Turks and the act of learning Turkish. Nevertheless, the covert nature of this discourse suppressed any explicit political conversation. This research highlights the agency of adolescents to negotiate identity through everyday social interactions and appropriate existing systems of meaning for their own purposes.

### **Example 3: Agency and Resistance in the Narratives of Homeless Youth**

A third example of the way in which youth negotiate and co-construct cultural meaning through narrative identity can be found in the narratives of homeless adolescents. In the United States, the social category of "homeless" brings with it the possibility for severe stigma and exclusion and thus presents a serious challenge for the identities of youth without housing (Kidd, 2007; Roschelle & Kaufman, 2004). Classification into this category mediates the everyday reality of homeless adolescents and has a significant impact on their access to power and resources, as well as how their behaviors and identities are interpreted by others (Kerckhoff, 1995). Examining the rarely heard stories of this marginalized population sheds light on the ways in which they navigate contested narrative terrain and suggests that adolescents belonging to low-status groups can find agency and self-worth by resisting the dominant cultural narratives that devalue them. Two such narratives that exist in the United States are the *criminal* narrative, which portrays homeless youth as morally deficient, and the *client*

narrative, which portrays homeless youth as sick or incompetent.

Within the criminal and client narratives, homeless youth are defined by deprivation and denied the possibility of self-worth, community, or hope. Some work, however, has begun to move beyond deficit models to explore the assets and resilience of homeless youth (e.g., Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn, 2007; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Lindsey, Kurtz, Jarvis, Williams, & Nackerud, 2000; Rew & Horner, 2003). Toolis and Hammack (2014) used an inductive, narrative approach and conducted in-depth interviews to elaborate the ways by which these adolescents define themselves and resist stigmatizing social categories imposed on them by hegemonic discourses. This analysis revealed that homeless adolescents resisted criminalization through counternarratives that located the roots of poverty outside of themselves and refused to accept blame for their exclusion from the "American Dream." In addition, participants resisted the infantilization of the client narrative by articulating fierce struggles for independence and asserting the value of their experiences and abilities. Thus, through narrative, marginalized adolescents may restore their identities and participate in reinterpreting the meaning of existing identity categories. Hence, although narrative can be a tool for control, it can also be a tool for liberation (Gjerde, 2004; Hammack, 2010*b*).

#### ***Example 4: Stories of Sexual Identity***

A final area of empirical inquiry in which our theoretical position can be illustrated is in the study of personal narratives of sexual minority (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered [LGBT]) adolescents in the United States. Again, the focus is on how mutual constitution occurs during adolescence through a process of narrative engagement that emphasizes the politics of language about social categories. The United States has a long history of persecution against sexual minorities by legal, medical, and scientific authorities (Hammack & Windell, 2011), and hence the meaning of a sexual minority identity has changed considerably over the course of the 20th and early 21st centuries (Hammack, Mayers, & Windell, 2013).

The study of personal narratives of same-sex-attracted adult men has revealed cohort-specific identity development processes (Cohler, 2007). Men born in the 1930s and coming of age in the 1950s engaged with a "sickness" narrative of homosexuality, reproducing this discourse through their

own internalized stigma but also challenging it through participation in the nascent gay and lesbian civil rights movement (Hammack & Cohler, 2011). With the gay and lesbian social movement of the 20th century, a redemptive master narrative of sexual minority identity emerged, and individuals increasingly constructed personal narratives of redemption through "coming out" and becoming an active cultural participant in the gay and lesbian community (Cohler & Hammack, 2006, 2007). Young sexual minorities born in the 1970s and coming of age in the 1990s constructed personal narratives of redemption from stigma through participation in the sexual minority community (e.g., Savin-Williams, 1998).

Language, as we have suggested, is not static but rather a living tool of cultural reproduction. Narratives and discourses, therefore, shift with historical time. Cultural and political events play a role in this shift, as the protest activities of the mid-20th century altered the narrative of homosexuality and resulted in a whole new discourse on homosexuality, moving from a "sickness" to a "species" narrative in which sexual identity gradually became viewed as an unchosen trait akin to race (Hammack et al., 2013). This discourse then constructed a new developmental context for subjectivity and self-understanding (Cohler & Hammack, 2007). But this "species" narrative began to be challenged in the 1990s with the "queer theory" movement that rendered all social categories associated with sex and gender dubious (e.g., Butler, 1990; see Hammack et al., 2013). Gradually, the personal narratives of same-sex-attracted adolescents again began to shift in tandem with this shifting master narrative of the stability and coherence of a "gay identity" (Savin-Williams, 2005).

In the 21st century, same-sex-attracted adolescents engage with multiple, competing master narratives of the meaning of same-sex attraction (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Hammack & Cohler, 2009). Narratives of sickness, redemption through participation in the gay community, and emancipation from sexual identity labels all compete for salience, with today's adolescents coordinating their own personal narratives in relation to these discourses on the nature and meaning of same-sex attraction (e.g., Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009; Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009; Westrate & McLean, 2010). Narrative identity development is thus polyphonic (Bakhtin, 1984), and the discursive content of personal narratives reveals much about culture and identity as active processes of

social construction. As same-sex-attracted youth engage with existing discourses about the meaning of same-sex desire and of sexual identity categories, they construct narratives that either reproduce or challenge an existing verbal-ideological community.

## Conclusion

For well over a century, the concept of culture has provided a tool through which to understand difference across human communities. Understood as a system of shared meaning made manifest in social practice, culture has provided a way to identify the universals and particularities of human development (e.g., Shweder et al., 2006). An interdisciplinary approach to the study of human development in context requires frameworks that theoretically link persons and cultures in a dynamic way amenable to empirical study. The theoretical position we have sketched in this chapter on the cultural psychology of adolescence attempts to offer such a framework.

Our guiding assumption is that adolescent identity formation is not simply an individual process experienced with some regularity at a particular moment of biological and social transition. Rather, we conceive of adolescence as both individual and cultural process, as a cohort of youth in a particular cultural context engages with the content of some verbal-ideological community and, through an identity development process anchored in linguistic mediation and appropriation, either regenerates or resists the social order. Hence, our position privileges concepts like historical time (i.e., membership in a birth cohort) and narrative (i.e., the coherent organization of language) in positing a role for adolescent identity development in social stasis and change. This emphasis on adolescents as linked to the social order through their own process of development is not necessarily new (e.g., Erikson, 1958), but our attempt to integrate certain theoretical principles and methodological practices under the umbrella of a "cultural psychology of adolescence" represents a novel endeavor. Here, we suggest three concrete recommendations that might guide future research conducted in the paradigm we propose in this chapter.

First, we suggest that scholars of human development make a decisive intellectual commitment to a sociogenic, rather than ontogenetic, paradigm of developmental science (Dannefer, 1984). This commitment requires a shift from the dominant

Euro-American vision of Platonic universalism in mental life, represented most significantly by the work of developmental psychologists such as Piaget in the 20th century (see Shweder, 2011). Fortunately, a sociogenic paradigm is central to other theorists in developmental science whose influence has grown exponentially in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, namely Vygotsky (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992; Yasnitsky & Ferrari, 2008). But even a science of human development anchored in Vygotsky's central ideas benefits from an explicit commitment to a sociogenic paradigm that does not view developmental science as a teleological project. Put differently, a sociogenic paradigm recognizes social science inquiry itself as a historical enterprise (e.g., Gergen, 1973), and the search for lawful regularities only stands to construct cultural "mini-theories" that end up applying better to US college students than to the vast majority of the world's inhabitants (Arnett, 2008; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Attention to adolescence as a historical and cultural process shifts the endeavor away from prediction and control of the human life course toward understanding and interpretation (see Cohler, 1982).

Second, we suggest that the interdisciplinary study of human development and culture requires attention to multiple levels of analysis—the individual, the immediate social environment, and the larger historical or "macrocultural" (Ratner, 2012) context of development. The cultural psychologist of adolescence, then, studies individuals using methods appropriate to the empirical question at hand (e.g., an interview, a survey). But to study adolescence as a process in relation to culture requires an empirical analysis of culture itself in its symbolic and material forms, whether through narratives and discourses (e.g., Hammack, 2011a) or social practices in action (e.g., Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Hence, methods that examine processes beyond individuals, such as ethnography (e.g., Shweder, 1996), are vital to the cultural psychologist and can be used in tandem with person-level analytic tools (e.g., Hammack, 2011a).

Finally, we suggest that language in its active use represents an ideal focus of empirical study for the cultural psychology of adolescence and that language represents the prism through which we can interrogate adolescent identity development directly. Language mediates our experience of the social and political world, providing individuals and groups with a sense of unity, coherence, and

purpose (e.g., Cohler, 1982; McAdams, 2011). The empirical study of language using methods linked to narrative and discourse (see Hammack & Pilecki, 2014) provides a blueprint for the cultural psychology of adolescence, for it is through language practices that a generation resists or reproduces a social order. We suggest, then, that the study of language shift from margin to center in cultural psychological approaches to adolescence and identity development and that the link between cultural discourse (or “master narratives”) and personal discourse (or “personal narratives”) becomes a primary goal for empirical interrogation. Through the analysis and documentation of this relationship, we access adolescence as a cultural process, rather than an individual experience of biological and social change.

Our view on adolescence and culture, like our view on culture and human development more broadly, is more integrative of politics than traditional approaches in US and European cultural and developmental psychology. We do not view human difference through the prism of “neutrality” or equality with regard to global power and hegemony (see Gjerde, 2004). Unlike critics of the culture concept in anthropology, we see a continued use for culture in psychology and developmental science (see Shweder, 2003). But the view of culture we advocate is more closely linked to perspectives that connect practices (and linguistic practices especially) either directly to the state and its “ideological apparatus” (Althusser, 1971) or to some verbal-ideological community of resistance (Bakhtin, 1981). In other words, practices and discourses are positioned in relation to an existing social order and its matrix of social hierarchy or dominance among groups. A cultural psychology of adolescence views processes of narrative engagement and identity development as inherently political, as the practices of youth either challenge or reproduce the social order. Hence, the cultural psychologist of adolescence considers not just the immediate social context using ethnographic or similar methods. Rather, she considers phenomena like stratification and intergroup relations with awareness of the political structure of the society in which adolescence occurs.

To return again to the exchange of Israeli, Palestinian, and American adolescents that began the chapter, the cultural psychologist views adolescence among these three distinct national groups through the lens of language and power. Although

sharing a common experience of the “global” youth culture (Arnett, 2002), these three national groups inhabit radically divergent political cultures, and they are saturated with stories that offer divergent interpretations of history and present-day experience (e.g., Hammack, 2006; Kelman, 1999). Narratives of victimization and justification collide when Palestinians and Israelis come together for dialogue (Pilecki & Hammack, 2013), and it is precisely in the appropriation of narrative that Palestinian and Israeli adolescents reproduce the narrative stalemate of their long-standing conflict (Hammack, 2011a). Social and biological changes may mandate particular individual experiences in adolescence, but a shared cultural and political context mandates forms of subjectivity tied to competing discourses related to power and intergroup relations. Through a perspective on adolescent identity that emphasizes language and power, the cultural psychology of adolescence can shed invaluable light on adolescence as a cultural-historical process and hence on the course of social stasis and change.

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