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Political Change through Narrative

Catherine Elliott

Bates College, celliott@bates.edu

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Political Change Through Narrative

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Politics

Bates College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Catherine Stanley Elliott

Lewiston, Maine

March 23, 2012

For the people who stick with it.

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Preface

“For those policy people that stick with it in the public sector I often ask them after a few years if their views of the policy process have changed. The invariable response is that the reality differs from the texts.

“People describe to me policy processes constituted not by order and rationality but by uncertainty, interpretation, contested meaning, power, volatility, compressed views of time and space and partial information... practitioners are confronted with constant paradoxes.”¹

Uncertainty, interpretation, contested meaning, power, volatility, compressed views of time and space, and partial information are the observations, beliefs, and struggles that inform this thesis. This thesis spans the gap between two spheres that, as this epigraph suggests, are often in tension with one another. The public sector, or life beyond academia, is often inconsistent with what scholars discover and cite in their academic texts. Academic work is similarly distant from many of the realities of practice. In the case of this thesis, those two worlds come together in what many would call a community-based research project.

For the purposes of this inquiry, I am the researcher and Maine People’s Alliance is the community partner. Although I do not inherently like the strong, slightly hierarchical relationship implied by the titles of “researcher” and “community partner,” these terms

¹ D. Adams, review of P. Bridgman and G. Davis, *The Australian Policy Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005), quoted in Hal K. Colbatch. “What work makes policy?” *Policy Sciences* 39, no. 4 (2006): 310, doi: 10.1007/s11077-006-9025-4.

make it easy to identify the general roles assumed by the central contributors to this thesis. That said, I would like to emphasize a two things. First, collaborative research is far more nuanced than these distinctions suggest. Second, co-constructed knowledge is powerful and legitimate. These beliefs inform how I approach this collaborative thesis.

There are multiple ways this to name this collaboration, some of which include community-informed research, Participatory Action Research, Science Research, or Action Research. Despite the variety in names, these various disciplinary approaches to research have two things in common, both of which are relevant to this inquiry. First, they emphasize the salience of collaboration. Second, they illustrate the central tension of the divide between academia and reality. As seen throughout this inquiry, the academic world generally has a desire to name, explain, and understand phenomena of the practical world, whereas the rest of the world is intent on *doing*.

As an undergraduate senior on the cusp of her graduation, I came to this thesis because of my desire to *do*. I was eager, in the most genuine of ways, to pull academia from its incubator in Ladd Library and track some mud into Pettengill Hall from the streets of Lewiston. I followed in the footsteps of every academic who is interested in the way the world really works, and I have learned countless lessons about expectations, communication, persistence, honesty, and the transformative power of experience. Because of Maine People's Alliance, I have a thesis. This thesis just happens to be a little different than some, because it is ensconced in the grey area between organizational practice and academic inquiry.

C.S.E.
Lewiston, Maine
March 18, 2012

Introduction

“Justice has changed.
If there’s a problem,
they look to the poor,
the people on welfare.
Then they give to the rich.”

-New member at the Lewiston MPA canvass follow-up meeting
February 9, 2012

In typical conceptions of the political process, legislators and executives make decisions, interest groups and citizen lobbyists influence decisions, and the American people receive decisions.² A web of bureaucratic procedures, good intentions, colluded motives, and, perhaps, uninformed opinions connect these communities in action, debate, and allegiance. These factors have intersected in politics for centuries to create complicated arrangements of interdependent relationships. Politics is about who gets what, when, and how, but it is also about the relationships between different people who get different things at different times and through different processes. One of the ways to express those relationships is through stories. In the typical plot, protagonists and antagonists come into conflict over some issue, tension grows between the characters as they pursue solutions to the conflict, and a more-or-less satisfying, but generally final, resolution ties up the loose ends.

² In this context, the term “American” means people living in the United States of America, regardless of their citizenship status.

People think about the world through stories. In the above quotation, the new MPA member identifies a problem (unfair treatment), names actors (poor people and rich people), and subtly implies a solution (better distribution of wealth). The speaker also cues images of a justice-monger in tights who steals from the rich and gives to the poor with neither pause nor remorse. Through these narrative elements, the speaker identifies the problems of today, presents a vision for a better future, and implies the urgency of getting there. This is a powerful argument for political change. At the same time, however, this quotation is just one individual's interpretation of the world. What would it mean for an organization –or, better yet, a movement– to express its vision through a narrative?

Conservatives have a narrative: government is so big that it intrudes on our individual liberties, corrupts our morals, and prevents our country from prospering. According to conservatives, we can solve these problems by lowering taxes, limiting government, and regulating morality. This is obviously just one interpretation of what is best for the country, however. Who is telling the other side of the story? This is a question that progressive organizations have been asking for years.

Maine People's Alliance (MPA), a progressive community advocacy group, is just one example of the many organizations that incorporate narrative development into their campaigns for progressive change. MPA is a membership-driven, multi-issue organization that draws support and motivation from over 32,000 members throughout Maine. These members collaborate with MPA on a wide range of progressive issues that include universal healthcare, corporate accountability, toxics use reduction, affordable housing, clean elections, voting rights, civic engagement, and more. MPA has been on the forefront of

political organizing in Maine for the last thirty years, and it enjoys state and national recognition for its expansive organizing efforts.

One of MPA's current campaigns is narrative development. As I discuss throughout this thesis, narrative has significant implications for achieving lasting progressive change. MPA is interested in the ways that they can link intentional narrative development with direct political change, particularly in the context of policymaking. Narrative development makes high demands on the limited practical resources of organizations like MPA, however, and there are numerous questions about the appropriate relationship between membership and leadership in organizations that work on narrative. These tensions are joined by a third observation about the endless variety of ways in which people and organizations interpret reality. These tensions create somewhat hostile ground for narrative development, as it is daunting to imagine a coherent vision for political change that accommodates the varied needs of members, leaders, and Mainers.

That said, MPA has not shied away from the question of narrative development. The organization is dedicated to developing a framework in which it can situate its political work. This thesis, which accompanies MPA on its plight for a narrative, asks the following question: How does a community advocacy group like MPA facilitate the development of a grassroots political narrative that represents the varied opinions and experiences of its membership while remaining capable of producing lasting political change?

I approach this question in four parts. In Chapter One, I review the literature that introduces and develops the question of narrative. I begin with community organizers and their approaches to narrative because their insights are closely related to the political work that actually happens at MPA. From this initial discussion, I move to a collection of other

scholars to propose language and stories as the constituent elements of an encompassing narrative. Language and stories create an opportunity to unify direct action and worldview development through policymaking, which suggests one possible resolution to the tensions that organizations like MPA navigate in worldview development.

To better understand the ability for narrative to influence the policymaking process, Chapter Two focuses on the variety of ways that scholars study narrative. This discussion begins in the realm of literary analysis, but it gradually approaches politics by following a thread of scholarship that emphasizes the strategic capacity of narrative. After a brief discussion of policy approaches to narrative, this chapter presents the community metanarrative model as a way to approach the various tensions that characterize worldview development.

Chapter Three takes a step back from the theoretical foundation of the first two chapters to examine the approaches MPA has already taken to worldview development. The first sections of this chapter address past work on worldview to better understand the framework in which MPA currently organizes. The later parts of this chapter detail several worldview development activities that I organized with MPA over the course of the year. These observations provide insight into the various tensions that complicate worldview development and suggest the urgency of developing a cohesive progressive narrative.

We return to the community metanarrative model in Chapter Four to discuss the varied success of MPA's narrative activities. Chapter Four incorporates observations about the three faces of power into a discussion of the various narrative-attentive activities MPA has organized. This does two things: it provides the grounds for a critique of organizational approaches that rely solely on the three faces of power for worldview development, and it

integrates the three faces of power with the community metanarrative model to more effectively accommodate the gamut of tensions that complicate worldview development.

Several tensions develop over the course of this inquiry, all of which shed light on the inherent challenge of worldview development. As we progress through the chapters from conceptions of narrative to forms of analysis and application, we see that tensions between the leadership and membership, distance between practical and ideal organizing strategies, and endlessly variable interpretations of reality have a habit of complicating narrative development. Despite the challenges of this inquiry, we see the persistence with which community organizations like MPA approach narrative. We can rest assured that MPA will not cease to organize until there is nothing left that it wants to change, but it is high time that we join forces to address this problem of narrative development.

Chapter 1: Contextualizing Narrative

My first conversations with staff-people at Maine People’s Alliance (MPA) uncovered the relevance of narrative to their campaign for lasting progressive change.³ Although nobody at the office could produce a unanimously accepted definition of the elusive term, MPA’s ‘narrative’ is broadly conceptualized as an encompassing story that simultaneously creates and responds to popular understandings of the world. It incorporates individual perspectives, events, policies, campaigns, and injustices into a coherent expression of the world as it is and as it should be. In other words, the narrative is a story that relates individual actions such as policy proposals, legislative campaigns, and candidate endorsements to each other in a single, coherent matrix with which people can identify.

Scholars who analyze community organizing and social movement framing argue that narrative is an essential element of lasting political change. Narratives create contexts in which people understand the world and, consequently, precede political change movements. These scholars approach narrative as the means to an end; political organizations must have a cohesive narrative if they hope to create lasting change. This reasoning, as we see below, renders narrative development distinct from the actual

³ Progressivism as an ideology exists both in relation to other political ideologies and as an ideology, itself. The fluidity of this categorization, when considered in tandem with the observation that MPA does not explicitly define “progressive,” has various implications for both the work MPA does as an organization and the clarity of this thesis. MPA’s webpage lists categories of interest (health care, affordable housing, the environment, immigration, worker’s rights, economic justice, racial justice, and democracy; “Issues,” Maine People’s Alliance, <https://www.mainepeoplesalliance.org/content/issues>.) but does not broadly define its “progressive” work beyond the following statement: “MPA’s purpose is to bring individuals and organizations together to realize shared goals.” (“About MPA,” Maine People’s Alliance, <https://www.mainepeoplesalliance.org/about>.) I intentionally refrain from imposing a definition on this term and encourage readers to look to Appendix A for more information about MPA’s organizational priorities.

political organizing that groups like MPA do. Although there are lessons to be learned from this approach to political change, it has limited applicability for MPA, an organization that has limited resources to dedicate to an abstract process like narrative development. MPA filters much of its work through various political activities: lobbying legislators, making candidate endorsements, developing policy proposals, and taking positions on legislation. MPA questions whether those direct actions are linked to narrative development. With that in mind, I propose looking more closely at policymaking as a vehicle for simultaneous political change and narrative construction.

To do that, I first expand on what narrative means. I draw insights from community organizers, social movement framing theorists, and scholars of political myth to better understand a variety of approaches to narrative. The observations of these scholars create a foundation upon which to analyze how some scholars already integrate policy and narrative and to argue that policymaking can be a forum for narrative development.

Two Approaches to Narrative

Because of the variety of scholars that studies the abstract idea of narrative, there is some ambiguity in the terms they use. The community organizers, represented by Saul Alinsky, Rinku Sen, and several progressive organizing groups, talk about worldview. Saul Alinsky is a household name and published what many consider the foundational theory of community organizing. Though he generally emphasizes concrete, tangible change over the development of ideology, his argumentation suggests the existence of a larger narrative or

worldview within which community organizers operate.⁴ Alinsky argues that if change-makers are to be successful, they cannot be too peripheral to broadly accepted social norms. He suggests that people have associations with those who break with social expectations, so remaining within the realm of socially acceptable behavior will make communication and change-making more successful.⁵

Rinku Sen, a more contemporary organizer who got her start organizing on college campuses in the 1980s, avoids the subtlety of Alinsky's argument by arguing that organizations must think deeply about their organizational structure if they ever hope to create lasting change.⁶ She opens her text with the no-nonsense assertion that conservatives have been on a power trip since the 1970s.⁷ Throughout her text, Sen references the intricacies of the conservative infrastructure and discusses the implications this has for people who want to change the status quo.⁸ She emphasizes the value of a strong progressive infrastructure that addresses the complexities of social, political, and economic problems while remaining sensitive to the individual experiences of constituent members of those movements.

Consistent with Sen's observations about the necessity of a strong infrastructure, the Grassroots Policy Project (GPP) promotes strategies with which grassroots movements

⁴ Alinsky's first book is *Reveille for Radicals*, which was published in 1946 and updated in 1969. I focus on *Rules for Radicals*, because it is the text I found on the bookshelves of community organizers at MPA. Saul D. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 2nd ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1989). Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1971).

⁵ Alinsky writes, "If the real radical finds that having long hair sets up psychological barriers to communication and organization, he cuts his hair." Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1971): xix.

⁶ Sen also engages in a fairly thorough critique of Alinsky's model for organizing, arguing that it marginalizes women and people of color. Sen, *Stir it Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003): xlix-lv.

⁷ Sen, *Stir it Up*, 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

can develop their organizing strategies. GPP has worked both abstractly and concretely on the challenge of narrative development in progressive grassroots organizations. Other ideologically similar groups, such as reNEW Minnesota and TakeAction Minnesota, offer additional insight into the relationship between narrative development and community organizing.

GPP approaches the idea of a well-developed social consciousness through a discussion of power. The organization presents three levels, or faces, of power.⁹ The first face is “direct political involvement,” which includes passing specific policies, endorsing particular legislators, or lobbying at certain legislative sessions.¹⁰ The second face is “organizational infrastructure,” which is about the structure of the organization and its capacity to promote an agenda and do political work.¹¹ These two faces lead to the third face, which focuses on “worldview, culture, myths, stereotypes and values.”¹² GPP argues that the third face, or worldview, helps people understand the world around them.¹³ Shifting worldview, especially when worldview is considered a manifestation of culture, is a tool that change-makers must engage when they present their progressive agenda in the face of a dominant or pre-existing worldview.¹⁴

⁹ The three faces of power comprise a model that community organizations use to frame their work. This is a slightly unwieldy term that appears throughout the text in a variety of different contexts. Unless otherwise noted, the reader should assume that “the three faces of power” refers to the model as described by the GPP.

¹⁰ Richard Healey and Sandra Hinson, “Power and Social Change,” *Grassroots Policy Project*, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ Grassroots Policy Project, “Using Worldview to Build Power,” *Grassroots Policy Project*, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

Social movement framing theorists join the community organizers to discuss the intricacies of social movements and how they organize.¹⁵ David Snow and Robert D. Benford are known for their research on collective action frames, which they explain as the way social movements position themselves in relation to social issues and political solutions. Their perspective contributes important insight to the practicality of movement building as effected through community organizing.

Social movement framing theorists note that community organizers often exist as foils to more comprehensive or dominant societal frames. Community organizers often have an outsider status; they are outside the dominant power structures, advocate for alternative solutions to social and political problems, and develop an identity through a frame that opposes the mainstream perspective.¹⁶ According to social movement framing theorists, one of the most successful ways for people to coalesce as a group is by identifying common complaints.¹⁷ Through common experiences, which result from living in a society with a fairly consistent or influential culture, people develop shared grievances that they want to resolve.

Social movement framing theorists also emphasize the necessity for successful social movements to clearly articulate their positions, problems, and solutions. Developing a “frame” is the social movement equivalent to a narrative or worldview. Frames express

¹⁵ I do not intend to review the vast literature on either social movement theory or social movement framing theory. Instead, I merely recognize that there are similarities between the worldview of the community organizers and the collective action frames of social movement theorists.

¹⁶ Beth Zemsky and David Mann, “Building Organizations in a Movement Moment,” *Grassroots Policy Project*, 4.

¹⁷ This type of frame is called the diagnostic frame; people organize around common complaints. There are other types of frames: the prognostic frame allows people to articulate their particular concerns, and the motivational frame creates a context in which people can take action in response to their grievances. Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Process and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 614-618.

“the core narrative that underlies everything the movement does.”¹⁸ They create a context through which the social movement can interpret information, articulate positions, develop campaigns, forge alliances, and mobilize populations.¹⁹ There are countless ways to explain the similarities between social movement framing and the development of a progressive worldview, but they can be summarized by the following: “frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization.”²⁰ In other words, frames inspire people toward action. They help people understand issues, relate to issues, and take action to resolve issues.

Overall, community organizers and social movement framing scholars come to a simple, but important, consensus: people tend to congregate around shared beliefs. Those beliefs are often informed by common experiences or complaints, which suggests that societies tend to treat people in ways that are consistent with the societal culture. The common culture of a society creates a dominant understanding or narrative that inevitably affects community organizers and social movements as they promote political change. For progressive change to succeed in the U.S. today, progressives need to develop a worldview or narrative that can counteract the existing story of the conservative Right.

Making the Narrative Happen

Whether it is called a worldview or a collective action frame, a coherent narrative is important and powerful. In contemporary American political society, the conservative

¹⁸ Zemsky and Mann, “Building Organizations,” 4.

¹⁹ For more information, see Zemsky and Mann, “Building Organizations”; Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes”; and Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements.”

²⁰ Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements,” 614.

Right moderates the dominant narrative.²¹ GPP argues that conservatives have taken up values that may be shared by progressives and have framed them in ways that support the conservative worldview.²² Sen makes a similar claim when analyzing the conservative infrastructure. She further argues that progressives have not dealt with the idea of an overarching narrative or worldview that frames their actions. Instead, she writes, progressives have an “inability or unwillingness to address ideology and organizing.”²³ This makes it difficult for progressives to link important causes across interest groups and creates a rather piecemeal approach to making change. Progressives do not have a particularly coherent ideology, but community organizers and social movement framing theorists have ideas about how to fix that.

Community organizers agree that the dominant narrative or culture has many implications in the linguistic sphere. Alinsky engages in a fairly extensive discussion of language and words, which he intends as a lesson to radicals in language selection. To demonstrate his point, Alinsky argues that the word “power” and the phrase “harnessing the energy” are denotatively equivalent.²⁴ Despite the fact that they have the same denotative meaning, the two have very different connotative interpretations, which Alinsky discusses at length. He concludes by asserting that radicals must engage with less

²¹ Lakoff writes, “Contemporary American politics is about worldview. Conservatives simply see the world differently than do liberals.” Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002): 3.

²² The authors list equality, fairness, democracy, good government, family, and community as values that are shared between conservatives and progressives but that have been embedded in a conservative worldview. Grassroots Policy Project, “Using Worldview to Build Power,” *Grassroots Policy Project*, 2.

Lakoff makes a similar point: “[Conservatives] have...managed to forge conceptual links in the voters’ minds between morality and public policy ... by carefully working out their values, comprehending their myths, and designing a language to fit those values and myths.” Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 19.

²³ Sen, *Stir it Up*, 2.

²⁴ Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 49.

inherently controversial words.²⁵ Though Alinsky poses this tip as a way for radicals to facilitate immediate change on their own terms,²⁶ he also implies that the narrative determines how words are used. This has larger implications for the worldview discussion, as it suggests that language exists in a web of connotations that the dominant narrative influences.

Because the conservative narrative dominates contemporary society, many words have conservative connotations. Even though conservatives do not have ownership of words such as equality, fairness, democracy, good government, family, and community, GPP argues that all of these words have strong political meaning because of how conservatives use them.²⁷ For example, a word as simple as “freedom” is linked to individualism, limited government, and free markets.²⁸ According to Sen, “Conservatives have masterfully crafted language that highlights popular anxieties and values and relates them to [their key] issues.”²⁹ To talk about any of those “conservative issues” in a way that society will understand, progressives have to use that “conservative language.” For obvious reasons, conservative language does not provide the traction progressives need in order to make change.

So what gives? How do progressives begin to talk about issues that matter when language has already been locked up by conservatives? At the moment, progressives play

²⁵ Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 49.

²⁶ If I were to truly engage in a critical evaluation of Alinsky’s text, this is where I would suggest the tension between his first point, that radicals must engage with the world as it is, and this second point, that radicals must subvert the language society uses to understand the world. The point of this argument is to establish the relevance of the narrative, however, so I will refrain from further commentary.

²⁷ Grassroots Policy Project, “Using Worldview to Build Power,” *Grassroots Policy Project*, 2.

²⁸ George Lakoff wrote an entire book about this topic. George Lakoff, *Whose Freedom? The Battle Over America’s Most Important Idea* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006).

²⁹ These issues include, among others, English-only, affirmative action, welfare, multicultural education, unions, abortion, sexuality, and crime. Sen, *Stir it Up*, 5.

their contortionist card to fit into the “acceptable center” that the Right has defined through its linguistic finesse.³⁰ This means using language that has not yet been tainted by the conservative worldview, which leaves little room for progressives to develop their own narrative or worldview. The dearth of politically neutral language only makes the necessity for a worldview even clearer: if the change-makers cannot label themselves, their actions, or their beliefs, it will be difficult to implement any sort of lasting change.³¹ Practically speaking, progressives merely need a broader support base, more sustained campaigns, and a distinct set of terms with which to express facts to the public.³² They need to stop using language that cues conservative values, and they must organize. In other words, progressives need to fight a little dirtier for their worldview.

Community organizers argue that a common element of worldview, culture, or narrative is values. Values are extremely controversial because there is no universally accepted way to define them, explain where they come from, justify their eccentricities, or trace them across cultures.³³ Alinsky writes, “the organizer recognizes that each person or bloc has a hierarchy of values.”³⁴ Sen argues that there are core values that shape a society and, conversely, a set of values that could potentially motivate the constituencies that are duped by the dominant narrative.³⁵ Out of this confluence of core values comes a

³⁰ Ibid., 6.

³¹ Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements.”

³² Sen, *Stir it Up*, 19-20. This perspective is echoed by Zemsky and Mann, “Building Organizations,” 4; Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements,” 623-627; David A. Snow, et. al, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation, *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 467-476.

³³ Different people have different values, and I do not want to engage in a debate about what values are justifiable or worthwhile. I merely want to say that values *matter*.

³⁴ Although Alinsky does acknowledge the relevance of values, he does so in the context of immediate political change. His interpretation of values is in the context of devising strategies for immediate change, as opposed to worldview development. Thank you to Ben Chin for clarification of this point. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 76.

³⁵ Sen, *Stir it Up*, 7.

“movement orientation”³⁶ that frames those values in a coherent story to confront the conservative infrastructure. In other words, progressives will begin to develop their own infrastructure by first understanding their values.

With this in mind, GPP argues that progressives must imagine the world beyond “the way things are.”³⁷ According to GPP, the only way for progressives to combat the conservative narrative is to develop an alternative narrative. “You can only fight a paradigm with a paradigm,”³⁸ the organization argues. In other words, even though progressives have been hesitant to put forward a worldview, they need one to compete with the conservative Right. With this in mind, the GPP returns to its three faces of power. The organization argues that progressives do a satisfactory job on both the first and second faces of power but do not devote sufficient resources to shifting worldview. The consequence, then, is that progressive movements have not yet reached their potential: “To build power at all levels, we need to challenge the dominant worldview and frame our issue to reflect our broader goals for social change.”³⁹ If progressives do not challenge the conservative worldview or more successfully frame their issues, they will not be successful in facilitating the type of change they want to make.

Sen sings a similar tune, writing that progressive organizations must develop a “strategic capacity”⁴⁰ to achieve lasting change. She recognizes that contemporary problems are more complicated than ever and that organizing must account for the infinite ways that a single issue can divide the polity. Instead of letting potential supporters divert

³⁶ Ibid., 21.

³⁷ Grassroots Policy Project, “Using Worldview to Build Power.”

³⁸ Ibid., 3.

³⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁰ Sen, *Stir it Up*, xvii.

their attention to a single pet issue, Sen argues that progressives must remind their constituencies of the ideological framework in which progressive change will actually happen. This means articulating a shared worldview that will shift people back to progressivism.⁴¹

To do this, Sen reflects on the process that the conservatives took: “The New Right built itself through a series of economic- and social- policy campaigns that it never gave up on.”⁴² She argues that powerful think tanks⁴³ fostered connections across powerful institutions and people to make the worldview happen. Her solution for progressive change is threefold: expand support, address issues across campaigns, and find ways to spread the progressive message.⁴⁴ She writes that through political education and analysis, progressive organizations will develop into social movements that can compete with the conservative Right. Sen provides examples of building membership and creating an action oriented movement through a number of brief case studies, but she remains somewhat silent on the actual process through which the progressive narrative will coalesce. In many ways, she implies that that worldview is byproduct of good organizing and political action.

GPP has a slightly different approach. As an organization, GPP encourages progressive groups to develop specific initiatives that address each of the faces of power. This means organizing direct political action, building the strength of the organization, and shifting worldview.⁴⁵ GPP also promotes building the strategic capacity of organizations: “What makes a group more able to move to a larger, transformational vision is when they

⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

⁴² Ibid., 5.

⁴³ These include the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, the Manhattan Institute, the Hoover Institute, the Cato Institute, and others. Ibid., 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁵ Grassroots Policy Project, “Power and Social Change.”

deliberately create spaces in the life of the organization and develop capacities that bring their practices in alignment with their long-term, transformative social change goals.”⁴⁶ GPP has used this model with several organizations, including ISAIAH, a coalition of faith-based organizations in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. ISAIAH came together to generate thousands of conversations about racism by articulating the coalition’s values, developing long-term strategies for change, linking to issues that would bring new people to the table, and forging long-term partnerships.⁴⁷ These activities created a language of race and anti-racism that permeated numerous sectors and became the framework for effective direct political action. In this case, GPP facilitated a shift in race-oriented worldview by directly engaging people in the process.

reNEW Minnesota, another progressive organization, hosted a similar people-driven discussion of values to facilitate worldview development. Thousands of people submitted statements about their personal, political, social, and economic beliefs.⁴⁸ reNEW Minnesota analyzed and catalyzed every submission to develop two lists: one had positive statements about what the membership supported, and the other had negative statements about what the membership rejected. reNEW Minnesota called the final lists their collective vision.⁴⁹ This was an active process with the singular purpose of developing a shared worldview, which is an organizing strategy that many organizations use to unite worldview development and other types of political action.

⁴⁶ Phillip Cryan, “Strategic Practice for Social Transformation,” *Strategic Practice (Grassroots Policy Project)*: 1-2.

⁴⁷ Zemsky and Mann, “Building Organizations.” Cryan, “Strategic Practice for Social Transformation.”

⁴⁸ reNEW Minnesota, “Inserting our Values into Politics: Building a Vision for Minnesota,” Powerpoint compiled by Wellstone Action and Take Action Minnesota and shared with Maine People’s Alliance.

⁴⁹ reNEW Minnesota, “Our Future Together: A Vision for a renewed Minnesota,” reNEW.mn campaign, 2009. <http://renew.mn/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Vision-Doc.pdf>.

At this point, what we see among community organizers are two basic strategies for worldview development. Some present worldview as a byproduct of good organizing, whereas others present worldview as an activity that requires individualized attention. The latter perspective, that worldview development is an isolated but essential activity, is more consistent with the strategies proposed by social movement framing theorists.

Whereas community organizers advocate the development, dissemination, and revision of worldview to accommodate political change, social movement framing theorists package these ideas into a single term: collective action frames. Creating a frame for a social movement incorporates interests, values, beliefs, activities, and goals into one coherent ideology.⁵⁰ According to Benford and Snow, four steps lead to a successful frame. First, social organizations link ideologically connected but structurally independent organizations. Second, the groups clarify or amplify their vision. Third, groups extend their agreed upon vision or ideology to less ideologically aligned organizations. Fourth, social organizations present information in ways that accommodate new meanings and understandings.⁵¹ The result, according to social movement theorists, is a coherent and persistent frame in which social movements can situate themselves. The social movement framing theorists, like many of community organizers, argue that direct attention to the development of the frame is the best way to counter the dominant worldview.

If narrative development requires direct attention, organizations that are interested in building their strategic capacity will inevitably divide their resources between worldview development and other activities. This creates a problem for organizations that

⁵⁰ Snow et al., "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," 464.

⁵¹ Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements," 624-625; Snow et al., "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation."

have limited financial and human resources: worldview development as conceptualized by these community organizers and social movement framing theorists does not have very many short term benefits. These organizations want a worldview, but they do not have the time for direct worldview development. The question then becomes one of problem solving: how do we remedy the seemingly inevitable tension between direct action and worldview development? MPA staff and volunteers wonder if there needs to be such a divide: perhaps worldview development and direct action can happen through the same process. They say policymaking is that process, but to get to policy requires discussion of a third approach to narrative: political myth.

Political Myth

Scholars who talk about language, stories, and myth bring additional theoretical insight to the more practical models of community organizers and social movement framing theorists. By synthesizing the perspectives of these thinkers and their various conceptions of narrative, we begin to understand the importance of movement orientation and the challenge of developing a narrative while also attending to the concrete policymaking aspects of progressive action.

Political myths are “important stories”⁵² that represent the understandings a society has of its intricate cultures, goals, and operations. People who talk about political myths argue that they are stories, real or imagined, that help individuals and societies understand their actions. These scholars have slightly varied understandings of myth, but there are a

⁵² Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009): 9.

number of key observations to pull from these definitions. First, myths operate in a cyclical fashion and are simultaneously informing and informed by the activities and beliefs of the polity. They might influence how the community perceives reality,⁵³ how the community organizes,⁵⁴ how the community acts,⁵⁵ what the community values,⁵⁶ how the society interacts with opposing narratives or stories,⁵⁷ how the community relates itself to the broader society,⁵⁸ how the community understands itself,⁵⁹ or how the community understands the past, present, and future.⁶⁰ The myth provides a foundation upon which a community or society understands itself and its relationship with the world, which means that the myth is a powerful organizing in the political realm. By looking at some of these more specific elements of myth, we can learn a lot about the worldview of community organizers.

⁵³ According to John Girling, "Myths are symbolic representations of reality; they are also authentic responses to social change." John Girling, *Myths and Politics in Contemporary Western Societies: Evaluating the crisis of modernity in America, Germany, Great Britain* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1993): ix.

⁵⁴ Girling writes, "Myths render the social world intelligible, although in a metaphorical and symbolic idiom; they also represent 'rallying signs' in which the group renews its sense of identity and solidarity." *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁵ Gilbert Morris Cuthbertson writes, "Myths contain the stereotypes which condition political behavior. They limit meaningful alternatives for social action." Gilbert Morris Cuthbertson, *Political Myth and Epic* (Michigan State University Press, 1995):157.

⁵⁶ Bennett writes, "It is through such cultural models [myths] that people first encounter the ideals of free enterprise, honesty, industry, bravery, tolerance, perseverance, and individualism." W. Lance Bennett, "Myth, Ritual, and Political Control," *Journal of Communications* (fall 1980): 168.

⁵⁷ Boer writes, "Political myth involves the construction of labyrinthine eschatological worlds characterized by a dialectic of reaction and subversion." Boer, *Political Myth*, 35.

⁵⁸ Henry Tudor writes, "A political myth may, for instance, establish the claim of a certain group to hegemony, sovereign independence or an extension of territory; it may help strengthen the solidarity of the group in the face of a major challenge; it may serve to encourage the resistance of an oppressed minority; or it may supply compelling arguments for the abolition of undesirable institutions." Tudor, *Political Myth*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1972): 138.

Bottici and Challand write, "Political myths provide fundamental cognitive schemata for mapping of the social world: by reducing the complexity of experience, they enable us to come to terms with the multifaceted character of the world we live in." Bottici and Challand, "Rethinking Political Myth," 321.

⁵⁹ Flood refers to Freud and Jung in asserting that "The purpose of dreams, myths, and other forms of fantasy [is] to bring into the awareness of the individual the drama that is enacted deep within his psyche." Flood, *Political Myth*, 43. For additional information, refer to "Geneology of a Myth" in Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 17-80.

⁶⁰ Discussing Sorel: "[myth] provides a vision of the future which makes crude but practical sense of the present." Tudor, *Political Myth*, 15.

Political myths develop in reaction to something that was true in the past and remains relevant today.⁶¹ Myths are relevant because they come from something memorable. Interpretation of that memory is what creates the myth.⁶² The particular story is not relevant anymore; what matters is that a society has created meaning out of the story and uses it to understand society.⁶³ Because of their provenance, myths cannot be denied, rejected, or disproven; they are sacred truths.⁶⁴ The myth is not fictitious, nor is it wholly literal, and it has emergent properties that cannot be fully explained.⁶⁵ In other words, the myth is a combination of reality and understandings of reality and, therefore, cannot be invalidated. This creates the necessary distinction between myths and ideologies, as an ideology implies content that is debatable.⁶⁶ The myth is not debatable but rather informs

⁶¹ Myth is, "the spoken correlative of the acted rite, the thing done." Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (London: Merlin Press, 1963), Quoted in Tudor, *Political Myth*, 28.

Friedrich and Crezesinski write that myth is, "a tale concerned with past events, giving them a special meaning and significance for the present and thereby reinforcing the authority of those who are wielding power in a particular community." Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Crezesinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York & London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), quoted in Tudor, *Political Myth*, 16.

⁶² Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 203-226.

⁶³ Christopher Flood defines political myth as, "an ideologically marked narrative which purports to give a true account of a set of past, present, or predicted political events and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group." Christopher G. Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996): 44.

⁶⁴ Flood writes, "myths have unquestioned validity within the belief systems of the social groups which cherish them." This assertion, when read in tandem with the assertion that a society believes a certain set of myths, suggests that the societal understanding derived from those myths cannot be challenged. Though scholars debate the extent to which a myth actually represents an event that actually happened, they generally agree that widespread acceptance of an interpretation makes it impossible to deny the event. Flood, *Political Myths*, 32. This debate is also present in the mythos-logos discussion of several scholars, including Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 28-43.

⁶⁵ Henry Tudor writes, "A myth, I suggest, is an interpretation of what the myth-maker (rightly or wrongly) takes to be hard fact. It is a device men adopt in order to come to grips with reality; and we can tell that a given account is a myth, not by the amount of truth it contains, but by the fact that it is *believed* to be true and, above all, by the dramatic form into which it is cast." Tudor, *Political Myth*: 17. See also Flood, *Political Myths*, 45-53.

⁶⁶ Sorel asserts, "ideology as a myth which has been rationalized and thus laid open for discussion." Quoted in Tudor, *Political Myth*, 121. See also, W. Lance Bennett, "Myth, Ritual, and Political Control," *Journal of Communications* (fall 1980): 167.

the collective unconscious; it has a hold on how a society thinks about all aspects of being alive.⁶⁷

Political myths also have some sort of goal. Whether it shares a moral, tells a story, or proposes an action, the myth *does* something.⁶⁸ Take the example of the American Dream. The American Dream is a myth that Americans interpret as a motivation to work hard. As the story goes, she who is an honest worker will be rewarded with prosperity for her dedication and labor. This myth, therefore, promotes diligence, persistence, and patience; it promotes a very particular type of behavior. Finally, myths do not just exist. They persist because people believe in them, tell them, and give power to them. Chiara Bottichi and Benoît Challand define political myth as “a continual process of work on a common narrative by which the members of a social group can provide significance to their political conditions and experiences.”⁶⁹ This observation provides a direct link to the process of worldview development that we have so far discussed with community organizers and social movement framing theorists.

In many ways, the community organizers and social movement framing theorists who talk about worldview could just as easily be talking about myths: they want to create a

⁶⁷ Bennett writes, “Myths become imbedded deeply in consciousness as associative mechanism that link private experience, ongoing reality, and public history into powerful frameworks of understanding.” Bennett, “Myth, Ritual, and Political Control,” 169.

⁶⁸ This perspective is widely supported by a number of theorists, including: Geroges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T.E. Hulme and J. Roth (New York: Collier Books, 1961), Quoted in Bottici and Challand, *Rethinking Political Myth*, 329. Also: Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*; Flood, *Political Myth*; Bennett, “Myth, Ritual, and Political Control.” This diverges some from Tudor’s conception of the political myth, wherein the myth is made political merely by its content as opposed to its incitement of action. Tudor, *Political Myth*.

Malinowski writes that myth, “expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforce morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man.” Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Garden City & New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1974), Quoted in Tudor, *Political Myth*, 50.

⁶⁹ Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, “Rethinking Political Myth: The Clash of Civilizations as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 3 (2006): 316, doi: 10.1177/1368431006065715.

narrative (which they call a worldview or a frame) that has the same characteristics as political myths. They want to create a narrative that regulates itself, helps people understand the complicated world around them, becomes a point of reference for cultural values, and inspires people to act in certain ways. The infallibility of myths is what community organizers strive for when discussing worldview, and it is one of the ways in which myth and worldview are intimately related. The ability for a myth or narrative to incite action is the core of what community organizers hope to accomplish with their worldview. Community organizers and social movement framing theorists also want to develop an understanding the world that incorporates a goal so that people are motivated to act; the only difference is that they call this worldview and frames while others call it political myth.

To summarize, the myth is rooted in the past and has undeniable truths. The myth draws upon the people's stories and experiences to become representative of a society's outlook on the world. Because of this, the political myth can be used to further goals. All of these observations link political myth to worldview and frame development. Despite the similarities between worldview, collective action frames, and political there is ambiguity in the relationship between political myth and political change. This gap can only be addressed after assessing the practical elements of myth formation.

Myth-Making

Although there is a clear understanding of what a political myth is, there is not such consensus about how the myth comes about. This is because of the generally ambiguous nature of political myths: myths imply the way a society generally thinks about itself, and

the provenance of such a widespread view is difficult to pin down.⁷⁰ That said, two elements are implicated by the definition of myth as a linguistic interpretation of a past occurrence. The first is stories, and the second is language.

Stories and language are the mechanisms through which people explore and remember the world. Rhetoricians, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, political theorists, and politicians⁷¹ recognize the ability for stories to influence how individuals and groups process information. These scholars argue that stories are not “just stories”⁷² because they are so related to critical analysis. On the linguistic front, these scholars argue that language creates the foundation for shared social experiences.⁷³ Language relates terms, people, and information, so any manipulations of language affect how people interpret the world around them.⁷⁴ Because myths are based in some element of real life, they automatically rely on stories and language to transmit information.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Flood writes extensively on the complication of the cognitive relevance of myth. Flood, *Political Myth*, 71-99.

⁷¹ Shaul Shenhav references Sarbin, Chafe, Mishler, Cornog, and others to argue this point. Shaul R. Shenhav, “Political Narratives and Political Reality,” *International Political Science Review* 27 no. 3 (2006), doi: 10.1177.0192512106064474.

Martin Kreiswirth references a similar trend in his trace of narrative from novel to discourse. Martin Kreiswirth, “Trusting the Tale: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences,” *New Literary History* 23 (1992). See also the works of Lyotard, Burke, and Rorty, as discussed in Shenhav, “Political Narratives and Political Reality” and Kreiswirth, “Trusting the Tale.” Also, David M. Timmerman, “1992 Presidential Candidate Films: The Contrasting Narratives of George Bush and Bill Clinton,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26 no. 2 (1996), and Allen Speight, “Arendt on Narrative Theory and Practice,” *College Literature* 38 no. 1 (2011).

⁷² Emery M. Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis: Theory and Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 9.

⁷³ Murray Edelman writes, “Language is the key creator of the social worlds people experience.” Edelman, “Political Language,” 10. On page 14 he writes, “...problems, aspiration, and social conditions....are constructions of language as well.”

⁷⁴ Booth talks about language in terms of metaphor, but the application is the same. If metaphors are applied in certain circumstances, they will either create or muddle understanding. Wayne C. Booth, “Metaphor as Rhetoric: The Problem of Evaluation,” *Critical Inquiry* 5 no. 1 (1978): 50-51.

See also Allen and Faigley, “Discursive Strategies for Social Change: An Alternative Rhetoric of Argument,” in their discussion of putting gender-free words into communication and what that means to people’s understandings.

⁷⁵ Scholars across disciplines are struggling to find ways to characterize stories as legitimate, reliable, and truthful representations of reality. Walter Fisher proposes a narrative paradigm that relies on stories as legitimate sources of information. He advocates developing an alternative logic of narrative, or narrative rationality, that scholars can apply to evaluate the coherence and fidelity of narratives. He seeks an evaluation

The personal investment of individuals in stories and language has huge implications for myth-making. This begins with the argument that stories are essential to the formation of broad understandings of the world.⁷⁶ This observation yields the argument that stories exist on two levels. The first category is loosely equivalent to personal narratives, or the stories that people tell to make sense of the world. The second category is essentially what political theorists talk about when they study political myth. These narratives are the stories that determine a society's understanding of the world. Scholars identify a constructive relationship between little narratives and grand narratives, wherein little narratives provide the content that creates the grand narrative.⁷⁷ Overall, by thinking of small narratives as personal stories and grand narratives as myth, there is a clear link between stories, myths, and the question of power that characterizes worldview development.⁷⁸

process to prove the relevance of narrative to contemporary scholarship. Fisher, "Narration, Knowledge, and the Possibility of Wisdom," 20.

Other scholars are saying similar things. Shenhav, argues that we must explain the relationship between narrative and reality so that the two can actually engage with each other. Shenhav, "Political Narratives and Political Reality."

⁷⁶ Shenhav, "Political Narratives and Political Reality," 255. Walter Fisher, "Narration, Knowledge, and the Possibility of Wisdom," in *Rethinking Knowledge: Reflections Across the Disciplines*, ed. Robert F. Goodman and Walter R. Fisher (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). Kreiswirth, "Trusting the Tale," 643.

⁷⁷ The relationship between these two tiers of narrative is not always peacefully constructive, however, as personal narratives can sometimes be manipulated to create a particular grand narrative Kreiswirth warns, "[Grand] narratives exert totalizing and, in some instances, totalitarian control, through the universalization of a particular plot, which restrictively positions its agents, narrators, and listeners... Little narratives, on the other hand, are defined by their local, contingent, and nontotalizable discursive elements." Kreiswirth, "Trusting the Tale," 641-2. This provides an important link to the power dynamics that can stymie effective worldview development.

⁷⁸ George Lakoff explores this capacity of stories in his use of metaphor to explain the differences in liberal and conservative ideology. He argues that conservatives ascribe to a "strict father" mentality that explains their relatively hands-off approach to government. Liberals, on the other hand, fall in the category of the "nurturing parent," and are more likely to support collaborative programs like welfare and affirmative action. In the little/grand narrative context, the metaphor is roughly equivalent to the grand narrative; the metaphor, like the grand narrative, is constructed of personal ("little") understandings of the world. See Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004) and Lakoff, *Moral Politics*.

Stories are also familiar to large groups of people, which makes them the perfect forum through which to develop compatible understandings of the world in the face of complicated situations.⁷⁹ People recognize character development, triumph over adversity, and conflict resolution as standard story elements,⁸⁰ so incorporating those elements into presentations of information generates a better⁸¹ understanding of social complexity.⁸² These elements are present in fictional stories that we tell each other for entertainment and in the stories we use to understand things like politics, policies, and politicians.⁸³ Stories create a relationship between characters through plot, which tells the listener how to engage with the story.⁸⁴ Stories also exist across cultures, geographies, and demographics, which means they are accessible and, on some scale, universally understandable.⁸⁵ The tendency for stories to be so universally understandable makes them excellent material for those grand narratives or myths, which have so much societal buy-in that they are practically infallible.

When carefully crafted, stories and language can also serve strategic purposes.⁸⁶ In stories, descriptions and explanations place actors and actions in certain relationships that

⁷⁹ Shenhav writes, "...humans have a natural tendency to think in narrative form." Shenhav, "Political Narratives and Political Reality," 245

⁸⁰ See, Shenhav, "Political Narratives and Political Reality," 251; Hampton, "Enhancing public participation," 265; Timmerman, "1992 Presidential Candidate Films," 365.

⁸¹ By better, I mean more accessible or participatory, both of which yield greater accuracy.

⁸² Timmerman, "1992 Presidential Candidate Films."

⁸³ Vincent Reinhart writes, "The narrative determines our attitudes toward the actors and events of the [housing] crisis." Vincent Reinhart, "The High Cost of Getting the Story Wrong," American Enterprise Institute, 2

⁸⁴ Kreiswirth, "Trusting the Tale," 636-637.

⁸⁵ Hampton writes, "Story telling is a low threat, familiar, easy and perhaps enjoyable activity for most people in most cultures." Greg Hampton, "Enhancing public participation through narrative analysis," *Policy Sciences* 37 (2004): 263-265, doi: 10.1007/s11077-005-1763-1.

⁸⁶ Political language has the "capacity to reflect ideology, mystify, and distort." Edelman, "Political Language," 10. See also, Julia Allen and Lester Faigley, "Discursive Strategies for Social Change: An Alternative Rhetoric of Argument," *Rhetoric Review* 14 no. 1 (1995).

influence how the listener responds to the story.⁸⁷ The person telling the story may also entice the listener to respond to the story in a certain way.⁸⁸ Even if fictitious, as stories often are, they will be somewhat representational and, therefore, persuasive.⁸⁹ Evaluating the way words frame controversial issues like slavery and racial equality illustrates the strategic capacity of language. In these cases, the words we use to understand slavery (that it has been abolished) imply things about racial equality (that it has been achieved). While the former statement is true, the latter is not, which illustrates the ability for language to manipulate understandings.⁹⁰ Because both language and stories can be manipulated, organizers can use stories and words to suggest a larger narrative or myth. To summarize, scholars argue that the accessibility and malleability of language and stories mean that stories and language are the mechanisms through which myths develop. From this analysis, I argue that intentional use of language and stories helps control the production of political myths.

So now we are back to language and stories. Stories and language first appeared when community organizers discussed the need for, and the development of, worldview. The community organizers characterize language as a gauge of the strength of opposing narratives, and they discuss the struggle to overcome language that is imbued with conservative connotations. Stories, they suggest, help overcome the complexities of linguistic minefields. Further analysis of language and stories in the context of political

⁸⁷ Rodden writes, "...description, classification, and especially explanation can also operate argumentatively." Rodden, "How do Stories Convince Us? Notes Towards a Rhetoric of Narrative," *College Literature* 35 no. 1 (2008):152. See pp153-154 for more discussion.

⁸⁸ Hampton, "Enhancing public participation," 265.

⁸⁹ Shenhav writes, "political narratives contain various elements of persuasion." Shenhav, "Political Narratives and Political Reality," 249.

⁹⁰ Edelman writes, "These examples do not demonstrate that major problems have been solved, but rather that the terms in which they are named have been transformed." Edelman, "Political Language," 18-19.

myth corroborates this conclusion, which makes stories and language seem like the key to narrative development. The next logical question, then, is about how we control stories and language. This question, as we see below, points to the two central tensions of this thesis: power and practicality.

Moving Forward

This exploration of language and stories from community organizers and social movement framing theorists to political myth raises two categories of questions that complicate narrative development. To begin, there are practical limitations inherent to the various observations of community organizers, social movement framing theorists, and political myth scholars. What can an organization with limited resources realistically accomplish? Are narrative-centric activities the best use of those limited resources? When does a grassroots approach such as the one presented by reNEW Minnesota become so bogged down in thousands of paper slips that the process is neither participatory nor productive? Did the ISIAH meetings, which often had over a thousand participants, ever get side-tracked? How does such an organic methodology maintain momentum? Do organizations have enough resources and momentum to develop worldview while also making headway on tangible political issues? How does an organization choose values that are politically attainable and relevant to the community? How does an up-and-coming movement decide which values allow the flexibility with which to incorporate other groups? Many of these questions also suggest that worldview development requires direct attention.

The second category of questions is about some of the power relationships between the organizers and the membership in groups that work on narrative development. If an organization develops narrative-centric activities, then how can the organization avoid negative membership-leadership dynamics? What are the relationships between the people and the organizers? Who decides meeting agendas? In the social movement context, which groups make proposals and which groups responds to the others' proposals? Who develops the language that movements use to talk about political issues? How does a society mobilize around a given set of words? Where do the associations with words or phrases come from? How long does it take a myth to develop? Where do the constitutive stories come from? Who evaluates the relevance of the stories? When is it clear if a myth has been created?

These questions get more complicated when we look at them in the context of a single organization. In many ways, practicality and power are very related. For organizations like MPA that work against short deadlines, limited resources, and complicated issues, it is often more *practical* to design and implement campaigns from a core of staff or, at most, very involved volunteers. Those campaigns, however, rely on the people who lobby, fill volunteer shifts, and sign petitions to be effective. The ensuing relationship between the membership and leadership is one in which the group of organizers has *power* over the group that gets organized. We see the composite of these two questions in the narrative work that MPA wants to do: At what point does an organization need to “call the shots” and “push” a narrative that encompasses core values in a way that respects the stories and beliefs of the people? When does having a worldview become more important than assuring that the worldview represents the interests of all

constituent groups?⁹¹ Both of these questions illustrate scenarios when what is best for the membership-leadership relationship does not align with what is best for worldview development and progressive change.

That said, community organizers cannot -and will not- deny the need for worldview. As discussed at length above, community organizers, social movement framing theorists, and rhetoricians who study political myth and storytelling support the cause of the worldviews, collective action frames, and political myths that mobilize constituents towards certain ends. Worldview creates an infrastructure in which organizers and communities can attain future change; it embodies the vision for a better future. Worldview is valuable, and progressives want one.

At the same time, organizations like MPA are dedicated to achieving tangible political victories. These victories might be as simple as holding an in-district meeting with a representative or as complex as organizing a rally with hundreds of demonstrators agitating for a specific policy action. These concrete actions, no matter how apparently miniscule they appear in the scheme of radical political change, are what create the sense of movement and momentum. MPA needs direct action if it is to remain accessible to its membership, remind stubborn political leadership that change is afoot, and maintain a presence in the media. The problem, however, is that the abstract worldview development does not link naturally to the direct engagement piece. This creates tension between the leadership and membership as decisions are made about how to use limited resources. This

⁹¹ It is interesting to think of this in terms of the current Occupy Wall Street movement. Their worldview or narrative is that "We are the 99%." The movement has been criticized for being so unclear in its vision, with event attendees carrying signs that protest everything from corporate involvement in politics to abortion rights. The movement is intentionally broad because it does not want to alienate anyone of the 99%, and yet, that breadth seems to compromise the movement's credibility and believability.

is precisely the problem that MPA wants to address: How do they develop a worldview while maintaining activities that effect direct political change and keeping positive relationships with their membership? To get past these tensions of power and practicality, we need to find a way to unify worldview and direct action.

To do this, we must better understand the challenges of direct action. Legislative sessions happen at certain times of the year, and elections cycle through every year. Meetings come up, seats are vacated, appointments are made, and candidates shift their platforms. Organizations have to be in the *now* to address these realities. They have to be able to mobilize people for unexpected meetings, populate the state house at a moment's notice, and release statements when legislation is proposed. These activities are not conducive to worldview development, because worldview development requires dedicated attention to the abstract foundation of an organization's activities. Worldview development takes time, which is perpetually lacking in the realm of direct action. There are times when an organization needs a story to frame its direct action, and on many of those occasions, there will not be time for the organization to go directly to the people with a bottom-up, voice-of-the-people approach. Sometimes the organization needs to act, and the need to act will lead the organization to tell to a story that is based on the understanding the organizers have of how to successfully organize, as opposed to the stories-gathered-from-the-people-on-the-streets understanding of what needs to be done.

This reality speaks to the concerns presented earlier about the role of the organizations versus the role of the people in narrative development and yields the following question: How does an organization like MPA facilitate the development of a worldview that can accommodate direct action in a strategic framework that represents

the longer-term value of individual stories and experiences? According to MPA, the answer is in unifying direct action and worldview development.

Policymaking

Policymaking is a natural channel through which to mollify the tensions of power and practicality because it pulls direct action and narrative together into one setting. The whole policy process, from draft policy proposals to media coverage of legislative decisions, creates space to discuss the abstract concepts of worldview, collective action framing, and political myth. Policymaking is also an undeniably tangible action. Policy passage is a concrete process that includes written proposals, legislative hearings, debates about definitions, and arguments over implications. Policy proposals, by their very nature, use technical language and public discussions to create political change. This policy language is similar to the language of worldview, as discussed in the previous section about myth-making. Because policymaking is an established legislative process, it is a legitimate forum through which to propose solutions to social and political problems,⁹² which are also essential elements of worldview.

Additionally, the depiction of problems and solutions in policies inevitably reflects the values and priorities of the proposing group. This depiction-through-policy yields a subtle narrative that positions the responsible problem solvers against the negligent problem creators. Because of the conversations generated by and conducted in the core language of the policy, a subtle narrative eventually enters the public realm as an

⁹² In an early draft of this chapter, Ben Chin commented that there are other organizations that also do this type of work. These groups may include union organizing, corporate campaigns, and electoral organizing and probably do the work “just as well.” Ben Chin, Personal Communication, December 6, 2011.

alternative understanding of the world. In other words, policy “does” language and stories. This creates an overlap between narrative and policy in which policy becomes a process that both reflects and develops worldview. The next step, then, is to look at existing approaches to understanding the relationship between narrative and policy.

All of this begins with a hunger for progressive change. Community organizers know that narrative is important to progressive change, but they do not have a good way to develop narrative. As discussed, above, direct attention to worldview development is impractical because it drains already limited human and financial resources. At the same time, presenting a worldview to the membership of an organization creates a hierarchy between the membership and the leadership, which is not productive. Community organizers are left wondering what options they have for narrative development. By tracing narrative through academic realms like political myth, we introduce two new factors into the mix: strategic language and stories. These bring strategy, values, connotations, and narrative into the policymaking process, which creates the opportunity to unite worldview development and direct action. To determine if policy is the best venue for narrative development, we must better understand the types of narratives that exist in policy.

Chapter 2: Narrative and Policy

Stories abound in politics and public policy, and policymaking contains various undeniable narrative elements. Campaign ads tell stories of characters that overcome challenges to solve conflicts, and policy is often interpreted in a narrative form wherein politicians are characterized as the forces that help society progress from a bad situation to a better one, save a society from utter destruction, or fend off threats to society's well-being. Of the scholars who investigate the role of stories and narratives in campaigns, policy formation, and other political settings, many come from backgrounds in literary analysis or communication studies and approach politics as a topic to be explained with a narrative analysis approach.⁹³

Though scholars who bring literary analysis to policy analysis develop insights that traditional modes of analysis neglect, it does not follow that the next great thing in policy analysis requires shifting into the realm of literary criticism. Using literary theory to evaluate policy is not ideal because it overlooks elements of policy discussions that are essential to understanding why political decisions are made. There is certainly value in a multidisciplinary approach to the construction of meaning, and this critique is not an argument that isolated disciplines should focus solely on their own strategies and methodologies.⁹⁴ Instead, this critique appreciates the demonstrated political awareness of

⁹³ See Gring-Pemble, "Are We Going to Now Govern by Anecdote?"; Timmerman, "1992 Presidential Candidate Films"; Hammer, "The role of narrative in political campaigning: An analysis of speeches by Barack Obama," *National Identities* 12 (3): 269-290; Kreiswirth, "Trusting the Tale."

⁹⁴ For a discussion of how one discipline has dealt with increasing multidisciplinary in the context of narrative, see Roberto Franzosi, "Narrative Analysis—Or Why (And How) Sociologists Should be Interested in Narrative," *Annual Review of Sociology* 14: 517-54.

some literary analysts and calls for heightened awareness of narrative from within the realm of policy.

Narrative policy analysis develops from narrative analysis, which is why I begin this section with a discussion of narrative. This brief summary of the development of narrative analysis illustrates the difficulty of interpreting the qualitative data contained within and expressed by stories. After this introduction, I look more specifically at narrative analysis as a strategy in policy analysis. Narrative policy analysts already approach narrative from a political vantage point and explore the relationship between narrative and policymaking. Insights from both narrative analysts and the narrative-attentive policy analysts reformulate the tensions of power and practicality from Chapter One to suggest a new approach to the tensions that stymie narrative development.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis began developing as a field in the 1970s when scholars recognized that stories can be data and are not just the mode through which data is communicated.⁹⁵ This perspective was borne from the belief that people's interactions with the world can be explained through typical narrative elements, such as character development, conflict, and resolution.⁹⁶ Some scholars emphasize the unique implications of narrative for culture, politics, ideology, cognition, and psychology to call for a revaluing

⁹⁵ Kreisworth writes, "Until about twenty years ago, I think it is safe to say, narrative qua narrative was very little discussed. ... It is only quite recently, however, that narrative itself has moved from the periphery to the center, from the role of ancillary or adjunct to a position of control, even of dominance." Kreisworth, 630. See also Catherine Riessman, *Narrative Analysis, Qualitative Research Methods Volume 30* (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1993); Emery Roe, "Narrative Analysis for the Policy Analyst: A Case Study of the 1980-1982 Medfly Controversy in California," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 8 (2): 251-273.

⁹⁶ Riessman, 4.

of ideas that cannot be expressed through traditional rational modes of analysis.⁹⁷ Across these disciplines, the central tenet of narrative analysis is fairly consistent: stories are relational. In other words, the meaning of a story is determined by the relationships storytellers create between story elements. Scholars also agree that stories have essential emergent properties. Just as scientists cannot expect to understand the functions of the human body by reducing it to a collection of cells, neither can narrative analysts fully understand a story by merely looking at its constituent parts. This creates a problem for analysis: stories are too complicated and unwieldy to analyze in their entirety, but they lose important information when divided into smaller pieces.

Scholars have developed a variety of methods to meet this challenge. Walter Fisher, narrative analyst, presents several criteria for narrative evaluation. He argues that consistency, completeness, and character are manifestations of the narrative's coherence: coherence in the argument and structure, coherence in the content and relationship with other stories, and coherence in the values and goals ascribed to certain actors within the narrative.⁹⁸ According to Fischer, these criteria yield information that cannot be expressed by more scientific or quantitative methods of analysis. To demonstrate this point, Fisher applies his paradigm to three cases: one in politics, one in dramatic texts, and one in philosophy. He concludes that the narrative paradigm, when appropriately applied, explains paradoxes that cannot be accommodated by other methods of inquiry.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Kreisworth, "Trusting the Tale."

⁹⁸ Walter Fisher, "Narration, Knowledge, and the Possibility of Wisdom," in *Rethinking Knowledge: Reflections Across the Disciplines*, edited by Robert F. Goodman and Walter R. Fisher (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 177.

⁹⁹ Fisher writes, "attribution theory, balance theory, constructivism, social-convergence theory, reinforcement theory, balance theory, social-exchange theory, and symbolic interactionism" cannot evaluate the information that stories contain. Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1987): 86.

Other scholars represent somewhat eclectic methodologies and strategies, drawing on a combination of factors to develop a mode of analysis that fits the particular needs of their case.¹⁰⁰ These scholars cite truthfulness, believability, applicability, and longevity, among other things, when they discuss the logistics of narrative evaluation. They argue that a variety of issues, including abortion policy,¹⁰¹ reactions to reproductive health concerns,¹⁰² emotional trauma experienced in divorce,¹⁰³ policy in Yellowstone National Park,¹⁰⁴ responses to infestation by invasive insects,¹⁰⁵ and welfare policy¹⁰⁶ are all more intelligible when considered through a narrative lens. Regardless of the specific application, these scholars are concerned with the challenge of creating meaningful understanding of truths that cannot be expressed through any mode but narrative.

From the narrative analysts, we have five essential criteria for a successful narrative: believability, applicability, truthfulness, longevity, and coherence. These requirements for narrative are surprisingly similar to those of myth. First, political myths develop in reaction to something that happens in the real world; they do not just happen.

¹⁰⁰ Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*.

¹⁰¹ F.D. Ginsberg, *Contested Lives: The abortion debate in an American community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Cited in Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, 25-34. F. Ginsberg, "Dissonance and harmony: The symbolic function of abortion in activists' life stories" in *Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives*, edited by Personal Narratives Group, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989): 59-84. Cited in Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, 25-34.

¹⁰² S.E. Bell, "Becoming a political woman: The reconstruction and interpretation of experience through stories" in *Gender and discourse: The power of talk*, edited by A.D. Todd and S. Fisher (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1988): 97-123. Cited in Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, 34-43. S.E. Bell, "Commentary on 'Perspectives on Embodiment: The uses of narrativity in ethnographic writing,'" *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 1 (3): 245-254. Cited in Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, 34-43.

¹⁰³ C.K. Riessman, *Divorce Talk: Women and men make sense of personal relationships* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990). Cited in Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, 43-52. C.K. Riessman, "Beyond reductionism: Narrative genres in divorce accounts," *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 1 (1): 41-68. Cited in Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, 43-52.

¹⁰⁴ McBeth, et al., "The Science of Storytelling: Measuring Policy Beliefs in Greater Yellowstone," *Society and Natural Resources* 18: 413-429. doi: 10.1080/08941920590924765.

¹⁰⁵ Roe, "Narrative Analysis for the Policy Analyst"; Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis: Theory and Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 52-75.

¹⁰⁶ Shawn A. Cassiman, "Of Witches, Welfare Queens, and the Disaster Named Poverty: The Search for a Counter-Narrative," *Journal of Poverty* 10 (4): 51-66. doi:10.1300/J134v10n04_03.

This is akin to the *believability* of narratives, as both must be rooted in something convincing enough that people accept them to be true. Second, political myths help people understand the world; they provide a frame through which to evaluate reality. This relates to the *applicability* of narratives, because people have to believe that myths and narratives are informed by and related to reality if they are to have any real significance. Third, political myths are “sacred truths” that persist; they are influential because they have informed generations of thought. This is accommodated by the *truthfulness* and *longevity* of narratives, both of which suggest that myths and stories have to weather some test of time before they become significant. I also argue that Fisher’s three-part criteria for narrative, *coherence* as expressed through consistency, characterizations, and completeness, applies to political myth, as well. Coherence creates a successful or convincing political myth by creating recognizable presentations of information (consistency) across various actors and societal groups (characterizations) that also accommodate possible counterarguments or counternarratives by anticipating critiques (completeness).

Despite these convenient similarities, we are left with one element of political myths that is not matched with an element of narrative analysis: the goal. Political myths motivate people to act in particular ways. This is the main distinction between narrative and political myth: the former is informative whereas the latter is strategic. Because of this, narrative analysis cannot accommodate the complexity of narratives told through or contained within politics.

This is particularly evident in an analysis by David Barry and Michael Elmes of the relationship between narrative and strategic planning.¹⁰⁷ To investigate the role of narratives in a corporate setting, the authors discuss the various applications of relational stories in strategic planning, corporate image, and marketing.¹⁰⁸ Throughout the text, Barry and Elmes are motivated by a very particular question: how does an organization generate, “an engaging, compelling account, one that readers can willingly buy into and implement?”¹⁰⁹ This question introduces a new variable into the discussion of narrative: strategy. Unlike the narrative analysts, the authors do not want to *study* narrative. Instead, they want to *create* one.¹¹⁰ The authors recognize the strategic capacity of stories, and they want to harness that capacity to motivate people. They want to create a narrative that synthesizes existing perceptions of reality and motivates people –employees, customers, investors— to act in certain ways. In other words, the authors isolate the capacity of a well-developed *strategic* narrative to be a vessel of change.

To complete their analysis, the authors rely primarily on a narrative structure developed and promoted by Victor Shklovsky, a narrative theorist of the Russian Formalist circle.¹¹¹ Barry and Elmes augment Shklovsky’s evaluative mechanisms¹¹² with another set of criteria: the materiality, voice, perspective, ordering, setting, and readership of the

¹⁰⁷ David Barry and Michael Elmes, “Strategy Retold: Toward a Narrative View of Strategic Discourse,” *Academy of Management Review* 22 no. 2 (1997): 429-452.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 446-448.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 433.

¹¹⁰ Many authors refer to this as a “counter-narrative.” See Molly Andrews, “Opening to the Original Contributions: Counter-narratives and the power to oppose,” in *Considering Counter-Narrative: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense*, edited by Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004): 1-6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 434.

¹¹² First, the credibility of the narrative; and second, the defamiliarization of the narrative. The basic idea is that the narrative must be believable, but that it cannot be so familiar that it does not draw some sort of attention to itself. *Ibid.*, 433.

narrative.¹¹³ According to the authors, the combination of these criteria allows the analyst to consider elements such as plot, narrator, audience, the length of the story, the literary devices contained within the story, and other elements that affect how a story is delivered and received. It is important to note, however, that the authors determine that the literary foundation of their analysis is not sufficient for their strategic purposes. Because the authors introduce alternative criteria, they make a subtle comment about the negative consequences of relying exclusively on literary criteria for narrative analysis in strategic settings.

Barry and Elmes also raise the issue of truth and fiction in strategic settings. They write that those who work with the strategic capacity of narrative have a tenuous relationship with truth and fiction: “strategists find themselves having to disguise the inherent fictionality of their stories.”¹¹⁴ This further illustrates the distinction between narratives that play strategic roles, such as myth and worldview, and those that play informative roles, like personal narratives. From the cut-and-dry realist literary perspective, strategic narratives are not necessarily truthful.¹¹⁵ They are honest in the sense that they present information in a way that is believable, familiar, and relational, but the information does not have a prerequisite of accurate representation of reality.¹¹⁶ This calls into question the concepts of *truthfulness* and *believability* as discussed by narrative analysts, as these criteria have different meanings in the strategic context. Strategic narratives influence how people interpret reality, which means they cannot be evaluated

¹¹³ Ibid., 435.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 434.

¹¹⁵ “Truth” here is a difficult word, because it can be read subjectively. In this particular context, I mean what is denotatively or empirically real or true, not what is perceived to be real or truthful.

¹¹⁶ Other scholars discuss this in greater depth. Shaul Shenhav, “Political Narratives and Political Reality,” *International Political Science Review* 27 no. 3: 245-262; Murray Edelman, “Political Language and Political Reality,” *PS* Winter 1985: 10-19.

with the same criteria that analysts use to understand narrative. This further connects strategic narrative to myth and, therefore, worldview. As discussed earlier, these three are strategic and cannot be accommodated by literary analysis. To better understand all three of these goal-oriented narratives, we must transfer to a more politically attentive mode of analysis: narrative policy analysis.

Narrative Policy Analysis

Policy analysis, the process through which policy options are evaluated and selected, is not immune to narrative analysis. Narrative policy analysts argue that policy can benefit from the way narratives carry content, because narratives bring information to the policy realm that cannot be quantified in scientific ways. This information might be about why groups support certain policies,¹¹⁷ why certain policies have succeeded or failed, how policies can be framed more effectively, or why there are such distinct or contradictory policy proposals.¹¹⁸ Narratives also create methods of inclusion that invite participation from those who have not traditionally been included in political discussions.¹¹⁹ Resembling stories we discuss in Chapter One, these narratives create relational understandings of the elements of a policy and incorporate information that may otherwise have been left unconsidered.

¹¹⁷ McBeth et al. write, "Competing policy narratives incorporate strategies such as identification of winners and losers, framing who benefits and who sustains costs in the policy conflict, the use of condensation symbols, the wrapping of issues in larger policy surrogates, and the use of scientific uncertainty." McBeth et al., "The Intersection of Narrative Policy Analysis and Policy Change Theory," *The Policy Studies Journal* 35 no. 1: 90.

¹¹⁸ Bridgman and Barry, "Regulation is evil," 143.

¹¹⁹ See, Cassiman, "Disaster Named Poverty," 52; Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis*; and Hampton, "Narrative policy analysis."

Narrative policy analysts think about the role of rhetorical elements in policy analysis and formation. They argue that the language contained in policies can reinforce or undermine popular stereotypes.¹²⁰ The language also frames information and tells populations how to think about problems and their solutions.¹²¹ According to the narrative policy analysts, other rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, synecdoche, associations, and allusions are also influential in the policy realm.¹²² In other words, policy is a hotbed of linguistic and rhetorical devices that can be used strategically to present information.

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have recognized the policy applications of narratives for several decades. The increasing prevalence of narrative analysis was contemporary to changes in the mainstream approach to policy analysis, which created an easy union between the two. As early as 1970, Harold Lasswell¹²³ critiqued the piecemeal construction of contemporary policy analysis.¹²⁴ Even though Lasswell does not explicitly mention narrative or narrative elements, later scholars who study narrative analysis in politics reference his work as a turning point in policy analysis.¹²⁵ Lasswell's attention to concepts such as conflict resolution, goals, and patterns opens the door for a more narrativist approach to policy analysis.

¹²⁰ Lisa Gring-Pemble, "Are We Going to Now Govern by Anecdote?: Rhetorical Constructions of Welfare Recipient in Congressional Hearings, Debates, and Legislation, 1992-1996," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87 no. 4 (2001). Shawn A. Cassiman, "Of Witches, Welfare Queens, and the Disaster Named Poverty: The Search for a Counter-Narrative," *Journal of Poverty* 10 no. 4 (2006), doi: 10.1300/J134v10n04_03.

¹²¹ Deborah A. Stone, *Policy Paradox and Political Reason* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1988): 108-226.

¹²² Lakoff, *More than Cool Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Stone, *Policy Paradox*.

¹²³ Widely quoted for his definition of politics as, "who gets what, when, and how."

¹²⁴ Harold D. Lasswell, "The Emerging Conception of the Policy Sciences," *Policy Sciences* 1: 3-14.

¹²⁵ See also Thomas J. Kaplan, "The Narrative Structure of Policy Analysis," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 5 (4): 71-778; Bridgman and Barry, "Regulation is Evil"; Roe, "Narrative Analysis for the Policy Analyst"; Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis*.

Other early thinkers in the field include Martin Kreiger¹²⁶ and Thomas J. Kaplan,¹²⁷ who published articles in the winter 1989 issue of *The Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. Both Kreiger and Kaplan “note and argue for the importance of stories and the telling of stories in policymaking.”¹²⁸ Krieger does this through a discussion of decisions. He argues that small decisions eventually pile up on each other to yield moments of more decisive change. Krieger suggests that each small decision is an “alternative ‘little’ story”¹²⁹ that potentially leads to a big decision. Big decisions, he writes, “require a disturbance of what may once have been comfortable, and an eventual reestablishment of order and comfort and natural expectations.”¹³⁰ In other words, big decisions are often understood by telling stories that draw upon smaller preliminary decisions. This relates to the two-tiered approach that some scholars bring to narrative analysis. Some label the distinction as a hierarchy of primary beliefs and political strategies, in which the political strategies develop in response to primary beliefs.¹³¹ Others approach this distinction as a debate between narrative and meta-narrative,¹³² in which case the smaller narratives represent the understandings that determine the meta-narrative of policy.¹³³ Narrative policy analysts argue that this two-tiered relationship of stories means that policy both responds to and influences societal understandings. The tiered narratives and the

¹²⁶ Martin H. Krieger, “Big Decisions and a Culture of Decisionmaking,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 5 (4): 779-797.

¹²⁷ Kaplan, “The Narrative Structure.”

¹²⁸ Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis*, 253.

¹²⁹ Krieger, “Big Decisions,” 782.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 783.

¹³¹ McBeth, et al, “Narrative Policy Analysis,” 89-90.

¹³² Bridgman and Barry, “Regulation is evil.”

¹³³ Even this meta-narrative can be conceived in a number of different ways. See Hampton, “Narrative policy analysis,” 232-234.

cumulative nature of their construction are important to contemporary approaches to narrative policy analysis.

Kaplan encourages a more direct focus on the role of narrative in policy analysis. He writes, “Stories meeting certain characteristics (truth, richness, consistency, congruency, and unity) can integrate necessary considerations, explain the development of current dilemmas, and point the way to resolutions.”¹³⁴ There are two important things to note about this statement. First, Kaplan offers a set of criteria with which to distinguish narratives that are “a vehicle for good policy analysis”¹³⁵ from those that are not. These criteria are quite similar to the criteria of believability, applicability, truthfulness, longevity, and coherence that the narrative analysts propose. Second, Kaplan states the unique ability for narrative to explain and mollify past policy dilemmas. He does this by comparing policy’s problems and solutions to narrative’s conflicts and resolutions. Ultimately, Kaplan argues that the world of policy analysis needs to move beyond outdated, rational structures of analysis to accommodate the clarifying and enriching capabilities of narrative analysis of policy. These early thinkers provide the groundwork from which later, more developed understandings of narrative evolve.

Emery Roe, who first published in response to the Kaplan-Krieger debate, is often credited with actually bringing narrative analysis into policy. Roe literally wrote the book on narrative policy analysis and is cited in nearly every case of narrative policy analysis I have encountered.¹³⁶ Though Roe recognizes the significance of stories to policy analysis, he contends that, “policy analysis should be broadened to include systematic ways of

¹³⁴ Kaplan, “The Narrative Structure,” 761.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 761.

¹³⁶ Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis*.

analyzing such storytelling.”¹³⁷ Instead of just assuming that narrative analysis will bring necessary insight into policy analysis, Roe wants to develop criteria with which to evaluate the meaning and significance of those stories. Whereas more rhetorical scholars generally explore the implications of a given narrative for political processes, Roe assumes that policy is a given and looks to narrative as a yet-untapped source of information that can enhance understandings of policy.

Before Roe explains the practical applications of narratives in policy, he makes several assertions about policy narratives:

- “Policy narratives are stories (scenarios and arguments) which underwrite and stabilize the assumptions for policymaking in situations that persist with many unknowns, a high degree of interdependence, and little, if any, agreement,”¹³⁸
- policy narratives have a, “beginning, middle, and end (or premises and conclusions, if cast as an argument) and revolve... around a sequence of events or positions in which something is said to happen or from which something is said to follow,”¹³⁹
- policy narratives persist once they catch on,¹⁴⁰ and
- “...policy narratives can be representationally inaccurate—and recognizably so—but still persist, indeed thrive. In fact, when one narrative more than any other becomes the way we best articulate our ‘real’ feelings or make sense of the uncertainties and ambiguities around us, then we are often willing to put up with that narrative, no matter how empirically objectionable it is in many other respects.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Roe, “Narrative Analysis for the Policy Analyst,” 253. Emphasis original.

¹³⁸ Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis*, 34.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴⁰ This is explained in the context of the Tragedy of the Commons. Roe provides a counterexample, wherein a community in Botswana is able to persist despite its unmanaged communal resources. Roe questions why this second story about communal territory does not replace the older story of the Tragedy of the Commons, concluding that, “As a policy narrative, the tragedy of the commons story continues to have considerable staying power, because these negative findings and critiques in no way dispel the chief virtue of the narrative... this one helps to underwrite and stabilize the assumptions for decision making...to understand what is going on and what must be done in lieu of more elaborate and demanding analysis.” *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

These points should be very familiar because of the discussions about stories and myths in the Chapter One. The first point suggests that political narratives help people understand the world, the second speaks to the organizational structure of a narrative, the third point references the longevity of a story, and the fourth point comments on the somewhat ambiguous relationship between narrative and truth. These points are closely related to the criteria that narrative analysts use to understand stories and, thus, links back to political myths.

Although Roe reflects points made by scholars of narrative and political myth, his conclusions have different implications when they are transposed to an entirely political context. This is particularly true of the last point, that policy narratives need *not* be “representationally accurate”. The question of representation is paramount to the plight of policy narratives. For a policy narrative to influence the policy process, it must be grounded in the real experiences of people; it must logically connect problems and solutions, and it cannot be so imbued with feelings that it compromises the empirical significance of a story. Empirically objectionable narratives can be relevant, but just because a narrative is relevant does not mean that it is effective. What people *think* happened, or how people *feel* about what happened is important, to be sure. However, those *thoughts* and *feelings* should not overshadow what *actually* happened. The challenge, therefore, is to develop a political narrative that is representational of both experienced reality and perceived reality.¹⁴²

This speaks to the questions about power and practicality that affect MPA. So far, our dilemma posits practical concerns such as timelines and resources against the rewards

¹⁴² See Shenhav, 245. Shaul Shenhav discusses this dilemma as the need to evaluate, “how faithfully political narratives represent ‘political reality’” and draws on language familiar to earlier discussions of myth and worldview while making his argument. Also see Edelman, “Political Language and Political Reality.”

and demands of an abstract process such as worldview development. This is simplified to read as a tension between practical and idealistic visions for organizing. Another element of this dilemma, as we discuss in Chapter One, is the relationship between the membership and the organization: organizations may advance a narrative that accommodates the practical realities of political organizing, even if this means the worldview is less directly informed by the membership.

The leadership-membership tension and the practical-ideal organizing tension can also be explained in the context of perceived and experienced reality. Both the membership and leadership of MPA operate under perceived and experienced realities. In some ways, MPA mediates the experienced reality: timelines, upcoming legislation, and the electoral scene that inevitably inform the organization's political activities. Perceived reality, therefore, can be characterized as the conglomeration of stories or policy proposals that are put forward or demanded by the membership. This suggests the extent to which perceived reality may be idealistic or, at least, not completely bounded by the parameters of feasibility, and re-characterizes the question of worldview development to be a tension between alternate interpretations of the same reality.

At the same time, MPA is not immune to operating under perceived realities: What MPA prioritizes as a solution to poverty, for example, might not address the problem that the people perceive, but the organization can "push" its perceived reality over the experienced reality of the membership. The dynamic also goes the other way: people may perceive that MPA does not pay attention to certain policy issues, whereas the experienced reality may be that MPA was unable to incite change despite having organized daily lobbying at the capitol. In this case, people may interpret MPA as not caring, when the lack

of action was actually due to limited resources for more extended campaigns. Because there are so many ways to interpret situations, power dynamics and practicality are just two tensions that inform perceived and experienced realities. This only complicates the plight for narrative development: how can MPA develop a coherent worldview despite the multiplicity of interpretations and their tenuous relationship with representation?

Roe proposes metanarratives¹⁴³ as a solution to situations when perceived and experienced realities do not align. In short, metanarratives can ameliorate the tensions that develop when there is not enough evidence to objectively demonstrate the superiority of one policy option over another. Roe defines the metanarrative as “the candidate for a new policy narrative that underwrites and stabilizes the assumptions for decision making on an issue whose current policy narratives are so conflicting as to paralyze decision making.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, the metanarrative proposes an alternate framework through which to see the problem and potential solutions. Because it creates space for alternative interpretations, it solves the stagnation of uncertainty that two extremely polarized policy positions create.¹⁴⁵

There are four basic steps to the development of this metanarrative. First, the analyst must identify a situation that has multiple explanatory narratives that are “taken by one or more parties to the controversy as underwriting ... and stabilizing... the assumptions for policymaking in the face of the issue’s uncertainty, complexity, or polarization.”¹⁴⁶ Second, the analyst must identify which of the stories is the counternarrative or non-story

¹⁴³ Note that this metanarrative is not the same as the grand narrative or meta-narratives referenced earlier in this chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis*, 4.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

that only exists in contrast to the dominant story. Third, the analyst must compare the stories to the non-stories to isolate space for the metanarrative, which can be understood as an alternative argument. Finally, the analyst must assess “if or how the metanarrative,... recasts the issue in such a way as to make it more amenable to decision and policymaking.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, the analyst must determine how the metanarrative displaces the original conception of the problem and solution to transcend the paralysis of uncertainty. Although Roe uses several case studies to address the metanarrative process, his cases are not perfect examples of this four-step model, which raises some questions about the practical applicability of the method. Ultimately, the takeaway from this analysis is that policy analysts ought to use a narrative approach to compare contradictory policy positions. This creates the possibility of bringing narrative into the policy realm.

The question then becomes how to present a clear problem and solution when they have a varied relationship with reality and perceptions. Given the fluidity of truthfulness and representation of a policy narrative, defining problems and presenting solutions relies on the goals the storyteller wishes to accomplish. This brings us to a membership-leadership tension in the context of interpretation. Who determines what qualifies as a legitimate problem or a viable solution? What are the goals that underscore those decisions? These are about interpretation: What understanding of reality will determine the problems and solutions that are worth arguing? Who develops that understanding? In many ways, these are the same questions that often stagnate scholars of worldview, collective action frames, and political myth: Who decides? Who creates the story?

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

Even though we have brought narrative and policy together, the relationship between the two is still not clear. Metanarrative has potential to ameliorate some of the challenges of worldview development, but it does not fully address the membership-leadership tension or the tension of practical versus ideal organizing. To move forward from this muddle, we need to learn more about defining problems, proposing solutions, and developing strategic interpretations. To do this, we must translate this discussion to an even more political context: policymaking.

Community-Conscious Policymaking

Deborah Stone addresses the questions of power and practicality through a distinct understanding of policymaking. To begin, Stone assumes that paradoxes are implicit to politics. Sometimes, the political community cannot logically define problems and proposes policies whose solutions are not related to the problem. Other times, policies create rules that do not actually solve problems, and on still other occasions, policies create secondary problems that are more troublesome or persistent than the issue they were initially designed to address. Stone explains these policy shortcomings as the result of a model of political analysis that overlooks essential producers of information. To remedy this discrepancy, Stone develops an alternative mode of analysis that prioritizes community story-sharing and interpretation.¹⁴⁸

Stone presents the community as a powerful producer of information. This idea informs the entire first chapter of Stone's book. In this discussion, Stone rejects the market

¹⁴⁸ Stone writes, "In sum, then *Policy Paradox* aims to craft and teach a kind of political analysis that cherishes the richness and diversity of the human mind, that values politics and community, and that renders more visible the political claims underlying what is usually passed off as scientific truth." Stone, *Policy Paradox*, xii.

as the most important actor in politics. She writes, “Because politics and policy can happen only in communities, community must be the starting point of our polis. Public policy is about communities trying to achieve something as communities.”¹⁴⁹ Stone’s commitment to the community approach leads to discussions about membership, public interest, cooperation, loyalty, information, and power. It creates an alternative to self-interested, rational thinkers who care about their individual well-being more than the well-being of their neighbors. This becomes essential to later sections of the text, where Stone analyzes the goals that inform how people and groups prioritize policy decisions. By understanding that the polis “is a community, or perhaps multiple communities, with ideas, images, will, and effort quite apart from individual goals and behavior,”¹⁵⁰ Stone illustrates the viability of multiple conceptions of what it means for something to be equal, efficient, secure, or free. She defends the legitimacy of the collective as a producer and interpreter of information, which is related to previous questions about power and perceptions.

According to Stone, stories provide ample opportunities for political analysis and information sharing. Stone dedicates the majority of a chapter, “Symbols,” to discussing the variety of ways in which literary tropes augment political analysis. Narrative stories, she writes, “provide explanations of how the world works.”¹⁵¹ Policy problems, “have heroes and villains and innocent victims, and they pit the forces of evil against the forces of good.”¹⁵² Stone also argues that politicians frequently use a variety of stories to position themselves in relation to policy problems.¹⁵³ According to Stone, “Policy stories use many

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 137.

¹⁵² Ibid., 138.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 139-144.

literary and rhetorical devices to lead the audience ineluctably to a course of action. They have good guys and bad guys, even though nonhuman entities may be cast in these roles, and they have a moment of triumph.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, policy stories relate important actors to one another, present information in strategic ways, and help explain politics. By now, these assertions about the capacity of narrative are not new. What should be noted is that Stone is not a literary critic or a scholar of narrative. Instead, she is a political thinker who arrives at narrative as a way to enhance understandings of politics. She relates political problems and policy solutions to one another through conflict analysis, and she discusses those who influence the policy process through character analysis. Stone essentially translates the policy discussion into literary terms, which legitimizes the use of narrative as a tool for understanding politics

Last, but not least, Stone argues that interpretation is an essential element of political activity. She defines politics as the “struggle over ideas.”¹⁵⁵ It follows, then, that “politics is driven by how people interpret information, [and] much political activity is an effort to control interpretations.”¹⁵⁶ In many ways, this claim provides the ground for her entire inquiry, as it justifies her extensive discussion of goals, the ways goals are interpreted, and the solutions people propose to overcome discrepancies between the ideal and experienced realities. It is this observation that leads Stone to the following conclusion,

[There] is no universal, scientific, or objective method of problem definition. Problems are defined in politics, and political actors make use of several different methods, or languages, of problem definition... to become fluent in these languages is to learn to see problems from multiple perspectives and to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 145.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 28.

identify the assumptions about both facts and values that political definitions don't usually make explicit.¹⁵⁷

This conclusion speaks to the importance of the previous two points: first, the community is an essential contributor to problem definition; and second, problem definition can happen through stories. Combining these two points yields an important, albeit fairly simple, observation about interpretation: people interpret situations in different ways. Those varied interpretations matter because, as we saw through the previous discussion of narrative policy analysis, interpretations influence how people act.

Stone's conclusions meld nicely with both observations by the narrative policy analysts and implications of central question of this inquiry. Stone values the multiplicity of ideas, experiences, and interpretations that make politics and complicate tensions such as power and practicality. If we take her assumptions about the value of community interpretation to the metanarrative model, we can envision an effective way to develop worldview while navigating the tensions of the previous chapter.

Revisiting the Question

The challenge of worldview development is to move past the tensions of power and practicality into the thoughts, experiences, and opinions that inform the perceived and experienced realities that generate those two tensions to begin with. MPA wants a worldview, which is a big or overarching narrative that informs the work the group does as an organization. MPA also wants to stay connected to its constituents and develop a narrative that accurately reflects the lives and experiences of its members. Above all else,

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 134-135.

however, that narrative must be effective. It must have traction, it must influence the way people see and experience the world, it must persist, and it must expand to encompass new policy problems and solutions in the future. Throughout all of this work on worldview, MPA must also stay committed to the direct action that accomplishes real political gains through the first face of power. So far, we have explored this as a tension that exists between membership and leadership, the idealistic and the practical, and perceived and experienced realities. Gracefully accommodating these tensions will not happen by accident. If MPA wants a worldview that is both effective and representative, they must design it. One way to get there is by repositioning political narratives in a way that echoes Roe's metanarrative model and pays heed to Stone's assessment about the validity of community interpretation. This creates the community metanarrative.

The first step of metanarrative development is to identify policy narratives that propose opposing solutions to a policy problem. Looking at MPA, however, it is clear that uncertainty also arises from situations that are less directly oppositional. In MPA, people do not all tell the same story, but the stories people tell are not necessarily in opposition with each other. As Stone discusses throughout her text, people characterize similar issues in different ways. This leads individuals to identify slightly different problems, root causes, and solutions. The consequence of the varied interpretations is that individual stories for progressive change are not united behind anything more explicit than a call for justice, which is a cause so broad that it lacks any real significance. Although the stories told at and by MPA are not necessarily controversial and the members often have complementary perspectives, the collection of interpretations is not a coherent whole. The community

metanarrative accommodates the value and diversity of those interpretations, so it begins with the simple act of collecting stories.

The second step of the community metanarrative is to identify the relationships that exist between stories. This means finding overlap and tensions between the stories to generate conversations between the commonalities. Some stories elaborate about consequences, some propose alternative solutions, and some link people to problems in new ways. As Stone discusses, the multiplicity of interpretations that people develop from a single situation means there is a variety of ways in which to relate stories to one another. Her discussion of symbols, numbers, causes, interests, and decisions illustrates the breadth of approaches that can be used to find comparable elements of seemingly distinct stories. This step creates the opportunity to use those tools to identify the similarities between existing interpretations of the world.

The third step of the community metanarrative is to develop a coherent organizational narrative from the analyses of the first two steps. This means building on the relationships identified in the previous step to arrive at a more encompassing story that the organization can tell about its membership, leadership, and plans for political change. This means incorporating the individual stories of its members into a single, cohesive policy narrative.

The fourth step of the community metanarrative is deployment, which addresses the question MPA originally asked about narrative shifting. The basic idea is that the internal policy narrative developed in the first three steps can be presented to the public sphere as a foil to the policy narrative of the conservative Right. This speaks to the two tiers of narrative that the community metanarrative process accommodates: First, there is

the narrative that transcends the multiplicity of stories told by supporters of a progressive ideology. Second, there is the narrative that exists on a policy-level and positions MPA as a progressive organization in public space. This second tier is akin to the worldview of community organizers, the collective action frames of the social movement framing theorists, the political myth of political rhetoricians, the grand narratives of the narrative analysts, and the policies of policy analysts. The community metanarrative (read: solution to the ambiguity of varied approaches and understandings as expressed by MPA members) will be successful if it becomes a worldview, collective action frame, grand narrative, or policy (read: encompassing story that frames the work of a progressive organization in the face of strong political opposition). Both tiers are essential to the attainment of progressive political change, but my focus is largely on the former challenge. MPA must develop organizational consistency before it can present its cohesive narrative as one that will affect political change

To summarize, the community metanarrative process facilitates the development of a narrative because it capitalizes on rich accumulations of individual stories that have not been consolidated to meet their potential. Community metanarrative is a way to combine the interests of the organization with the stories of the people; they are not contradictory but just have not yet been aligned. This is the ideal way for people, especially those who are members of a single group and therefore share some of the same core values, to move past the uncertainty of multiple stories into a coherent narrative. This process also honors the source of the information and experiences (the people) and strives to be representationally accurate. The fact remains that MPA is not particularly interested in a worldview development process that requires direct and extended attention to activities that do not

accomplish direct political gains. Luckily, the community metanarrative provides a language with which to address important steps of narrative development, and it is wholly applicable to the policy settings in which MPA proposes simultaneous direct action and worldview development.

At this point, it makes sense to explore the extent to which MPA already organizes activities that emanate some of the steps of the community metanarrative model. Are there opportunities for sharing stories in MPA's campaigns? Do members have the chance to develop their own understandings of legislation and policy, or does MPA tell people how they should interpret information? Do members talk with each other about the similarities between their experiences and beliefs? Are group understandings created from discussion, or is there a preexisting understanding with which individuals align?

To explore these questions, we return to policymaking. According to MPA and our previous study of the tensions between power and practicality, policy is the natural forum in which to combine worldview development and direct action. Perhaps there is less of a gap between worldview attentive activities and direct political action when we consider policy as an impetus for conversations about beliefs, experiences, goals, and values. Perhaps slightly amplified attention to worldview development in the context of those policy-oriented activities would generate the conversations that are necessary for worldview development. We consider these questions alongside our ultimate question about the practicality of worldview development in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Maine People’s Alliance Organizes on Narrative

Before engaging in a more thorough discussion of how the community metanarrative model interfaces with the work MPA plans to do on worldview, we need a better understanding of how MPA has organized around issues of narrative in the past. To that end, this chapter has two main parts. The first two sections address MPA’s work with narrative before I began working with them in the fall of 2011. The remaining three sections outline the collaborative projects that MPA and I used to link direct action and worldview development in the context of the 2012 Maine State Legislative Session. Studying these activities not only provides concrete examples of the three tensions of power, practicality, and perceptions that complicate narrative development, but also illustrates some of the tactics MPA has used to get past those tensions.

Early work with Narrative

Scholarly activists and activist scholars such as Saul Alinsky, Amartya Sen, Iris Marion Young, and George Lakoff are familiar names to many community organizers, and many MPA organizers¹⁵⁸ fill their shelves with work by these authors. MPA staff organized around these authors’ ideas well before working with the Grassroots Policy Project (GPP) in 2003. Since then, the three faces of power¹⁵⁹ have been intertwined with MPA’s organizing strategies. Although MPA did not adopt GPP’s language until 2003, the

¹⁵⁸ The terms “organizer” implies a paid staff position at MPA.

¹⁵⁹ Recall that the first face of power is direct political action, the second face is building organizational capacity, and the third face is shifting worldview.

organization has long-since organized around ideas that are consistent with the ideas that constitute the three faces of power.

One of the most evident examples of this phenomenon is MPA’s criteria for campaign selection. These criteria, adopted in 1998 and revised in 2000, comprise of a list of questions that organizers and volunteers ask about potential campaigns. As illustrated by Table 3.1, most of these questions align with the three faces of power.

Table 3.1. Criteria in which to consider an MPA campaign¹⁶⁰

	Campaign Criteria	Face of Power
1	How does it build the organization?	Second
2	Will it attract new members?	Second
3	How will it increase our power (members, organizational stature, resources it might bring, etc.)?	Second
4	Does the goal of the campaign advance a solution? How many people will it affect? What is the prospect of the people who might benefit from the resolution of the problem joining MPA to fight for the solution?	First, Second
5	How is corporate power working against people on this issue and how do we expose it?	Third
6	What issues are involved with money and politics and how can we expose them?	Third
7	What publicity can we generate through the campaign? a) our own mechanisms (<i>The Alliance</i>) ¹⁶¹ b) mainstream media c) creating our own media	
8	What financial resources will be required?	
9	What will be the human resource requirements?	
10	Is there interest at the local chapter level?	
11	Is the project consistent with MPA’s goals?	Third

There are a couple of important observations about the alignment between the campaign selection criteria and the faces of power. The first face of power, direct action, is

¹⁶⁰ Maine People’s Alliance, “Criteria in which to Consider a MPA Campaign,” July 2000. Unpublished.

¹⁶¹ *The Alliance* is MPA’s organizational newspaper, which is published quarterly.

represented by the fourth question.¹⁶² The second face, building institutional power, is well-represented by a number of questions that assess volunteer bases, building power, and building infrastructure. This relationship illustrates the historic prominence of infrastructure-related activities in organizations like MPA.

This discussion gets more interesting when we turn to the criteria that relate to the third face of power. What we see with the third face is that MPA already has an idea about different relationships it wants to build between ideas such as money, politics, and corporations. This begins to suggest the power component of the question I ask with MPA about developing narrative: MPA clearly has an ideology as an organization and subscribes to progressive goals, but it still has a strong relationship with its membership and wants campaigns to be very people-driven. What is the best way to make sure that a narrative or worldview is co-developed and representative, as opposed to put forward by an organization that has clear conceptions of its political goals? What is the relationship between the membership and the leadership?

Another important observation is in the campaign criteria that do not fully align with any of the three faces of power. These criteria relate to important questions about practicality. The number of available volunteers, the depth of financial resources, and the general interest of each of the chapter areas inform the success of any campaign. The three faces of power do not accommodate these questions of practicality, which suggests the inability of the model to address one of the central tensions of worldview development.

¹⁶² This particular question, about whether or not the campaign has a particular solution to a particular problem, links to observations by Stone in Chapter Two about the challenge of defining problems, solutions, and goals.

I conclude this section with several observations. First, MPA prioritized elements of the three faces of power before they were formally introduced to the model in 2003. This suggests that the elements of the GPP model represent many of the ideas that drive community organizing groups. Second, the consistency in MPA's approach also shows that ideas persist. Once a model is institutionalized, it will likely be hard to overturn. This is a theme that we see with political myth and other political narratives, but it is also applicable to strategies of community organizing. Third, MPA has a history of thinking about its organizational goals in the context of direct action, infrastructure building, and worldview shifting. From this observation we can conclude that categorized thinking helps advocacy groups mobilize and organize. These observations also illustrate the relevance of the challenges of power and practicality that are endemic to the organizing strategies of MPA while suggesting that sole reliance on the three faces of power may not be the best way to address the challenge of worldview development.

Current Approaches to Worldview

Since 2003, MPA has intentionally incorporated the three faces of power into many aspects of its organization. The three faces are used to inform campaign development, drive group discussions about campaigns, describe volunteer positions, and train staff. MPA expects developed volunteers and organizers to understand the three faces of power so that they are effective in their communication with other political organizations, campaign volunteers, and new members.¹⁶³ MPA also trains field canvassers to present issues in ways

¹⁶³ "Member Organizers... understand... all three 'faces of power.'" Maine People's Alliance, "MPA SCIF Proposal," October 28, 2011: 3. Unpublished. Emphasis original.

that link to all three faces of power in one conversation. This is challenging to do effectively, as MPA Associate Director Amy Halsted notes: “How do canvassers talk about one issue, its problem and its solution, while also talking about what’s wrong with society and taking back our democracy?”¹⁶⁴ With this challenge mind, MPA has a number of strategies for emphasizing worldview through both messaging and campaign design.

MPA staff and volunteers use specific messaging techniques when interacting with people who do not actively support a progressive worldview. Following the conclusions of various scholars discussed in earlier chapters, MPA organizers believe that presenting information in a consistent framework facilitates the development of an influential worldview. When responding to opposing arguments, MPA volunteers put forward values, as opposed to facts, because they are easier to transfer between individual campaigns. Consistent with conclusions by Lakoff, Sen, and Alinsky, MPA organizers are also attentive to language. Organizers try to use words that do not signify opposing messages, and they find ways to acknowledge opposing views without appearing to agree with them.¹⁶⁵ All of these strategies aim to create space for alternative (in this case, progressive) understandings of contemporary issues and campaigns. That said, messaging is not as simple as this brief analysis suggests. As we see Deborah Stone’s discussion of ideas and goals, there are countless elements that inform how people and organizations transmit and interpret information. MPA attends to messaging so that it can control how recipients interpret information and, hopefully, reinforce a progressive worldview.

¹⁶⁴ Amy Halsted, Personal Communication, November 15, 2011.

¹⁶⁵ Maine People’s Alliance, “Responding to ‘their’ arguments using ‘our’ values: A check list for good messaging,” May 30, 2008. Unpublished.

MPA also engages the three faces of power in the development of specific campaigns, as illustrated by the organization's 2008 campaign for Single-Payer Healthcare. In an explanation of this campaign's methods, MPA writes that "All of the campaigns we are part of help us build power in each of the three faces to win this goal [of single payer health care in Maine]." ¹⁶⁶ This statement suggests two things. First, the organizers think about the three faces of power and use the model to frame their campaigns. This means that the three faces of power are a powerful organizing tool. Second, individual campaigns often benefit from the outcomes of previous campaigns that follow the three faces of power. The three faces of power create an organizational infrastructure that allows MPA to work on a variety of issues and transfer worldview ideas from one campaign to another.

During the Single-Payer Healthcare campaign, MPA related each of its various campaign activities to one of the three faces of power (see Table 3.2). According to this table, activities like in-district meetings facilitate direct action, whereas canvassing and leadership development build the organization's infrastructure. Conducting thousands of person-to-person conversations, teaching framing and messaging strategies at retreats, and getting people excited about change facilitates the third face of power, worldview shifting. ¹⁶⁷ In the Single-Payer campaign, infrastructure development and direct action were the most emphasized priorities. MPA felt that this was the best way to increase turnout, build coalitions, and create opportunities for intentionally-framed conversations.

¹⁶⁶ Maine People's Alliance, "Our Health Care Activities and the 3 Faces of Power," December 6, 2008. Unpublished.

¹⁶⁷ Maine People's Alliance, "Our Health Care Activities."

This observation suggests that MPA approaches worldview shifting as a consequence of good organizing on the first two faces.¹⁶⁸ For example, according to Table 3.2, the voter registration drives are an element of direct political action even though they generate worldview-attentive conversations. The same can be said of candidate endorsement: though a good election result is a gain in the first face of power, the election process generates new language and conversations about values in politics and, thus, could shift worldview. Though it is easiest to see how the activities in the lower faces link up the scale to higher faces, there are also activities that go in the other direction. Issue framing helps build membership and register voters, which links the third face back to the first face. Because of this, we can conclude that there is inevitable fluidity between the three faces and that not one of them is unaffected by organizing that obviously links to one of the other three faces.

To summarize, MPA has generally focused most directly on the first and second faces of power. This illustrates that limited resources (time, money, people) require organizations to prioritize their activities. When meetings need to be held, legislators need to be swayed, and voters need to be registered, it makes sense that organizations focus on the more direct or immediate political gains. This further illustrates the challenge of practicality that MPA faces in its worldview work, as the organization operates in a changing political environment that requires constant attention to direct action.

¹⁶⁸ Recall that this is consistent with Sen's assessment of infrastructure development.

Table 3.2 MPA, Single-Payer Healthcare, and the Three Faces of Power.¹⁶⁹

Three Faces of Power	How our activities build power for single-payer in Maine
<p><i>First Face: Immediate Political Gains</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to win issue campaigns • Helping candidates get elected to office • Taking legal action • Engaging in direct action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping candidates who share our goals on health care get elected through Campaign Vote! • In-district meetings with legislators • Making policy changes through Maine Voices for Coverage that will bring us incrementally closer to getting single payer • Canvasses and chapters doing voter registration and GOTV • Rallying against Anthem for HCAN
<p><i>Second Face: Building Infrastructure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building sustained membership involvement and organizing people for collective action • Developing leaders who can guide our organizations and coalitions • Identifying and developing candidates for public office • Building and maintaining coalitions, and alliances • Seeking to expand the political agenda, bringing in new constituencies to help develop and support a bold, new progressive agenda that unites different issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvasses building membership, identifying hot contacts and raising funds for our work • Small business surveys to identify new leaders • Leadership development in the chapters • New members recruited and better name recognition because of the canvasses • Working in coalition through Maine Voices for Coverage • Building a broad coalition around health care and racial justice issues for HCAN • Building a network of small business owners • Developing relationships with Mila Kofman, Rep. Brautigam, Congressional delegation and other leaders on health care • Developing relationships with organizations that work on health care quality • Leading HCAN in Maine builds MPA’s leadership
<p><i>Third Face - Shifting Worldview</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaping ideas and the way people make sense of what they see and hear. • Linking work in the shorter term to a broader vision and long-term goals • Challenging the current dominant worldview’s emphasis on rugged individualism, competition and limited role of government • Framing our issues with common progressive themes, so they are integrated together and reflect an alternative worldview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canvasses talking to thousands of people each night about single-payer and tapping into people’s desire for change • Bringing insurance company practices and outrageous profits to the public’s attention through HCAN • Developing a long-term policy agenda that fits our worldview through Maine Voices for Coverage • Trainings on worldview, framing and messaging at retreats, chapter meetings, one-on-one and in the HCSC • Framing all our issues, including health care, with community values to reinforce and strengthen our worldview • Promoting a strong role for government in all our issues • Canvasses agitating and building people’s desire for change, and showing members that they are part of something big!

¹⁶⁹ Maine People’s Alliance, “Our Health Care Activities,” 2.

That said, MPA has done a fair amount of work that speaks directly to the third face of power, shifting worldview. This is most evident in “A Guide to Framing Our Issues Using Our Values,”¹⁷⁰ a volunteer manual that MPA published in 2008. MPA opens the manual with an accessible discussion about language. MPA rejects common beliefs that are often expressed through clichés, classifying such phrases as barriers to real progressive change since they do not recognize political problems in solution-oriented ways.¹⁷¹

MPA builds on the discussion of language to assess the factors that motivate people to take action. These factors are consistent with some of the observations of social movement framing theorists and allow MPA to introduce worldview as, “the collections of beliefs, norms, value systems, popular wisdom, folkways and traditions that people draw upon to help them make sense of the world around them.”¹⁷² From here, MPA lists common themes of conservative and progressive worldviews,¹⁷³ discusses how broader concepts or “chunks of worldview”¹⁷⁴ appeal to constituents and link between topics, and introduces frames as a way to use progressive values and goals to talk about complicated issues.

The content of the manual became the foundation of a two-hour worldview exercise at the 2008 spring retreat.¹⁷⁵ During the workshop, MPA members participated in small-group brainstorms about clichéd sayings that, as the manual discusses, prevent people

¹⁷⁰ Maine People’s Alliance with the Grassroots Policy Project, “Maine People’s Alliance Worldview: A Reading. A Guide to Framing Our Issues Using Our Values,” 2008. Unpublished.

¹⁷¹ Some of these include “Money talks,” “Poverty will always be with us,” and “You can’t fight City Hall.” This speaks to Stone’s concerns about identification of root causes and how people express or interpret problems, which I discuss in Chapter Four. Maine People’s Alliance with the Grassroots Policy Project, “Maine People’s Alliance Worldview,” 2.

¹⁷² Maine People’s Alliance with the Grassroots Policy Project, “Maine People’s Alliance Worldview,” 3.

¹⁷³ Conservative themes include hyper-individualism, anti-government, competition and the market. Progressive themes include democracy, personal autonomy and development, social justice, family, community, society, hope, and equality, among other things. Maine People’s Alliance with the Grassroots Policy Project, “Maine People’s Alliance Worldview,” 3-4.

¹⁷⁴ Maine People’s Alliance with the Grassroots Policy Project, “Maine People’s Alliance Worldview,” 3.

¹⁷⁵ Maine People’s Alliance, “Maine People’s Alliance 2008 Spring Retreat: Worldview / Community Values Exercise,” May 16, 2008. Unpublished.

from believing they can effect change. A story exercise followed, during which MPA members looked at different ways of framing a single news story to change the problem, its cause, and its solution. This activity encouraged members to think about the ways in which frames influence how information is conveyed and interpreted. The workshop closed with a brainstorm of values and themes that progressives can apply to issues such as income taxes, immigration, healthcare, and subsidized housing that often have conservative spins. Ultimately, the workshop encouraged MPA staff and members to think about how they deliver or explain their positions to a constituency that is used to hearing narratives that are framed through conservative values.

This workshop illustrates the variety of ways in which MPA has engaged its membership with worldview. MPA approaches worldview shifting as one of the three faces of power that informs its work as an organization, and it organizes campaigns with attention to each of the three faces. That said, there is a gap between the worldview that MPA uses and the worldview that MPA *wants* to use to shift the political climate. MPA staff and volunteers talk about rich corporations that take money from hardworking individuals, people who do not pay their fair share of taxes, legislators who do not respond to the interests of their constituents, and families who are cut from MaineCare and other state benefits. Historically, MPA pairs different aspects of these stories with personal stories about hardship to sway politicians, raise public awareness, and effect change.

Despite this work with narrative, MPA does not yet have what it considers a strong progressive narrative. This can be explained by any number of things, including the challenge to organize people, the pace of politics, the tendency for unanticipated situations

to arise and demand attention, and the limitations to human and financial resources. The question, then, is how MPA can develop a worldview *in spite of* those practical constraints.

When I came to MPA in 2011, the organization hardly blinked an eye before putting forward the question of narrative. MPA is dedicated to progressive change and worldview development, but, like many non-profit organizations, it lacks the human capital with which to pursue research or develop new approaches to old ideas. My work with MPA is brief and by no means a single solution to the question of narrative development. Instead, this is a critical inquiry into the state of narrative within MPA. It is an opportunity to explore alternative approaches to narrative and to see what MPA is capable of, all the while responding to questions of power, practicality, and perceptions. Over the course of my time with MPA, I co-developed three activities with an eye to narrative. The first was a workshop at the annual December retreat, the second was a door-to-door survey to generate conversations with Mainers about the state of Maine politics, and the third was a series of follow-up meetings and conversations with “hot contacts”¹⁷⁶ that volunteers identified during the canvass.

Workshop

My work with MPA began with preparing for an annual retreat the organization uses to build relationships among members for the 2012 political season. The retreat kicked off on Saturday morning in December with an exciting direct action: MPA Organizers led about 60 retreat participants in a rally at Governor LePage’s mansion to

¹⁷⁶ The term, “hot contacts” denotes newly-identified individuals who have an expressed interest in or are directly affected by contemporary political campaigns. They are generally contacted by organizers, who try to get them involved in upcoming campaigns.

protest potential cuts to jobless benefits. In an unexpected show of the organization's political influence, three MPA members who spoke at the rally were invited to a closed meeting with Governor LePage. The meeting was a major achievement for MPA, because it had been trying to set up a conversation with the Governor for months. The excitement of the morning's action set the stage for the rest of the retreat, which was a jam-packed weekend of campaign organizing, relationship building, celebration, and reflection. There were regional break-out sessions, de-briefings about current and recent campaigns, information sessions on current legislation, a presentation about MPA's three-year plan, board elections, and the work I led on worldview and narrative. The retreat was not only the first opportunity I had to work directly with staff and members on the concept of narrative, but it was also a chance for the organization to revisit narrative-related work it had done in the past. As the schedule for the retreat came together, MPA decided that the first formal group workshop would be about narrative, as this would create a language and framework through which to approach the remaining elements of the weekend.

The narrative workshop was a key part of the opening session and reminded the group about the importance of framing for the rest of the retreat. In the days leading up to the retreat, Ben Chin, MPA's Director of Political Engagement, and I developed a multi-media presentation about narrative.¹⁷⁷ The presentation was designed to encourage participation and group discussion about narrative. To facilitate this goal, Ben and I found several campaign ads that illustrated both effective and ineffective messaging strategies. We watched and analyzed the videos as a group after opening the workshop with some background information about the importance of narrative.

¹⁷⁷ See Appendix C for a reproduction of the narrative component of this PowerPoint.

The workshop began with a discussion of values. We started with a brainstorm of progressive values, which yielded responses such as “community,” “fairness,” “inclusion,” “family,” and “caring for the next generation.” As a foil to this brainstorm, we also talked about some conservative values. This brainstorm was obviously skewed by the progressive bias of the participants, but some of the responses included “individualism,” “capitalism,” “freedom,” and “family.” As we had anticipated, there was some similarity in the list of values that the group generated for the two political perspectives. With this in mind, we discussed the challenge to differentiate between progressive and conservative conceptions of the same values, such as “freedom” and “family.”

This led directly into a more pointed discussion of narrative, as I explained that narrative is one way to discuss different interpretations of political values, relationships, and situations.¹⁷⁸ We defined narrative as a story that conveys values by talking about “good guys” and “bad guys” who struggle over a conflict to ultimately find a solution. We used this framework to evaluate several different campaign ads that Ben and I had selected the prior to the retreat.¹⁷⁹ We simplified the group analysis of these narratives three basic steps. First, we asked about the characters: Who are the “good guys”? Who are the “bad guys”? Then we asked about the story: What is the problem? What is the solution? Finally, we linked the characters to the story elements to see what the narrative implied about the role of the good guys and bad guys in creating and solving the problem. This provided opportunities for participation and group brainstorms, both of which MPA recognizes as important organizing techniques.

¹⁷⁸ Stone discusses interpretations at great length, which we return to in the next chapter.

¹⁷⁹ See Appendix D for transcriptions of the narration, text, imagery of the ads.

The first ad was produced by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in response to healthcare legislation proposed in 2009.¹⁸⁰ The ad begins with a narrator who is concerned about the unemployment rate, the economic hurdles faced by small businesses, and the likelihood that “Congress’s latest healthcare bill makes a tough economy worse.”¹⁸¹ Throughout the ad, there are images of poorly lit conference rooms filled with worried employees, spreadsheets with concerning numbers, and strategic statistics that emphasize the hopelessness of the economic situation. The ad closes with a plea to call Senators Snowe and Collins to tell them, “We can’t afford this healthcare bill.”¹⁸²

Following the screening of the ad, we had a lively group discussion informed by the simple framework described, above. We decided that the “good guys” are small businesses and employees, and the “bad guys” are not very well developed. The government is the implied opposing force throughout the ad, and the group talked about how the narrative would have been stronger if the opposing party had been clearer. The ad expresses a fairly clear problem: the U.S. has a bad economy, and the government wants to raise taxes so it can spend money in irresponsible ways. The solution, which was also fairly obvious, is to prevent healthcare reform. Overall, this first analysis went quite well. The members responded well to the distinction between characters and conflicts, and they participated more enthusiastically than we had expected. Ben and I had developed an alternative route for the workshop in case the first round of analysis did not go well, but the audience was interested and engaged, so we continued on to the second ad, as planned.

¹⁸⁰ U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “Employers for a Health Economy – Struggling,” December 23, 2009. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-TA9iTwy3s>.

¹⁸¹ U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “Employers for a Health Economy.”

¹⁸² U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “Employers for a Health Economy.”

Republican Sharron Angle produced the second ad in her Tea Party endorsed campaign for the U.S. Senate seat in Nevada.¹⁸³ Titled “Best Friend,” the ad is a direct attack against Democrat Harry Reid and his position on immigration legislation. The ad opens with a video of several dark-skinned men walking along a fence in the dark of night, which the producers use as a contrast to embedded videos of a light-skinned family and several light-skinned construction workers. The narrator threatens, “Illegals sneaking across our border, putting America’s safety and jobs at risk [sic].”¹⁸⁴ According to the ad, Harry Reid is “the best friend an illegal alien ever had” and, therefore, a threat to the safety and security of the American people. This messaging is consistent throughout the ad, which closes with an image of Sharron Angle and her husband walking down a peaceful wooded path.

In comparison to the first ad, this ad has impressive cinematic and special effects, which the MPA members enjoyed. These effects are the vessel for a fairly complicated cast of characters and conflicts, but the workshop participants rose to the challenge and developed an impressive list of the ad’s narrative-oriented information. The “good guys” are varied: children, workers, office employees, couples, the elderly, and Sharron Angle. These characters are threatened by the “bad guys,” who are not only the dark-skinned immigrants who sneak illegally across the border, but also Harry Reid, who protects and supports those very immigrants. The ad also presents a variety of problems: Americans are not safe, jobs are disappearing, too many people receive unemployment benefits, Social Security is not guaranteed for native-born Americans, and “illegal aliens” get special tax treatment. The MPA members identified a couple of solutions within the ad: pass stricter

¹⁸³ Sharron Angle, “Sharron Angle TV Ad: Best Friend,” September 14, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tb-zZM9-vB0>.

¹⁸⁴ Sharron Angle, “Sharron Angle TV Ad: Best Friend.”

immigration bills (like Arizona's SB 1070) and do not elect Harry Reid. There are also a couple of other implied solutions, such as changing tax structures and Social Security so that immigrants do not get special treatment, but the group focused on the more straightforward solutions. Analysis of this second ad gave members a chance to start connecting common themes of the conservative narrative, which became even clearer with the third ad.

The third ad was by far the most engaging of the six we watched as a group. This ad, called "Proven Leadership"¹⁸⁵ and produced by Rick Perry, is an intensely cinematic representation of the supposedly inevitable demise of a country under Democratic leadership. The ad presents a post-apocalyptic world that is caused by Barack Obama's inability to revive the economy. The first half of the video is a montage of empty streets and playgrounds, dilapidated buildings, flickering lights, and peeling Obama campaign posters. The producers include a sound bite of Obama shouting that he is, "just getting started!"¹⁸⁶ before shifting to depict "A great county [that] requires a better direction," "a renewed nation [that] needs a new president," and a country that, "really is the last great hope of mankind."¹⁸⁷ These statements are accompanied by views of lush farmland, scenes of Perry speaking with workers and members of the armed service, and panoramic cuts of important U.S. monuments such as the Statue of Liberty and the Iwo Jima Memorial. The ad closes with a series of quick clips of Perry surrounded by crowds of supportive voters and the media.

¹⁸⁵ Rick Perry 2012, "Rick Perry – Proven Leadership," September 20, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EL5Atp_vF0.

¹⁸⁶ Rick Perry 2012, "Proven Leadership."

¹⁸⁷ Rick Perry 2012, "Proven Leadership."

The dramatic nature of this video was both engaging and effective, and the MPA members came away with a clear understanding of how Rick Perry engaged narrative as an element of this campaign. To begin, the “bad guy” is very clear: Barack Obama is to blame for all of the country’s problems. The good guy, who would come in and solve the problems created by such an irresponsible leader, is Rick Perry. He is accompanied by a number of “supporting characters,” such as awe-inspired children and workers that Perry meets, cheering crowds that support Perry’s campaign, and the servicemen and women that Perry salutes at the end of the ad. The ad also clearly defines problems and solutions by presenting information in a story-form. The MPA members noticed the plot progression of the ad: Obama’s apocalyptic land of urban decay, poverty, homelessness, joblessness, and hopelessness is saved by Rick Perry. The ad does not present a single policy solution and instead focuses on values: tough individualism, the free market, and the military will solve the nation’s problems. This ad generated energetic group (and side) conversation, which suggested the efficacy of its messaging.

The group took a brief break after the first three ads to discuss the elements that comprise a more conservative narrative. We did this by condensing information from each of the original analyses. The protagonists of the conservative ads are generally hardworking and responsible Americans, most of whom are white and appear to be either working or middle class. The antagonists are often people of color (especially immigrants), the government, and liberals. These characters engage with each other in a variety of conflicts that are caused by irresponsible people who take advantage of an overly generous government. Of the first three ads, all of which represented conservative worldviews, the third was the most exciting to discuss. The members did an incredible job interpreting the

information, and they were very engaged in the entire conversation. This was partially due to the severity of the statements made by the conservative ads, which demonstrated the urgency of developing a progressive narrative.

To reinforce the necessity of an effective progressive narrative, the next ad we presented to the group for analysis was an example of a poorly developed progressive narrative. This ad, “Child’s Pay,” was the winning entry of ad competition sponsored by Moveon.org.¹⁸⁸ The ad is set to quiet reflective music and shows clips of young children doing various blue-collar jobs: a young white boy washes dishes in a dark commercial kitchen, a young white girl vacuums the floor in the hallway of a hotel, a young white boy jumps off the back of a dump truck to collect trash, and a young black boy fixes a tire in a mechanic’s shop. The ad then cuts to a black background with white text that reads, “Guess who’s going to pay off President Bush’s \$1 trillion deficit?”¹⁸⁹ The ad closes with a final image of a white child working at a grocery store cash register.

The audience was generally unsure of what to do with this ad. They were certainly moved by the cinematography and the message that the next generation will be held responsible for the bad situations created by current political leadership, but we had a hard time finding the story within the ad. There are not any identifiable characters, and the problem, which lacks any sort of solution, is simply the country’s large deficit. The members also noticed that the jobs depicted by the ad – dish washers, trash collectors, and manual laborers – create the impression that working one of those jobs would be bad. Overall, the impression was that the ad does not present any information or attribute any blame. Members were surprised at this realization, as their progressive biases led them to

¹⁸⁸ Moveon.org, “Child’s Pay,” May 24, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JkFbYxrxBA8>.

¹⁸⁹ “Moveon.org, “Child’s Pay.”

attribute the problems to conservatives even though no such connection was explicitly made by the ad. This ad illustrates the need for progressives to develop a narrative that is clear and engaging regardless of the ideology of the viewer.

We moved on from this example to two progressive ads that do a better job of creating narrative relationships between characters and conflicts. The first example was developed by Minnesota Democrat Paul Wellstone when he ran for U.S. Senate in 1990. Wellstone's ad is very straightforward. "This is my wife, Sheila, and our children,"¹⁹⁰ Wellstone says, as he gestures to his family lined up on the lawn behind him. In front of his family home, Wellstone says, "This is my house in Northfield, where I've lived for 21 years."¹⁹¹ Wellstone also commits to protecting the environment and fighting for national healthcare. The ad ends with Wellstone getting on his green bus as a narrator invites viewers to vote for Wellstone on November 6, 1990.

This ad was significantly simpler than the preceding ads, both in terms of cinematography and in terms of content. MPA members noticed that the "good guys" are the most developed category and included families, farmers, the working class, and the middle class. The members had a harder time identifying the "bad guys," who are limited to polluters and critics of universal healthcare. The implied conflict is that the right people are not in office. This is accompanied by smaller conflicts, such as poor health insurance policies, limited support for farmers, and pollution, none of which are particularly well-developed. The implied solution is to elect a regular guy to office. Although MPA members

¹⁹⁰ Paul Wellstone, "Classic TV Ad – Fast Paced Paul Wellstone – 1990," June 17, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qLSITd6_Ug.

¹⁹¹ Wellstone, "Classic TV Ad."

found this to be a heartening ad to watch, the general consensus was that the ad does not contain a strong narrative.

The final progressive ad, “My Brother Bob,” was produced by Maine Democrat Chellie Pingree in her 2008 campaign for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.¹⁹² This ad is narrated by Pingree, who sits in a living room to tell the viewer about her brother’s struggle with cancer and health insurance: “When my brother, Bob, was diagnosed, he fought two battles: insurance company, and his cancer. Bob died fourteen months later, with the guilt of knowing that his wife and child were left with nothing.”¹⁹³ Pingree highlights her historical positions on issues related to drug and insurance companies, and she presents herself as the best candidate for fixing the broken healthcare system.

As with the Wellstone ad, the viewers found the Pingree ad somewhat boring, but there were certainly elements of narrative throughout the ad. The explicitly developed “good guys” are limited to Pingree and her brother, which implies the goodness of everyone who struggles against insurers and drug companies. The “bad guys,” therefore, are the health insurance and drug companies that prioritize profits over people. The conflict is that people have to fight for insurance coverage when they should only have to worry about their health. The solution is obvious: elect Chellie Pingree so she can promote healthcare reform. The MPA members identified these narrative elements with relative ease, but the story was not presented in the most engaging fashion. Comments during this discussion showed that members were thinking back to the polished shine of the Rick Perry ad and lamenting the lack of funding that plagues many more progressive candidates.

¹⁹² Chellie Pingree, “My Brother Bob,” May 20, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8axXdUGz4E>.

¹⁹³ Chellie Pingree, “My Brother Bob.”

Overall, this activity placed narrative in the context of urgent politics because of the media component: the campaign ads demonstrate the direct link between telling a story and creating the space for political change. The policy connection was also clear in some of the ads that told stories around particular pieces of legislation. This got MPA members and staff talking about the link between political change and effective narratives, which was an important step. The task that remained was how to transfer this ideas-based discussion into a tangible plan of action.

Canvass

The second narrative activity was a field canvass that would help MPA organize for the 2012 Legislative Session. This activity also linked the practicality of direct political action and the intangibility of worldview development by generating worldview conversations around direct action. The hope was that the policy space of the legislative session would combine the first and third faces of power. MPA thought that a door-to-door canvass would generate conversations with people who are not already involved in politics, recruit new volunteers, and collect stories that could be used to further a progressive narrative. This would be accomplished through one fairly straightforward activity: conduct a survey that asks both concrete and abstract questions about politics and values. Volunteers would take this survey door-to-door in Lewiston, Augusta, Portland, and Bangor to generate conversations with people who might not ordinarily be involved in politics.

Execution

During the first week of January, I presented the timeline and goals of the project on a conference call with organizers and key volunteers from each of the chapters. Going forward, this group of about ten people became the core of the both the canvass project and the State House lobbying.¹⁹⁴ During that same week, Jennie Pirkl, the Portland organizer, also discussed the project at her chapter meeting. Despite concerns among staff about possibly low-interest in a mid-winter door-to-door canvass, Jennie found that members were enthusiastic about the opportunity to have conversations with non-members; this reinvigorated the planning process. Over the course of that week, we also considered logistics like sample size, statistical significance, and target populations that would affect the type of data we could glean from the completed surveys.

By the second week of January, I had compiled information and contributions from staff and volunteers about survey content. I formatted this into a preliminary list of questions, which was twelve pages long and addressed the following topics: environment and health, safety and community, money and banks, employment, assistance programs, education, household and family, transportation, food, taxes, and values. There were additional questions about demographics that would help us interpret the data we collected on the other topics. By the end of the week, we had a three-page working draft of the survey, which MPA staff edited for consistency in organizational priorities and messaging. After we made these edits, we were ready to run a field trial in Portland before the official canvass.

¹⁹⁴ Another important element of this project was its alignment with lobbying at the State House. MPA coordinates between the chapters to cover important hearings and work sessions every week the legislature is in session.

We originally planned to have volunteers in the field during the third week of January, but this timeline was hampered by practical limitation. The organizers had a hard time recruiting volunteers on such short notice, so we pushed the canvass back to the first weekend in February. This provided additional time to brainstorm how to divide territory (or “cut turf,” as organizers say) in ways that would be cognizant of both the logistical practicalities of walking door-to-door and the desire to have statistically significant conclusions.¹⁹⁵ We considered cutting turf based on census tracts or voting wards, but eventually decided that organizers should use their familiarity with local neighborhoods to find the best prospects for a canvass. Another logistic that we smoothed out during this week was about language and interpreters. A Spanish interpreter and a Somali interpreter joined the canvass in Portland, and two Somali interpreters worked with the canvass in Lewiston. Though we were about two weeks behind our original timeline at this point, the extra time gave us the chance to smooth out important logistics like interpreters, which was invaluable by the time we were in the field the following week.

Volunteers and staff conducted surveys in Lewiston, Augusta, and Portland on February 4 and 5.¹⁹⁶ By then, MPA had divided turf and finalized the survey. The final version of the survey was three pages long and asked a series of questions about healthcare and employment (see Appendix E for reproductions of the canvass documents). The questions responded to Governor LePage’s proposed cuts to MaineCare and unemployment benefits, as MPA hoped to generate interest in issues connected to the 2012 legislative

¹⁹⁵ MPA wanted something generalizable so that it could produce a report on “The State of Working Families in Maine.” I was skeptical of the practicality of collecting enough surveys and defining our target population well enough to provide statistical significance, but we proceeded with that goal in mind.

¹⁹⁶ We had originally planned on a canvass out of Bangor, as well, but changing leadership at the regional level meant the chapter was not equipped to run a canvass.

session. There was also a question about values for which respondents were asked to identify their two most important values from a list developed by MPA. Additional questions about demographics, as well as a postcard to send to LePage protesting the cuts, contextualized the survey data and ensured that we could follow up with participants after the canvass. The postcard was also important because of the recruitment component of the field canvass: MPA staff and administration were excited about the prospect of new volunteers and “stories” to tell during lobbying. Collecting contact information was an important step of this process, as it would allow MPA staff and volunteers to build relationships with new recruits and strengthen MPA’s second face of power.

On the morning of the canvass, each organizer led a short training session for volunteers about how to conduct the survey.¹⁹⁷ The training covered a variety of topics, including the purpose of the survey, strategies for keeping the various papers (surveys, walk-sheets, postcards, and take-away sheets) organized on a single clipboard, and best practices for canvassing. Organizers also discussed the logistics of confidentiality, explained that people are free to stop answering the survey at any time, and talked about how the data would be used by MPA. After the training, organizers assigned turf to volunteers and instructed everyone to return to the chapter office at a designated time to turn in the completed surveys and de-brief as a group.¹⁹⁸

Overall, the canvass went very well. The Portland team of eleven (eight volunteers, two interpreters, and the Portland organizer) collected 49 surveys and 64 postcards.

Augusta’s seven-person team (two volunteers, four field canvassers from Bangor, and the

¹⁹⁷ I led the training in Lewiston with the help of Doug Kempner, another Bates intern with MPA who has extensive experience leading field canvasses.

¹⁹⁸ The process described in this paragraph is the one I developed with MPA staff and Bates professors to ensure best practices. I cannot guarantee that this training is exactly what happened at each chapter area.

Augusta organizer) collected 61 surveys and 56 postcards. The Lewiston team of ten (six volunteers, two interpreters, the Lewiston organizer, and me) collected 101 surveys and postcards. All told, the three canvass teams had over 225 conversations during which individuals answered survey questions and/or filled out a postcard. We were invited into homes, held babies, looked at family photos, and had meaningful conversations with people about the problems they deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Immediately following the canvass, the volunteers, interpreters, and staff met to discuss the project. In the Lewiston office, this conversation consisted of sharing highlights from the day and compiling a list of reflections and recommendations for next time.¹⁹⁹ Some of the highlights included having conversations with Somali refugees through interpreters, the graciousness with which we were welcomed into homes, and realizing the extreme poverty in which many individuals and families live. The group then brainstormed reflections and recommendations by using a “Plus and Delta” model. Pluses, or things that went well, were similar to the highlights. Volunteers enjoyed working with interpreters, liked having conversations with new people, appreciated that the weather cooperated, and were enthusiastic about the number of responses generated in such a short period of time.²⁰⁰ Deltas, or things to improve on next time, included choosing smaller turfs, hiring more interpreters, preparing responses to anti-immigrant and other negative perspectives, being more informed about the specific legislation,²⁰¹ and having a less logistically

¹⁹⁹ I did not participate in the Portland or Augusta canvasses, so I only have information from the follow-up activity held in Lewiston.

²⁰⁰ We exceeded our own expectations, as each Lewiston volunteer was sent into the field with ten surveys. Many volunteers ran out of surveys before the field time was up. Although the staff organizer printed additional copies and distributed them to volunteers in the field, we could have collected more.

²⁰¹ Because many of the survey questions were related to the budget, which was only in the proposal stage at the time of the canvass, we could not give respondents definite information about how they would be affected.

challenging system for managing the survey and postcard information. Overall, spirits were high at the end of the afternoon, and volunteers expressed interest in doing a similar project in the future.

Table 3.3 Group de-brief from the Lewiston field canvass

Plus (+)	Delta (Δ)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking to people • Emphasis on the quality of surveys over the volume • People were glad to see us even though it was cold outside (and we were knocking on their doors on Super Bowl Sunday) • Saw first-hand the poverty people live in • Many people (canvassers, respondents) have a desire to “get their hands dirty” and get more involved • There was an impressive number of volunteers • We had high quality volunteers • Conversations were informative and got people interested in future topics (ex. Might not experience cuts <i>now</i> but are looking to the future) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should have a more user/environmentally friendly survey (fewer pages, easier to navigate) • Find better ways to contact minority groups • Would have liked more volunteer prospects • Could select territory to have a better focus on people who would be affected by these cuts (many of the people we talked too were too far below the poverty line to be affected) • We need ways to respond to anti-immigrant sentiments (i.e. “My MaineCare was fine until the refugees starting coming.”) • Add questions about other topics to generate more conversations • Could have a better system for organizing materials (lots of paper)

On the Monday after the canvass, the planning team of organizers and volunteers de-briefed the activity over the phone. This was a time of both celebration and critical reflection. MPA had never done an activity like this, so staff and volunteers were excited over the perceived success of the endeavor. That said, we identified a number of elements of the process that could have been better managed. The phone conversation followed the Plus/Delta model that Lewiston used to de-brief. Volunteers and organizers from the other chapter areas expressed sentiments that were similar to those list developed by Lewiston (see Table 3.3). Staff and volunteers were enthusiastic about the process and hopeful that

the surveys would generate useful information and contacts. Overall, the most exciting outcome from the survey is that MPA is already talking about how to do this better *next time*.

Results

Because there were two goals for the survey, we wanted to collect two types of data. In pursuit of the first goal, publishing a report, we needed quantifiable information from the survey. Each of the chapter areas was responsible for entering the survey data into a Google Survey form that I developed and tested prior to the field canvass. We selected this entry system because it is highly accessible: canvassers, other volunteers, and organizers would be able to navigate the program and assist with data entry. Given the volume of surveys we initially anticipated (400-500), this was an essential consideration in the research design. Google Survey was also convenient because it is web-based: each region could input the data remotely and access the complete data set. Data entry was only just completed at the time of this writing. The data, though interesting, is not essential to this inquiry. Instead, I am more interested in the process through which the survey was developed and disseminated and the various ways MPA plans to use the data. Those aspects of the process are most related to the questions this inquiry asks about narrative.

The second goal of the survey was worldview-related and relied on more qualitative data. This information came from the nuances of conversations between canvassers and survey respondents, which were difficult to record. The entire conversation between canvasser and respondent, whether the respondent was affected by the legislation or not, is important to the process of worldview development. With this goal in mind, the organizers encouraged canvassers to write extensive notes about their conversations before going to

the next house. These observations were discussed orally at the de-briefing meeting, but much of the data was not properly recorded, which speaks to the challenge of narrative analysis.

Overall, the canvass was an interesting experiment. It combined volunteers, recruitment, and worldview conversations with direct action. The volunteers enjoyed the chance to talk to new recruits, the organizers were generally pleased with the process, and the respondents were generally happy to engage in conversations about their experiences and values. As anticipated, the canvass generated a lot of good information and conversations that we followed-up with during meetings in each of the chapter areas.

Follow-Up Meetings

As a follow-up to the canvass, each of the chapter organizers committed to holding a meeting with “hot contacts” to generate additional conversations about political beliefs and welcome new people into the ranks of MPA. Each chapter scheduled its meeting for the week following the canvass. This type of meeting posed a distinct challenge that some of the organizers had not worked with before: many, if not all, of the participants would be new to MPA. Another challenge was turnout: how could organizers estimate how many people would show up to the meeting? For this meeting to be successful, the organizers had to develop an agenda that could engage either a large or small group, accommodate attendees who were both enthusiastic and hesitant to participate, and address both direct political action and worldview issues.

The organizers developed strategies for the follow-up meeting by sharing ideas through email and a conference call. During these communications, the organizers decided

that the general emphasis of the meetings would be building relationships and discussing Governor LePage's proposed budget. Focusing on these two topics would provide a good foundation from which to accommodate the specific needs or inclinations of whoever attended the meetings. Organizers also planned to discuss the history of MPA as an organization, current campaigns, voter registration drives, and other local issues that might interest meeting attendees. There was general consensus that story sharing, or giving attendees the opportunity to share their experiences with others in the room, would be a valuable way to build relationships, strengthen organizational infrastructure, and start generating worldview information.

Another component of the meeting was strategic analysis. Also called a power analysis, this activity would engage participants in a brainstorm about which political actors have power, what that power is, and what organizations like MPA can do to shift that power. Depending on how the meeting went, the organizers also considered introducing attendees to the three faces of power. Volunteers and staff were originally enthusiastic about using the survey data to generate conversations and involve participants in a co-analysis of the data, but this never appeared on the agenda because of logistical and time constraints both on the data entry side and the meeting execution side. This brainstorm eventually helped the organizers develop a more specific agenda (see Table 3.4).

As with most activities of this nature, the demonstrated product was very different from what the organizers had originally planned. This is clearly illustrated by the experience of the Portland chapter. Despite the positive reception of the meeting by survey respondents during conversations in the field and the turn-out calls volunteers made to likely recruits, nobody showed up to the meeting. This was disheartening, as the staff and

volunteers had put a fair amount of effort into planning the meeting. A similar thing happened in Augusta. Due to time constraints and less enthusiastic reception among both volunteers and survey respondents, the meeting did not happen. Despite the initial appearance of failure, however, both experiences provided the opportunity to learn new things about this type of organizing. At the time of this writing,²⁰² organizers in both Portland and Augusta planned to have follow-up “one-on-ones”²⁰³ with respondents who had expressed interest in getting more involved, and the Augusta chapter was preparing for an in-district meeting with a legislator.

Table 3.4 Preliminary Agenda for follow-up meetings in Augusta, Lewiston, and Portland

What	How	Time
Introductions	Share your name, your town, and how you got involved with MPA or why you are here tonight	5:30- 5:45
Agenda Review	Review agenda and make additions or changes	5:45- 5:46
Introduction to MPA	History Issues Major Victories	5:46- 6:05
Sharing Stories	Healthcare Banks Economic Justice	6:05- 6:35
Budget Update	MaineCare Cuts FY12 What’s next	6:35- 6:40
Power Analysis		6:40- 6:50
What can we do in the long term?	Lobby Day Elections	6:50- 6:55
Closing	Debrief meeting—Evaluation	6:55
Take Action! (Lewiston only)	Optional Meeting with Rep. Peggy Rotundo	7:00 - 7:45

²⁰² Mid-February, 2012. Since then each of the chapter organizers has held numerous one-on-ones with hot contacts, but there has not been mention of a second try for the follow-up meetings in either Augusta or Portland.

²⁰³ One-on-ones are a common organizing strategy during which two people have a conversation with one another. The strategy is based on the assumption that politics and organizing are all about relationship-building, and MPA uses this strategy regularly.

In contrast to the difficulty that both Portland and Augusta faced in getting a follow-up meeting off the ground, the Lewiston chapter had a crowded and productive meeting. The meeting was held on Thursday, February 9. It began at 5:30pm and ran until 7:00pm, at which point the participants were invited to stay for an in-district meeting about the budget with Senator Peggy Rotundo. The second meeting lasted for close to an hour, and participants were engaged with questions, comments, and personal anecdotes throughout the conversation. There were drinks and snacks available to participants throughout the evening, and most seemed to enjoy the opportunity to meet with like-minded individuals and one of their legislators.

The most notable success of the Lewiston meeting was the high turnout. There were twenty-five participants, not including Gen Lysen or myself. Of this group, sixteen were completely new to MPA and seven were Somali refugees. The other participants were long-standing volunteers who helped run the meeting, involved members who recruited new volunteers, and volunteers who had been involved in the canvass. The size of the group provided a bit of a challenge, as we had not expected such a large turnout. There was a scramble for chairs as the meeting started, and people were definitely cozy. Another challenging aspect of the group was language interpretation. MPA hired a Somali interpreter for the night, and she was invaluable. The logistics of the interpretation were challenging, however. We had intended to use audio equipment from another local organization to facilitate simultaneous interpretation, but the room was so crowded that there was not adequate space to set up in this way. As a result, the meeting was a back-and-

forth English-Somali conversation that, although inspiring and humbling, doubled the amount of time we had to spend on each agenda item.²⁰⁴

Because of the size of the meeting and the logistics of interpretation, the agenda changed over the course of the evening. As planned, we opened the meeting by establishing ground rules (see Table 3.5). After that, attendees introduced themselves and explained why they came to the meeting or were involved with MPA. From there, a board member introduced MPA's mission, history, and current campaigns. At that point, the group had established some common knowledge and understandings, so we moved on to the story sharing aspect of the meeting. People were invited to share personal experiences in which they were unable to attain healthcare, were taken advantage of by banks, or were given unfair loans.

As expected, experiences and responses to these questions varied on the specifics but were thematically similar. We heard from one individual who said that he would be dead without Medicaid: his Multiple Sclerosis medications would cost thousands of dollars per month without coverage. Others told stories about interminable years on the waitlist for MaineCare, making "just enough" to not qualify for state benefits, unpredictable coverage due to changing employment situations and benefit qualifications, and misunderstandings with lenders that resulted in thousands of dollars of debt. One older gentleman expressed his position with great clarity: "I'm not in the gutter yet, but I'm going to be there soon. If the country keeps running this way, I'll be in the gutter."²⁰⁵ His

²⁰⁴ One of the unanticipated results of the canvass process is that MPA plans to hire a part-time Somali interpreter to assist with organizing in Lewiston.

²⁰⁵ Lewiston meeting participant, February 9, 2012.

sentiment reflected the general position of many people in the room: we need to make changes to the status quo of U.S. politics.

As participants told their stories, it became clear that we would have to take some items off the agenda. With an eye to the upcoming in-district meeting and the immediacy of the budget decision,²⁰⁶ we decided to cut the power analysis activity and focus on getting everyone up to speed on the budget situation. An involved volunteer provided this synopsis. Throughout the evening, participants demonstrated a willingness to share personal narratives about challenging situations. As organizer Gen Lysen reflected, “The emphasis was on story-sharing, most everyone was directly affected – either by lack of access to healthcare, abuse by the big banks, or jobless[ness]...”²⁰⁷ These stories are powerful relationship builders, but they also allude to the challenge of narrative. With so many constituent stories, how can MPA find a way to put forward a single organizational narrative?

Table 3.5 Ground Rules for the Lewiston follow-up meeting

Rule	Explanation
Step up, step back	Be aware of when you have something to say and when you would be better off listening to what other people have to say.
Be respectful	Listen, use appropriate language, be honest.
No cross-talk	Only one conversation at a time; no side conversations
Cell phones silenced	
Have fun!	

To be consistent with best practices for organizing, we finished the meeting with a brief evaluation. The group identified the following positive elements: pizza, people, new faces, stories, and a place to voice opinions. There were only two things on the delta list:

²⁰⁶ The appropriations committee had proposed a budget just days before this meeting.

²⁰⁷ Gen Lysen, Personal Communication, February 9, 2012.

finding a better room with more space and solving the technical difficulties around interpretation. Given the experimental nature of this type of meeting, the group's focus on logistical concerns (space, translation) is very positive; such a focus means that the content and experience were generally worthwhile and productive.

The significance of the meeting was hit home by Peggy Rotundo's visit. All but one of the new members stayed to talk with Rotundo in what became a difficult, but informative, conversation. To briefly summarize, Rotundo and other Democrats on the Appropriations Committee faced an almost indescribable choice during budget conversations: Either guarantee that 18,000 low-income Mainers will keep MaineCare while 14,000 lose coverage, or hedge their bets that the Governor's budget might have better numbers. Although the conversation at MPA that evening was not conclusive in terms of next steps,²⁰⁸ it was a meaningful show of the accessibility of (some aspects of) the political process. Those who attended the meeting had the opportunity, possibly for the first time in their lives, to talk to one of the individuals who is responsible for legislative decisions that affect their lives.

Overall, the Lewiston meeting was a huge success. Gen Lysen, the Lewiston organizer, says it best. In her email summary of the Lewiston meeting, Gen writes that,

It was an unwieldy but an incredible meeting where folks from different backgrounds, ages, income, race, etc. came together to commit to work together on the issues that directly affect them, and/or their neighbors. It was frankly one of the most inspiring moments in my organizing career, and testament to the fact that getting out in the community - knocking on doors, having conversations in hallways, foyers, on couches and at kitchen tables with our neighbors about their concerns or struggles – WORKS.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ MPA asked Rotundo to sign on to the Responsible Solution pledge, and Rotundo responded that she would do some research on the proposal. She did not commit to supporting the pledge at the time of the meeting.

²⁰⁹ Gen Lysen, Personal Communication, February 9, 2012.

In the week after the attempted follow-up meetings, the chapter organizers met to identify the reasons for the differential success of the meetings in each of the areas. In Lewiston, a volunteer called every one of the survey respondents for whom we had contact information. This volunteer asked each person she planned to come to the meeting, and she offered possible attendees a ride if they were interested but did not have their own means of transportation. The canvass team in Lewiston also collected the most surveys. Although the Portland organizer reminded the other organizers that she emphasized the quality over quantity of the door-to-door conversations, which was consistent with the goals of the canvass, numbers do affect turnout. Lewiston had about twice as many surveys as Portland or Augusta, which meant a larger pool from which to draw meeting attendees. Each region also had different canvassers. Although all of the volunteers were trained the day of the canvass, some volunteers had more experience than others. The Lewiston team was lucky in that most of the canvassers had prior experience in the field. Another, albeit unquantifiable, aspect that may have affected turnout in Lewiston was luck: knocking on the doors of individuals who happened to be interested, finding people with transportation to get themselves to and from the meeting, the opening in Rotundo's schedule to meet with us on the same night as the follow-up meeting, and more. There are endless factors that affect the experiences in the different chapter areas, which is further evidence of the volatility and unpredictability of this type of political work.

At the time of this writing, organizers and volunteers in each of the chapter areas have set up numerous "one-on-ones" with strong contacts. Some of these, as experienced in Lewiston, have been cancelled and rescheduled several times, and sometimes people do not show up. Despite the practical challenges of these intentional relationship-building

conversations, Portland reports three follow up conversations, Lewiston reports four, and Augusta reports several in progress.²¹⁰ As mentioned above, this illustrates the unpredictability of this type of work, as well as the need for dedicated and effective organizers who can get people involved, tease stories out of individuals, and create space for real political change.

Overall, the work MPA has organized on narrative in the last several years reflects many of the tensions that characterize our discussions of worldview development. Practical challenges include timelines, organizational capacity, unpredictability in volunteers, and other unforeseen situations. These challenges illustrate the draw for an organization like MPA to just present a narrative or worldview; the development process must be carefully designed to accommodate the varied experiences of meeting participants, the power dynamics between the membership and the leadership, and the constraints of practicality. This brings us back to our original question: How does MPA navigate the tensions of power, practicality, and perceptions to organize effective worldview development? Just as there is real opportunity for failure, there is real opportunity for success. To get closer to the latter requires the narrative in pursuit of which all of this work was organized. To get to that narrative, we must evaluate MPA's efforts in the context of the models we developed in Chapter Two.

²¹⁰ MPA Legislative Agenda Organizing Call, February 21, 2012.

Chapter 4: Worldview Development at MPA

The activities discussed in the preceding chapter were designed to accommodate both worldview development and direct action by generating conversations in the context of the 2012 legislative agenda. MPA planned the workshop at the retreat to remind staff and members that narrative and worldview are important to the fight for lasting change. The canvass was designed to connect MPA members and volunteers to new recruits through conversations about current legislation. Finally, the follow-up meetings provided an opportunity for staff, members, and volunteers to come together to analyze the information generated by the canvass while continuing worldview-attentive conversations. These projects were designed in the context of the 2012 legislative session with the hope that they would provide a foundation for a variety of direct action activities, including lobbying and candidate endorsements.

The question we are all asking now is whether those narrative-oriented activities actually helped MPA get any closer to a worldview. What happens when, as community organizers and social movement framing theorists recognize, there are tensions between the membership and leadership? What happens when the leadership faces practical limitations but would ideally incorporate the membership more fully? How do the perceived and experienced realities of the membership and leadership relate to defining goals, determining best courses of action, and evaluating outcomes? These questions respond to the work that MPA organizes on narrative, leading us to ask if intentional work on of worldview in the context of direct action helps mollify the apparent tensions between

leadership and membership, the idealistic and the practical, and perceived and experienced realities. We must take several steps to answer this question.

We first identify some of the changes that happened between the design and implementation of MPA's narrative-oriented activities. After this discussion, it is clear that the activities as implemented by MPA were not conducive to worldview development. In fact, as I discuss in the second section, this initial analysis suggests that MPA may already have a worldview that it puts forward to avoid the impracticality of worldview development in the context of the three faces of power. This makes us question the feasibility of worldview development under a model that proposes distinctions between direct action, infrastructure development, and worldview shifting. With this in mind, I return to the community metanarrative model of Chapter Two. This provides the opportunity to reassess both MPA's narrative activities and present the community metanarrative as a tool that helps community organizers move past the stagnation of sole reliance on the organizational structure of the three faces of power. I conclude this chapter by discussing the relevance of the community metanarrative model to worldview shifting.

This chapter responds to two sets of dynamics that are inherently relevant to this analysis. First, it explores the organizational dynamics that determined how MPA's narrative-oriented activities transitioned from theory into practice. It is important to address those dynamics and how they influenced the final outcomes of the organizing process, because they are elements of MPA's approach to worldview development. They also provide clear examples of how power and practicality affect worldview development. The second set of dynamics is between these three tensions and the community metanarrative model. More specifically, the question is whether the community

metanarrative model can accommodate the tensions that are often overlooked by an uncritical reliance on the three faces of power.

Design and Implementation

The narrative-oriented activities that I organized with MPA changed significantly between their abstract conception and practical execution. The first activity, the retreat, was to remind staff and members about the importance of narrative and worldview. We planned to have a dynamic and open conversation about the importance of developing a narrative. The second activity, the canvass, was originally about story identification. We sought to have open-ended conversations with people who would be affected by upcoming legislation, and we wanted to hear stories about the different political problems (and solutions) ordinary people see in our society. The follow-up meetings would provide a space for conversation about the stories we collected in the canvass. We wanted to use the data and stories from the survey to generate conversations in small group meetings with new recruits and with existing members. We hoped that these conversations would help participants isolate common trends in the stories that could be harnessed in pursuit of a more encompassing story. Despite careful planning and the organization's voiced dedication to worldview development, the execution of these activities was different from the original plan. In fact, almost all of the activities shifted away from the original goal of facilitating worldview development because of practical challenges and dynamics between the membership and leadership.

This shift is well illustrated by the survey. As stated above, the survey was originally designed as an opportunity to generate unscripted conversations about values, problems,

and solutions. The final version, however, focused on collecting quantifiable data. This shift did two things. First, it limited the types of conversations we would have with people during the canvass. In the editing process, we pulled three pages of questions about healthcare and jobs out of twelve pages of questions about healthcare, jobs, banks, education, values, family, and more. Because MPA was more interested in collecting data that could be used to publish a report about the experiences of working families in Maine, we were no longer setting ourselves up to collect stories about a broad range of topics. The survey also veered away from topics that would be more likely to yield worldview development conversations. In one of the revisions of the survey, the single remaining worldview question was sacrificed for an additional question on jobs. We eventually added the worldview question back into the survey, but this only happened after a series of discussions about the importance of this question to our original goal of collecting worldview-related information.

The second consequence of the survey shift was methodological. Because of the quantitative focus, we needed to collect a significant number of surveys to generate any sort of statistical significance or generalizable results. This changed the approach that volunteers took to conducting the survey. Though each conversation was still valued and worthwhile, most conversations followed the survey fairly closely. Conversations did not veer off into uncharted discussions as frequently as we had originally thought they would; the focus was on completing the questions of the survey instead of using each of the survey questions to generate a conversation.

The execution of the follow-up meetings was also less focused on worldview producing conversations than we had originally planned. The initial goal of the meetings

was to bring diverse members and volunteers together to discuss the content of the surveys and analyze some of the stories volunteers collected during the canvass. During the planning calls, however, some of the organizers were ambivalent towards the inclusion of intentional discussions of power and worldview during the meeting. Limited face time with recruits during the meeting, high demands on organizers' time for planning the meetings, and the uncontrollability of open-ended conversations meant that the focus on power and values was not guaranteed to succeed. We eventually decided to include a power analysis, but it was up to me and another organizer to design the activity. It was very clear that the worldview discussion was not the central purpose of the meeting. The minimized importance of the worldview activity was further emphasized through the time crunch at the Lewiston meeting, as the power analysis was cut from the agenda to make room to talk about the budget and other more direct aspects of MPA's organizing. Again, this is an understandable and justifiable decision, but it does illustrate MPA's tendency to prioritize direct action over worldview development.

We also saw this dynamic in group discussions at the retreat. During a workshop on the Affordable Care Act, organizers allotted a certain period of time for small groups to answer a series of questions. This inevitably meant that groups spent less time on the last questions, which happened to be the ones that asked members to frame the Affordable Care Act in the context of progressive values and worldview. This was even more pronounced when the small groups reported their findings back to the large group: the majority of the large-group conversation focused on clarifying the components of the bill. This is not to say that MPA ignored worldview issues, as there was a discussion about slogans with which to frame MPA's position ("Healthcare, not Wealthcare!" or "Healthcare

is a human right!”) and obvious inclusion of worldview on the agenda. That said, members were not given the chance to discuss worldview issues to the extent that the original schedule had planned.

These changes represent the three tensions we have followed throughout this inquiry. The survey design process illustrates the membership-leadership tension, because the MPA made decisions about what questions to include. This activity also represents the tension between experienced and perceived realities, as MPA put forward a survey that asked specific questions in ways that would yield particular results. The membership-leadership tension was also present in the hesitance to include a power analysis on the agenda at the follow-up meeting: open-ended conversations are unpredictable and would likely demonstrate a multiplicity of interpretations that would not necessarily align with MPA’s experiences in facilitating political change. Finally, many of the changes, like cutting the power analysis from the Lewiston meeting agenda, reflect the challenge of practicality. MPA had to make decisions about what it could fit into an agenda or accomplish in a short period of time.

What we see here is that the questions of power and practicality are implicated by the third tension: perceived and experienced realities. Different actors have different goals, different styles, and different problems. Unfortunately, the narrative-centric activities I led with MPA do not seem to accommodate those varied interpretations. As it turned out, these activities had a surprisingly limited focus on worldview development. We engaged a number of volunteers and new recruits during the canvass, but that success relates to the second face of power. We also had a good collection of volunteers present at the in-district meeting, but that connects to the first face of power. What we saw during these activities

was not only the ineffectiveness of unifying direct action and worldview development, but also the tendency for direct action to trump worldview development. That said, it is odd that an organization that asks questions about effective worldview development and is dedicated to its membership-driven mission would limit the time and energy it spends on worldview. I do not believe this is a matter of MPA not caring about worldview. Instead, because MPA is a political organization that is intently focused on direct political gains, perhaps MPA is just not enthralled by the thought of *developing* a narrative.

Bypassing Worldview Development

As a political organization, MPA must have a position on political issues. It cannot query its membership every time it wants to release a press statement or write a petition. Because of that, it is entirely possible that MPA already has a “go to” narrative or worldview. I observed this phenomenon throughout the activities I organized with MPA. While working on the narrative workshop for the December retreat, conversations with MPA staff uncovered the following worldview elements: conservatives are bad, corporations do not care about the people, government can be used to do good, and we are stronger when we work together. MPA had already identified these ideas as essential elements of the progressive position, and they were willing to push these ideas during the workshop and retreat. This suggests two things: first, MPA may be less invested in doing intensive narrative-development work, and second, MPA’s work on narrative will inevitably reflect the leadership’s positions and values. We must use these observations to discuss MPA’s narrative activities if we are to better understand the organization’s current relationship with narrative.

The structure of the narrative workshop illustrates the prominence of what could be called MPA's existing narrative. The group discussions during the workshop were brainstorm-based, but the workshop was prompted by steps and discussion points contained within a PowerPoint.²¹¹ We designed the PowerPoint so that text would not appear on the screen until prompted, which gave participants the chance to brainstorm their own ideas. That said, the framework, key observations, and major takeaway points of the presentation were established prior to the workshop and, although consistent with opinions that many members volunteered over the course of the discussion, were not a product of the group conversation. In this sense, MPA put forward a particular set of interpretations that was consistent with, but not necessarily derived from, the group's contributions.

Another controlled component of the workshop was the content, itself. Ben and I selected the featured campaign ads prior to the retreat with the hope of generating certain types of conversations. We were fairly certain that the Rick Perry ad would generate lively discussion about conservative values, and we thought that Sharron Angle's attack ad on Harry Reid would suggest the ridiculousness of conservative immigration politics. We made similar calculations in selecting the progressive clips we chose. Wellstone's ad, for example, presented progressives as reasonable people with simple means and old-fashioned values. We intentionally selected Chellie Pingree's ad about healthcare to link to other discussions at the retreat about the importance of a simplified healthcare system. These decisions were strategic and had certain goals, which suggests the extent to which MPA as an organization has ideas and narratives it wants to spread among its members.

²¹¹ See Appendix C for the PowerPoint slides.

The language of the survey also reflected the possibility that MPA was disseminating a particular worldview throughout the doorstep conversations. An early version of the survey presented Governor LePage as a callous, unfeeling leader (“Governor LePage wants to cut MaineCare....”). This language, though somewhat toned down in the final version, told people how to feel about the Governor’s proposed budget. The same could be said about the values question. Survey respondents were asked to select their two most important values from a list. There was an option to fill in an “other,” but almost all of the respondents selected some combination of family, faith, fairness, taking care of the next generation, community, and self-determination. MPA selected these values with the hope of showing inconsistencies between people who may benefit from progressive policies and yet demonstrate allegiance with more conservative values.²¹² This illustrates the extent to which MPA already has assumptions about what strategies and realities should be used to determine agendas.

People also generally know that MPA is a progressive organization with certain values and positions. This was illustrated by concerns that MPA had about how its data would stand up if published in a report. Some felt that, if the survey was clearly biased in its language and content, then political opponents could more easily reject its findings. Others thought that critique would be inevitable: MPA is known in the community as having certain positions on certain types of issues, and data would be interpreted in the context of those understandings. Though obvious, this suggests that the public relates to MPA in certain ways because of the organization’s positions.

²¹² Note the similarity between this goal and observations by Lakoff, Alinsky, and Sen that politics is run by a conservative narrative.

Another clear illustrator of this dynamic is the tendency to characterize people who are not supportive of MPA as having *bad worldview*. “We had a good meeting,” organizers will say, “with only one or two *worldview problems*.” The term *worldview* does not actually mean very much by itself, nor does characterization of worldview as *bad*. That said, this sort of statement has real significance when said in the context of MPA organizing. Why is it bad worldview? What comparison yielded such a categorization? Who decides when an individual’s worldview is not particularly strong? The difference between these questions and the ones asked in the first chapter is that MPA has answers to this set. *MPA* decides if a worldview is *bad*, and the organization uses a core set of beliefs (large corporations take money from people and small businesses, the wealthy should pay more taxes, and government should provide more assistance to low-income people) to pass judgment.

These observations suggest that MPA already has a worldview with which it contextualizes much of its work. The logical response to these observations is to question if it is problematic for an organization like MPA to be recognized as taking particular positions on social, political, and economic issues. Should we be concerned that MPA has a position? Does having a position compromise the organization’s ability to do good political work? In both cases, the answer is obviously no. As a political organization, MPA takes a stand and defends it; that is part of the game. MPA would cease to exist if it did not have positions, which suggests the extent to which MPA may already have a functioning worldview.

That said, it is important to consider the efficacy of that narrative. After all, MPA talks about developing a narrative, so there must be some shortcoming in the story that the organization already tells. The criteria of a strong narrative or political myth raise a couple

of interesting points. Recall that narratives must be truthful, applicable, believable, and long-lasting. In the case of an MPA-created-and-disseminated narrative, both the truthfulness and the applicability of the narrative are slightly questionable. Does a narrative developed by MPA represent the reality as the people see and experience it, or does it reflect the interpretation of that reality from a group of people who are affected by legislation in different ways? This question links to the question of experienced and perceived realities that complicate narrative development. This dynamic also feeds into applicability: is a story that MPA leaders tell more or less applicable to the lives of the average Mainer than a story they develop, themselves? These critiques do not question the intentions or dedication of MPA staff, but rather respond to Stone's earlier point about the subjectivity of interpretations. Because people experience slightly different realities, their interpretations of the same situation are inevitably different. A narrative that is put forward by a small group, whether that is a group of ordinary people or a group of MPA organizers, is less likely to represent the realities and experiences of a more extended and diverse population. To conclude, although it is not problematic that that MPA may already have a narrative, it is potentially inconsistent with the people-driven motto of the organization, does not make any headway on the tension between perceived and experienced realities, and stagnates the pursuit of a people-derived worldview.

Revisiting the Three Faces of Power

It is somewhat paradoxical that a people driven organization might have a narrative that is *not* people-developed. What factors lead an organization that is as people-oriented as MPA to find itself with an organizational worldview that is not completely people-

produced? When does the leadership of a membership-driven organization have to make group decisions that may not have been vetted in the opinions of the membership? The explanation lies in the tension between practical and ideal organizing. One of the most convincing ways to explain this tension is to consider the multiplicity of MPA's goals.

As discussed by Deborah Stone, goals are rarely singular or straightforward. MPA may have the goal of creating a progressive worldview, but that obviously does not mean that creating a progressive worldview is the only focus of MPA's political work. That also does not mean that creating the worldview is MPA's *ultimate* goal. If we recognize that MPA's ultimate goal is to effect progressive political change, then we can assume that there are smaller benchmark goals within that long-term goal. These might include expanding staff in each of the chapter areas, hitting membership goals, raising certain amounts of money, or having a certain number of conversations with legislators. These smaller goals suggest that MPA operates in a somewhat managerial position. The organization connects people to action through a variety of activities, most of which are conveniently situated in the first and second faces of power. In the case of MPA, a model like the three faces of power simplifies the complexity of a goal like "achieving progressive political change" and allows organizers to focus on the smaller, more constituent elements of a campaign.

If MPA's ultimate goal is progressive political change, then it makes sense that MPA might deemphasize the worldview-development component of activities during my time with them. The organization already does direct political work and infrastructure development, so it has ways of talking about itself, its constituents, and its values. The third face of power, shifting worldview, calls on organizations to present their worldviews in foil to existing, more dominant worldviews. To do any sort of work on the third face of power,

therefore, MPA must already have a worldview that it promotes among both its supporters and its adversaries.

These observations suggest that the categorizations imposed by the three faces of power actually obscure the goal of progressive change. For example, field canvassers who go door-to-door collecting donations build organizational capacity, whereas the canvassers who go door-to-door talking about values facilitate worldview development. The distinction between these activities seems trivial, because there is framing in the first scenario and the possibility of membership expansion in the second. In other situations, positive outcomes of organizing efforts are not necessarily valued within the framework of the three faces of power. With the three faces of power, building a community of activists and civic-minded individuals is an infrastructure activity as opposed to a manifestation of the community-oriented goals of a progressive campaign. Again, these distinctions are unnaturally picky. As discussed earlier, campaigns and activities do not exist in a vacuum unaffected by other types of work, which suggests the artificiality of a model that requires distinctions between integrated campaigns and activities.

All of the faces relate back to each other despite the distinctions implied by the three faces of power. If we define MPA's goal as advancing progressive politics in Maine, we find that most activities categorized as infrastructure development or worldview shifting link back to the first face. Direct political action gauges whether the organization is actually making change and is the mechanism through which organizations evaluate their progress on the goal of progressive change.²¹³ Infrastructure building through expanded membership and fundraising is important, but only insofar as it provides the human,

²¹³ This is illustrated by an activity at the December 2011 retreat. MPA staff and members listed some of the successes of 2011, almost all of which were direct political gains. See Table A.2 in Appendix A.

financial, and ideological capital with which to accomplish direct political change in the first face. The same can be said of the third face: shifting worldview is important because it creates momentum for long-term progressive political change. Changes in worldview manifest themselves through direct political gains, so they also link to the first face. Candidate endorsements, election returns, policy outcomes, and budget proposals are the outcomes of successful organizing on the second and third faces of power, they just happen to fall under the purveyance of the first face of power.

Differentiating between each of the faces makes it easier for organizations to prioritize some activities, like direct action, over other activities, like discussions about worldview. The tendency to cut worldview development from the agenda is not about MPA disengaging from its membership or using its volunteers to create change that the organizing staff deems worthy. MPA values direct action, values expanding the organizational capacity, values worldview discussions, and values engaging the members in all of those activities. Instead, this is about priorities and which elements of political organizing MPA decides are most important to pursue with a limited number of volunteers. This is about what direct action MPA can effect; it is about practicality. MPA chooses to engage people in direct action through in-district meetings with representatives, rallies, and group lobby events because they are practical: they are visible and suggest a developed movement.

The three faces of power also imply that worldview shift is a byproduct of effective direct action work. The three faces do not prioritize discrete attention to developing or shifting worldview, but rather imply that worldview will develop and shift if the organization attains enough successes in the first face of power. This is illustrated by the

discussion MPA had about successes at the retreat: organizers and volunteers talked about how certain electoral outcomes or coalition developments would lead to a shift in the dominant political worldview. As we see from our earlier study of Sen, this approach to worldview is not uncommon. The problem is that it contradicts the conclusions of the social movement framing theorists and community organizations like TakeAction Minnesota and reNEW Minnesota. These groups were successful precisely because they did *not* adhere to the worldview-as-byproduct perspective.

The worldview-as-byproduct perspective does nothing to ameliorate the leadership-membership tension. Recall the question we ask in Chapter One: At what point does the social movement organization need to “call the shots” and “push” a narrative that encompasses core values in a way that respects the stories and beliefs of the people? This question is still applicable to the organizing activities of 2011 and 2012 because, as illustrated, MPA has a narrative that it presents to its membership through supposedly worldview-development-oriented activities. If worldview is the byproduct of good organizing and if the organizing is done by the staff, then it follows that worldview would be highly informed by the actions and positions of the staff. This is problematic because it illustrates how easily a membership-leadership divide can develop, which is a risk that MPA has both recognized and lamented.

To summarize, exclusive reliance on the three faces of power imposes a high opportunity cost on worldview development. According to the model, dedicating attention to worldview development means diverting attention from the direct action that political groups use to evaluate the effectiveness of their organizing strategies. That is not practical. The three faces of power model also implies a worldview-as-byproduct approach to

narrative development, which increases the membership-leadership tension. This leaves community advocacy groups in the middle of a paradox: To achieve progressive change, MPA should have a well-developed worldview. To effectively accommodate the interests of their membership, groups like MPA should collaboratively with the membership on worldview development. Yet, models like the three faces of power do not prioritize worldview development and, instead, presuppose an existing worldview that can be used to shift the dominant narrative of conservatism. The problem is the assumption that good worldview will develop out of good organizing. Although this approach accommodates the practical demands on an organization like MPA, it overlooks the membership-leadership tension and the perceived-experienced realities tension; good worldview will not just rise from good organizing. If good worldview development cannot be the byproduct of good organizing, then perhaps we should explore the possibility that good organizing is the byproduct of good worldview development.

The Community Metanarrative

The GPP and social movement framing theorists of Chapter One argue that groups must give direct attention to issues of worldview and framing. MPA's original thought was to bypass direct attention to worldview development by blending direct action and worldview development together in activities related to policy. As illustrated by the recent work of MPA, this approach is not entirely successful. Part of the problem is that MPA frames its work in three faces of power, which emphasize worldview *shifting*, as opposed to worldview *development*. Worldview must be designed, and we need a model that can accommodate the practical constraints of limited resources, the possibility of a

membership-leadership hierarchy, and the tenuous relationship between perceived and experienced realities. This model must also reflect the recent characterization of worldview as a byproduct of good organizing. To better understand processes of worldview development that will yield the narrative MPA needs, we must move beyond the three faces of power. The way to do this, as suggested by the tension of interpretation as characterized by the division between perceived and experienced realities, is by engaging people in the collection and interpretation of stories.

The community metanarrative model directs our attention to narrative development by encouraging story collection and interpretation. The community metanarrative also accommodates the three faces of power by slipping into the space between worldview development and worldview shifting. Evaluating the narrative-building activities of MPA through the community metanarrative model shows how close MPA is to a narrative process that might ameliorate the tensions created by the decision-making power of the leadership, the impracticality of assessing the membership's opinions on every lobby or campaign decision, and the ambiguity in perceived and experienced realities.

Recall that the first three steps of the community metanarrative process are identifying existing stories, studying the relationship between the existing stories, and discovering coherence between the stories. These three steps represent the process through which an organization like MPA can facilitate the development of a cohesive organizational narrative. Through these three steps, the community metanarrative model creates space in which to develop worldview that responds to the interests and

experiences of the constituents. We can explore the effectiveness of the community metanarrative by applying it to the recent narrative activities of MPA.

The first step of the community metanarrative process is to collect stories. As discussed earlier, this is the idea that originally inspired the street canvass. Although the focus of the activity changed when it came time to the execution, the sentiment behind story collection fits well with an activity like the canvass. By generating conversations with a wide range of people, we were able to get new voice in the mix, and we were exposed to countless personal narratives about the relationships between unemployment, healthcare, and other controversial issues.

When evaluated through the community metanarrative, the deficiency in MPA's story collection process was in *capturing* those stories. As prescribed by the community metanarrative process, we needed to record those stories in some useable form so that they would exist beyond the door-step conversation between canvass volunteer and survey respondent. Ideally, we would have captured these stories so effectively that we could have used them to inform the follow-up chapter meetings. As it happened, we were able to collect some qualitative reflection on these conversations, which was data entered by volunteers along with the quantitative data. That said, it was difficult to capture the complexity of this content in just a few lines of notes scribbled while walking between houses. In many ways, this survey threw volunteers into the role of analyzing personal narratives that, as we discuss in Chapter Two, is not an easy task. In anticipation of this challenge, part of the pre-canvass volunteer training addressed strategies for recording the qualitative aspects of the conversations. As discussed earlier in this chapter, however,

priorities shifted by the time volunteers were in the field, and the canvass became more focused on the quantitative, as opposed to qualitative, aspects.

This canvass gives voice and recognition to the personal stories people tell in a way that is consistent with the community metanarrative. This strategy has the potential to transcend the leadership-membership tension by engaging numerous volunteers in the story collection process. The organizers may be responsible for the process of story collection, but they are not the source of worldview. As discussed by narrative analysts in Chapter Two, sharing stories in this way can be empowering and sometimes leads participants to become more engaged in troubleshooting some of the issues they face.²¹⁴ Despite these ambitious goals, this type of activity is also a practical way to begin conversations about narrative. Sharing stories and information has the potential to generate data for the next step of the community metanarrative process, might expand membership, and could locate a new volunteer who would be willing to share her story at a press conference. When we look back at the three faces of power, we see that the canvass has the potential to simultaneously address all three faces of power.²¹⁵

The real potential for the community metanarrative model lies in the next two steps of the process: identifying the relationships between personal narratives and evaluating the figurative space between personal narratives to develop an encompassing story. In practice, these two steps are somewhat nuanced and can both be addressed by an open, discussion-oriented meeting. In MPA's recent narrative activities, this happened in the follow-up meetings. In their original design, these meetings were to serve several purposes.

²¹⁴ Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*.

²¹⁵ Even though the three faces of power do not adequately accommodate worldview development, they are an effective organizing tool in other ways. They are also embedded in the organizing practices of MPA and, thus, must be accommodated by any model will successfully facilitate worldview development at MPA.

The meetings had the potential to solidify volunteer commitments, demonstrate a strong presence at the in-district meeting in Lewiston, generate interest around upcoming events like Lobby Day, and talk about some of the findings from the canvass. As discussed, practical challenges around participant recruitment in Portland and Augusta and time shortages in Lewiston meant that none of the chapters had the opportunity to reflect on the content of the canvass. Had the meetings in each of the chapter areas gone as planned, the leadership and membership would likely have left the meetings with better understandings of the varied realities that inform worldview development. As illustrated by the plan to have follow-up meetings with new and old volunteers after the initial street canvass, MPA certainly has the capacity for this type of activity.

The original design of the follow-up meetings responded not only to the quest for a worldview, but also to the questions of practicality and power that characterize worldview development. The follow-up meetings were a practical way to engage new people. Just like the canvass, the follow-up meetings created links between actions generally associated with one the three faces of power. Not only did the meeting focus on volunteer recruitment, but it also had a direct action. Both of these happened in the context of conversations about worldview development, which further suggests the possibility of integrating the three faces of power and the community metanarrative model to yield practical and productive work on worldview development. The follow-up meetings were also designed to respond to the leadership-membership tension. A focus on the group's capacity to evaluate information would shift emphasis to the co-construction of knowledge. The leadership would be responsible for getting people into the room, but the members (or, in this case, new volunteers) would be responsible for generating the analysis. This could create a

productive relationship between the organizing capacity of MPA's leadership and the lived experiences of the membership.

In addition to the canvass and follow-up meetings, MPA also had the workshop at the December retreat. The workshop served as a reintroduction to narrative, but it did not delve into questions of narrative development. Although this was a productive conversation to have with members and staff, the collective brainpower of the participants could have been harnessed for something more attentive to *worldview development*, as opposed to *worldview explanation*.

The community metanarrative model echoes the frameworks put forward by social movement framing theorists in their models of collective action. It also fits with the three faces of power; the three faces of power must only be considered in the context of worldview shifting and worldview development. The community metanarrative also advocates locating similar values, building coalitions across those values, and shifting the interpretation of those values as situations change. It addresses the processes of organizations like GPP and TakeAction Minnesota that organized direct work on narrative. At very least, it accommodates the questions of power and practicality by replacing the worldview-as-byproduct with a dynamic process in which the people control the narrative. As far as practicality is concerned, the community metanarrative emphasizes the value of relationships derived from the development process. This is essential, as community organizing is about developing relationships, getting people to commit to movements, and empowering people to create change.

To bring Stone back into the conversation, "politics is driven by how people interpret information, [and] much political activity is an effort to control

interpretations.”²¹⁶ Because politics is “the struggle over ideas,”²¹⁷ politics is really about controlling the interpretations that inform ideas. This is precisely what MPA does: as a political organization, MPA must have a position and organize coherent action on a variety of topics. As a community advocacy group, however, the role of the organization is not so clear. Because of this, one thing that is not yet clear is the role the parent organization plays in the metanarrative process. Just how likely is it that a collection of people gathered under the guise of a political organization like MPA would develop a narrative or worldview completely independent of the values espoused by the catalyzing group? As discussed earlier, political organizations have certain values and understandings of how the world is and how it should be. This is not remotely inappropriate, but it does create the opportunity for conflicting or inconsistent values between the organization and its membership.

The question becomes one about the relationship between organizations and the ideas of their constituencies: Is an organization expected to present information for the people to evaluate, or should the organization interpret information for its constituents and move forward with a coherent message? To what extent should a progressive political organization derive its interpretations from the constituents it represents? Does the staunch focus on community-driven action ever prevent the organization from operating as effectively? What considerations inform the efficacy of a campaign? These questions move beyond the scope of this thesis, because they start to evaluate the relevance of organizations that design alternative, less-collaborative relationships with their membership.

²¹⁶ Stone, “Policy Paradox,” 28.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

This inquiry is intentionally limited to collaborative organizations like MPA that strive to integrate membership into all aspects of their organizing. This creates a unique tension between the membership-leadership, as each approaches the other as a legitimate producer and interpreter of information. That said, practical limitations and different perceptions or experiences of reality mean that these groups do not always communicate clearly, which complicates the process of worldview development with three tensions: practicality, power, and perceptions.

Moving Forward

It is easy to sit in a library and list reasons why organizations like MPA should organize endless worldview development activities so it produces a narrative that is singularly informed by the people. Unfortunately, the idealized reality that suggests such a focus is not the same reality in which MPA exists. Unexpected political situations, such as Olympia Snowe's retirement or the death of Lewiston's mayoral candidate Mark Paradis on the eve of the election, require immediate and decisive action. Simultaneous campaigns, such as this past summer's intensive same-day voter registration campaign alongside countless other initiatives, draw limited resources in an infinite number of directions. Finally, volunteers with varied schedules, interests, and capabilities are sometimes difficult to manage. All of these realities take their toll on the organization's limited human, financial, and temporal resources.

This gets back to the problem of action that characterizes MPA: trying to get work done because work needs to be done, but not having the human or financial capital with which to sustain individual conversations, hold group meetings to interpret and produce

data, or code thousands of slips of paper that represent the various values of its diverse constituents. So how do we move forward from here?

I argue that we need to use the community metanarrative process to correlate the existing stories and goals of MPA with the existing stories and goals of its members. I want to see a power analysis that includes MPA as an actor. This simple organizing trope lists actors, makes connections between them, and identifies motivations and limitations of each influential actor. I want to see this done with MPA on butcher paper on the wall as part of a series of meetings that is about building relationships, building worldview, and building a movement for progressive change. Including MPA's stories in the metanarrative process is a way to get past the leadership-membership tension. From there, we can develop that internal organizational narrative that can then be expanded to the public sphere through a second application of the metanarrative process.

This two-tiered approach accommodates both the internal or organizational narrative (worldview development) and the external or public narrative (worldview shifting). Instead of complementary-but-unaligned narratives in the first tier of the community narrative, the second tier is characterized by the highly conflicting stories of MPA's progressive narrative and the dominant narrative of the conservative Right. Some of these may be non-stories with very little content, and MPA must be cognizant of the power of language and the necessity to frame one's worldview through intentional and original language. That said, the process of the community metanarrative is a viable solution. After isolating the stories that exist in foil to its organizational narrative, MPA can analyze the relationships between the conflicting stories. Are any of the actors the same? Are any of the problems the same? Do groups have any of the same allies? These questions will create the

space in which to provide an alternative narrative that is still representational, accurate, believable, and long-lasting. With time, this process will yield the worldview shift that MPA and other progressive organizations have defined as their ultimate, yet decidedly elusive, goal.

Conclusion

Narratives, whether defined as worldviews, collective action frames, or political myths, affect how people interact with the world. They have the capacity to motivate people and effect change, which makes them interesting to organizations like MPA that rally large groups of people around political issues. Progressive organizations like MPA pursue worldview development to facilitate their visions for political change, but they do not have an effective process through which to develop worldview. The questions of worldview development –how it develops, who develops it, and when it develops—are the foundation of this inquiry.

The original question, quite simply, is how a progressive political organization can facilitate the development of a narrative that motivates its political activities. To better understand the implications of this question, we look to existing approaches to action-related narrative in Chapter One. In studying community organizers and social movement framing theorists and their understandings of worldview and collective action frames, respectively, we discover that MPA is interested narrative that relates not only to scholars who study the organizing capacity of narrative, but also to scholarship that addresses the theoretical foundations of a society: political myths. From here, we recognize that stories and language are the constituent elements of narrative.

Developing a worldview requires coherence and consistency that can only be accomplished by controlling a community's interpretations of stories and language. This enriches the original question by adding two additional considerations worldview

development: The first, that limited resources stymie direct attention to worldview, is a question of practicality. The second, that there are the dynamics between leadership and membership in a group like MPA, is a question of power. To address these two tensions, MPA proposes a worldview development process that capitalizes on the direct action and narrative elements of policymaking.

As Chapter Two illustrates, narrative is endemic to the policymaking process. With this in mind, we seek criteria with which to evaluate action-oriented narratives in policy. We start with narrative analysis and land in narrative *policy* analysis, which accommodates the strategic nature of narrative development in the realm of policymaking. This leads us to other policy thinkers who provide a new characterization of the two tensions we introduce at the end of Chapter One. The more nuanced relationship between perceived and experienced realities takes up our earlier questions of power and practicality by explaining the ways in which varied interpretations complicate worldview development. By linking Roe and Stone, we develop a tentative model with which to accommodate those three tensions in narrative development. This is the community metanarrative model, which encourages co-construction of a worldview through four distinct steps.

While pursuing the question of narrative development in Chapter Two, it becomes clear that there are various tiers or types of narratives. Smaller, more personal stories inform larger, more generalizable stories. The smaller stories reflect individual experiences and beliefs, whereas the larger stories create a narrative that is more akin to the worldviews, frames, and myths discussed by community organizers, social movement framing theorists, and scholars of political myth. The result is a two-tiered approach to narrative development. The first tier is internal to an organization and requires consensus

among leadership and membership and attention to the perceived and experienced realities of those two groups. The second tier is external to an organization and disseminates the organizational narrative into the public to engage with the dominant worldview and create space for political change.

Chapter Three delves into the organizing activities of MPA. In this chapter, we study three different narrative-development-oriented activities organized at MPA, all of which focus on generating conversations in the policy context about values. The goal of these activities was to combine direct political action with worldview development and, thus, transcend the tensions of power, practicality, and perceptions endemic to narrative development. As we see, the three activities were not entirely successful in their accommodation of the three organizing challenges, above.

In Chapter Four we respond to the persistent tensions of worldview development by proposing a slight critique of the three faces of power. Despite its prominence as an organizing trope designed to clarify the variety of activities that grassroots organizations use to further their agendas for change, unquestioning allegiance to three faces of power actually obfuscates the layer of smaller, personal narratives. The stories and the processes through which stories are collected are essential to understanding the development of an effective worldview but do not fit into the framework of the three faces of power. Instead, the three faces of power focus on *shifting* worldview, thus overlooking the essential step of *worldview development*. The community metanarrative model fills the space of *worldview development* left by the three faces of power, which suggests that MPA must dedicate separate attention to the process of development before it can begin to shift the dominant narrative.

This conclusion poses two questions of practicality. First, how does an organization divert limited human and financial resources to an abstract process of worldview development? The answer to this question is simple: Organizations such as MPA must envision alternative ways of building organizational strength. Volunteers and members who participate in a process of worldview development will likely become natural subscribers to the developing worldview, which provides an initial population through which to evaluate the longevity, representationality, and accuracy of the narrative. In other words, more immediate buy-in will facilitate the progression from this worldview as a descriptive element of the organization into a strategic narrative that can be used to shift how others view the world.

A second question is about how the community metanarrative process expands past the organization to reach what we have described as the external, Grand, or opposing narrative. Although this question is beyond the scope of this inquiry, I propose a similar course of action to that which yields the internal narrative: return to the metanarrative process. This time, however, the process will happen in the context of highly contentious stories. Ideally, the metanarrative will not only transfer an internal narrative into the public sphere, but also facilitate the narrative's ascension into the hearts and minds of those who ascribe to a generally opposing narrative.

To conclude, I propose a tentative answer to the nuanced question of narrative development. Several months ago I asked how progressive community advocacy groups develop a worldview for political action that does not strengthen tensions between leadership and membership but is still practical given the organization's limited resources. Following the insights of community organizers, social movement framing theorists,

scholars of political myth, narrative analysts, narrative policy analysts, and the MPA members with whom I spent several months, I find that community organizers need a model for worldview development that attends to the individual experiences and perceptions of the people. These experiences and perceptions may vary, differ, conflict, change, debate, contradict, or confuse, but they are the foundation of how people interpret the world and, as such, are perhaps the most truthful pieces of information imaginable. This is why community organizing and story attentive narrative development “WORK,” as Gen Lysen puts it when reflecting on the challenging follow-up meeting with new MPA members. These participatory processes honor the value of individual perceptions and harness their capacity to create positive political change.

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Appendix A: Explanation of Maine People’s Alliance

Much of the information included below came from personal communication and observation and, for that reason, is not directly cited. Other information is pulled from internal briefs, grant proposals, and organizational documents that are not publicly available. Where appropriate, information is cited. Ultimately, the purpose of this appendix is not to provide a complete documentation and analysis of the thirty-year history of MPA. Instead, this appendix introduces MPA as an organization that is looking to narrative as a tactic for creating progressive change in Maine.

Brief overview of MPA

MPA is a progressive membership-driven community action organization that was founded in 1982 by a collection of neighbors in Lewiston, Maine. MPA was officially incorporated as a 501(c)(4) in 1983, and its sister organization, the Maine People’s Resource Center (MPRC), was established as a 501(c)(3) in 1984.^{218,219} Together, the two organizations comprise a partnership that allows staff and members to address numerous social and political issues that range from corporate responsibility and universal healthcare to jobless benefits and comprehensive immigration reform.

MPA has secured the support of over 32,000 members and makes annual contact with over 100,000 Mainers.²²⁰ At present, MPA members hail from every county in Maine

²¹⁸ “About MPA,” Maine People’s Alliance, <http://www.mainepeoplesalliance.org/about>.

²¹⁹ The (c)(4) status means that MPA can spend up to 50% of its activity on political issues, whereas the (c)(3) status categorizes MPRC as a not-for-profit that can collect donations.

²²⁰ “About MPA,” Maine People’s Alliance.

and represent 170 different towns.²²¹ The organization excels at “developing grassroots leaders for change, and [has] designed and adopted a nationally-recognized model for systematic leadership development of citizen volunteers.”²²² This model begins with the membership. To become a member, Mainers can make a contribution of five or more dollars or volunteer for five or more hours. This model is consistent with MPA’s belief in an accessible community of political advocacy and the organization’s attention to low-income individuals who are sometimes shut out of membership organizations for inability to pay.

The massive membership self-divides into a number of groups based on how involved the individual is with MPA (see Table A.1). By definition, “members” are those who have made a one-time contribution of time or money, but they are not otherwise active. Members who participate in at least one event per year are called “volunteers.” More active members who begin to identify themselves as important contributors to the MPA structure are called “activists.” The “member organizers” are more involved than the activists, and they self-identify themselves as leaders within the organization. They also understand the current issues and campaigns of the organization. “Lead organizers” take on additional responsibilities and have experience with a variety of tasks, including meeting facilitation and fundraising. MPA considers leadership development to be one of its core organizational goals, and members are encouraged to participate to their fullest capacity.²²³

²²¹ Maine People’s Alliance, “MPA SCIF Proposal,” October 28, 2011. Unpublished.

²²² Maine People’s Alliance, “Building Progressive Power for Maine,” January 20, 2011. Unpublished.

²²³ Maine People’s Alliance, “MPA SCIF Proposal,” 2.

Table A.1 MPA Leadership Development Ladder. *Reproduced with permission of MPA.* ²²⁴

MPA Leadership Development (LD) Ladder		
LD #		Definition
5	Member	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sends MPA a donation, but not otherwise active.
4	Volunteer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On our contact and turnout lists; has attended at least one event or taken one action in the last 12 months (such as attending a rally/meeting, writing a letter, contacting an elected official about an issue, etc.)
3	MPA Activist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attends chapter meetings or issue campaign meetings; has met with local organizer “one-on-one”; begins to identify with the organization (says “we” when talking about MPA); volunteers time regularly (at least monthly); understands issue campaigns in broader systemic/movement context
2	Member Organizer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-identifies as an MPA leader; takes specific responsibility and leadership; is accountable/dependable; helps recruit/train new volunteers; is involved in planning campaign strategies; understands organizers’ math; is aware of their own development and has undergone a “leadership development self-assessment” with a local organizer; understands all three “ <u>faces of power</u> ”
1	Lead Organizer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Has demonstrated success in planning and executing major events/projects with minimal support/coaching; regularly recruits/trains/supports other new and developing leaders, may represent MPA at national tables or in state coalitions; demonstrated mastery of all basic organizing skills (meeting facilitation, fundraising, messaging, public speaking, turnout, etc.); eligible for the state MPA board of directors

One of the core missions of MPA is to build a community of organizations that collaborates on issues that affect Mainers throughout the state. MPA plays a unique role in these coalitions because of its long history and strong infrastructure. For the past thirty years, MPA has been one of the founding members of every major progressive coalition in Maine.²²⁵ As of fall of 2011, MPA played a key role in seven coalition groups in Maine, including the Maine Small Business Bureau, Engage Maine, Maine Immigrant Rights

²²⁴ Table developed by MPA. Maine People’s Alliance, “MPA SCIF Proposal,” October 28, 2011: 3. Unpublished.

²²⁵ Maine People’s Alliance, “Building Progressive Power for Maine.”

Coalition, and the Healthcare for Maine Coalition.²²⁶ Other partnerships are listed thematically on the MPA website and include numerous groups around issues such as Labor and Trade Associations, Clean Elections, and Affordable Housing.²²⁷ The current published tally lists 48 allied groups across Maine.

In its work with each of these allies, MPA demonstrates high capacity to organize by mobilizing thousands of members on a variety of social and political issues. This is particularly evidenced by recent work on ballot campaigns, for which MPA began “to lead and coordinate all aspects of... campaigns, from field strategy, to communications plans to fundraising.”²²⁸ MPA organized door-to-door canvasses, phone banking, and other activities to garner support for specific initiatives. Community members, legislators, and community groups recognize the influential organizational capacity of MPA regardless of whether they support or reject the organization’s ideology.

Despite the diverse and sometimes controversial work that MPA does with members and coalition groups, the organization has a solid foundation of values. MPA identified several core values in a 2011 report on the vision and values of the organization, including community, investing in the future, and promoting fairness, equality, and justice.²²⁹ In this report, MPA reaffirmed its assertion that working together is better than working alone: “We are stronger when we work together than when we go it alone.”²³⁰ MPA also believes that government is an important actor on the political scene and works

²²⁶ Maine People’s Alliance, “MPA SCIF Proposal,” 4.

²²⁷ “Allies and Partners,” Maine People’s Alliance, <http://www.mainepeoplesalliance.org/allies>.

²²⁸ Maine People’s Alliance, “MPA SCIF Proposal,” 5.

²²⁹ Maine People’s Alliance, “Maine People’s Alliance: Vision and Values,” 2011: 1. Unpublished.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

to remind people that the U.S. government is a government, “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

This outlook reveals the central core MPA, which is to inspire its members and communities toward social change. The organization and its campaigns start and end with the members. Members propose, organize, participate in, and reflect on actions and campaigns with the assistance of MPA staff. As MPA staff wrote in a recent grant proposal, “Ultimately, we see all of our issue campaigns as vehicles for developing community leaders who are empowered to be involved in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, and who can lead the fight for social change into the future.”²³¹

Current leadership and membership structure

MPA has a fairly straightforward organizing structure that incorporates members and staff in a symbiotic relationship to facilitate action on a variety of issues. The board of directors consists of 10-12 lead organizers who are nominated and elected by members every year at the organization’s annual retreat.²³² Alongside the board are administrative and organizing positions in Bangor, Lewiston, Augusta, and Portland. Despite the strength and dedication of the paid staff and the board members, they would be the first to assert that the members and volunteers are the ones who actually keep the organization running. In the interest of clarity, I will briefly describe the variety of positions that populate MPA. All of this is public knowledge and is available on the MPA website.

²³¹ Maine People’s Alliance, “MPA SCIF Proposal,” 2.

²³² Amy Halsted, Personal Communication, November 15, 2011.

The Executive Director, Jesse Graham, works primarily out of the Bangor office. Amy Halsted, the Associate Director, works in the Portland office alongside Mike Tipping, the Communications Director, and Bridget Surber, the Member Programs Director. There are two Administrative Coordinators for MPA, as well: Charlene Childs works in Bangor, and Melissa Urey, who also manages the database, works in Portland. These more administrative positions create a foundation upon which the organization mobilizes members towards more direct political action.

MPA incites action through its organizers, who are geographically located in the organization's four chapter areas. In addition to mobilizing the membership within their regions to do direct actions like canvass neighborhoods and lobby the State House, organizers also lead monthly chapter meetings and coordinate statewide action on an assigned issue. For example, Jennie Pirkl, who coordinates the Greater Portland chapter, is also the Healthcare Organizer. Jonathan Hillier fills the newly-created organizer position in the Kennebec Valley chapter, and he also mobilizes the state around Environmental and Fair Trade. Lewiston is home to several organizers. Nate Libby manages the Small Business Coalition out of the Lewiston office, and MPA's Lead Organizer, Gen Lysen, coordinates actions between the other organizers alongside her duties in the Androscoggin Valley chapter.²³³

Also working out of the Lewiston office is Ben Chin, the Political Engagement Director. Ben acts as a bridge between the administrative and organizing elements of MPA by developing campaign work, coordinating political activities, and working directly with both organizers and the membership to make MPA's mission heard. Ultimately, the

²³³ There is also an organizing position in Bangor, but the chapter was in transition at the time of this writing.

organizers are a key element of MPA's mission, as they are the channel through which members and prospective members engage with the organization.

The success of MPA would be nominal if it were not for the organization's strong canvass capacity, which is responsible for fundraising, member recruitment, and campaign work. Bangor and Portland each have a field canvass that goes door-to-door to recruit new volunteers and solicit donations. The field canvass is assisted by a team of six phone canvassers that makes calls every evening. When field and phone canvassers are at full strength, the organization logs up to 1,000 contacts per day.²³⁴ As Associate Director Amy Halsted remarked, the canvassers are the "front lines" of the organization; without them, the organization would not begin to approach its current capacity.²³⁵

At this point, I want to emphasize the importance of people to the success of MPA. The constant interaction between MPA staff and community members creates a dialogue that furthers MPA's central mission of leadership development. Strong leaders, both on staff and in volunteer positions, cultivate leadership skills in newer volunteers and frequently reach out to newer members and non-members to build relationships. The result is a people-driven organization that capitalizes on the skills and talents of its staff and members to inspire Maine towards progressive change.

Recent Campaigns, Achievements, and Challenges

At a recent planning conference in Augusta, members and volunteers posted over 100 successes from the year 2011, alone (see Table A.2). These successes build on the

²³⁴ Maine People's Alliance, "Building Progressive Power for Maine," 1.

²³⁵ Amy Halsted, Personal Communication, November 15, 2011.

successes of the past thirty years, which span social and political issues on the local and national scales. The issues of MPA's campaigns are diverse and range from reducing the use of toxics and preventing spikes in local phone service charges to protecting the rights of LGBT Mainers and blocking the construction of a divisive boulevard through downtown Lewiston.²³⁶ These successes are often achieved through partnerships with other organizations, as MPA's mission and current organizing strategies suggest. Because of the extensive history of MPA, I will highlight only a few key campaigns and challenges of MPA's recent history.

Over the years, MPA has built a large media presence. The organization has a dedicated communications staff, and MPA is referenced an average of once per day in news media. An example of this prominence is the media coverage of the December 2011 rally at the Blaine House in Augusta, Maine in protest of potential cuts to jobless benefits. MPA staff leaked word of the rally just prior to the event, which led to a flurry of online news media by organizations such as the Maine Public Broadcasting Network.²³⁷ Numerous media groups, including *The Bangor Daily News*,²³⁸ *The Sun Journal*,²³⁹ *The Portland Press Herald*,²⁴⁰ and the State of Maine website,²⁴¹ published stories about the aftermath of the action in the days that followed. Search results also illustrate the depth of media coverage enjoyed by MPA. For example, entering the keywords "Maine People's Alliance" in the

²³⁶ The Visible Community organized Lewiston residents to protest "The Heritage Initiative." For more information, see "The Visible Community," *The Visible Community*, <http://www.visiblecommunity.org/>.

²³⁷ A.J. Higgins, "Mainers to Bring Unemployment Frustrations to Governor's Front Door," *MPBN*, December 2, 2011, <http://www.mpbn.net/>.

²³⁸ "Jobless Mainers rally outside Blaine House, LePage hears concerns," *Bangor Daily News*, December 3, 2011. <http://bangordailynews.com/>.

²³⁹ "Maine jobless rally at Blaine House," *Sun Journal*, December 3, 2011, <http://www.sunjournal.com/>.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Adrienne Bennett, "Governor LePage Listens to Job Seekers Saturday Morning," *State of Maine: Office of Governor Paul LePage*, December 3, 2011, <http://www.maine.gov/>.

search bar on the *Sun Journal* website yields over a thousand hits.²⁴² This compares to less than one hundred generated by other well-known progressive organizations in Maine.²⁴³ MPA's media presence is one of its distinguishing factors and organizing strategies; the group has fairly easy means to get information to large portions of the state.

A more specific MPA accomplishment was the foundation of the Maine Small Business Coalition (MSBC) in 2008.²⁴⁴ The coalition, which now has over 2,500 member organizations, is a strong organizing force on the horizon of Maine economic policy. The group offers perspectives that differ from those of the historic managers of business interests, like the Chamber of Commerce, and helps small businesses protect their rights and interests in relation to political issues.²⁴⁵

The most notable achievement of 2011 was the People's Veto Campaign to put LD 1373, the repeal of same-day voter registration, on the ballot for Mainers to evaluate. MPA was a key contributor to the Protect Maine Votes Coalition, which vowed to collect the 57,000 signatures needed to put the question on the November 2011 ballot.²⁴⁶ As per official guidelines, signature collection ran for one month. By August 8, the coalition members had collected over 70,000 notarized signatures. According to field organizer Doug Kempner, this averaged, "one signature every fifteen seconds during a twelve hour workday for twenty-three days."²⁴⁷ This fully demonstrates the organizational capacity of MPA: it mobilized hundreds of volunteer hours on the topic to mount an impressive

²⁴² "Maine People's Alliance," *Sun Journal*, search query generated March 18, 2012, <http://www.sunjournal.com/>.

²⁴³ "Equality Maine," *Sun Journal*, search query generated March 18, 2012, <http://www.sunjournal.com/>.

²⁴⁴ Maine People's Alliance, "Building Progressive Power for Maine," January 20, 2011: 2. Unpublished.

²⁴⁵ For additional information, visit the Maine Small Business Coalition's website: <http://www.mainesmallbusiness.org/>.

²⁴⁶ "Process," Protect Maine Votes, <http://protectmainevotes.com/process>.

²⁴⁷ Doug Kempner, Personal Communication, January 8, 2012.

defense of suffrage. MPA combined this effort with an extensive Get Out The Vote (GOTV) campaign, which led the veto to pass by a 60% majority.

Despite the general successes of MPA over the years, there are several key challenges with which the organization continues to struggle.²⁴⁸ To begin, MPA organizes in a rural state. This means there are great distances between membership pockets, and door-knocking campaigns are sometimes more time consuming than they are productive. There is also a lot of territory to cover, and with that distance comes geographically variable ideologies. Maine is also a state of challenging demographics. The population is small to begin with, so the state has a fairly small federal budget. The lower-income and aging populations are also more challenging to organize, and they hold diverse perspectives on the role of government. Finally, there is strong Conservative momentum in the state due to the recent work of several growing Conservative think tanks, which is also illustrated by the 2010 election of Governor Paul LePage.

One of the final challenges for MPA is to inspire a shift in worldview that favors progressive change. As MPA wrote in an early 2011 brief about building progressive power in Maine, “This shift will be especially important in the years ahead when it comes to conveying a compelling story of what precipitated the economic collapse and what kinds of public policies will build a lasting recovery.”²⁴⁹ The “story” that MPA references in this report alludes to earlier work the organization has done on narrative building and illustrates the importance of the questions investigated in this thesis.

²⁴⁸ Maine People’s Alliance, “MPA SCIF Proposal,” 5.

²⁴⁹ Maine People’s Alliance, “Building Progressive Power for Maine,” 3.

Table A.2 Achievements celebrated at the December 2011 MPA Retreat.

MPA Achievements 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPA was the first group to oppose governor LePage after his election, including delivering thousands of post cards to him his first week in office in support of health care reform • We beat back an attempt to allow the harmful chemical BPA back into children's products! • We beat back an attempt to strip away collective bargaining for workers (..... for now) • We stopped an attempt to roll back child labor laws in Maine! • We organized the first real campaign to pass legislation to establish a state bank! • We made the news media an average of more than once a day, every day, all year! • We grew the Maine Small Business Coalition to nearly 3,000 members! • Through the Maine Small Business Coalition we made the Chambers of Commerce, the NFIB and Senator Jon McKane very uncomfortable. • 150 MPA members made the Hall of Flags shake, chanting "Whose house? OUR HOUSE!" at Lobby Day 2011 • We released the (first ever) Maine Racial Justice Policy Guide! • We took over a Bank of America lobby and demanded they listen to us! • We gathered more than 1300 signatures in 24 hours to protect Maine clean elections! • We packed the statehouse with loud protestors on 24 hours notice to fight LD 1333, the health insurance rate hike bill. • Our new in-house polling firm (i.e. Mike Tipping) produced BY FAR the most accurate polling about the November election results (the Portland Press Herald calling them "uncannily close")! • We gathered more than 8,000 signatures in opposition to state Republicans' health insurance deregulation and rate hike bill! • We produced a storybook of Mainers hurt by poor healthcare quality. • We identified 452 new 'Action Team' members in regions outside chapter areas! • We generated 2,244 calls to LePage to demand he stop his rollback of important environmental protections! • We recruited 2,236 new MPA members at their homes in 2011! • We raised \$214,732.72 in small grassroots donations from Mainers in 2011! • 4,235 MPA members took action in our campaigns this year! • We led the statewide People's Veto campaign to protect Election Day voter registration. And WON: 60% to 40%!!!! • We helped stop an Arizona-style anti-immigrant law. • In defense of voting rights, we: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ collected over 70,000 signatures ○ held more than two dozen house parties ○ engaged over 1,000 volunteers ○ raised over \$10,000 from hundreds of small donors ○ generated 150 letters to the editor submitted to 21 Maine newspapers ○ spoke with and issue ID'd 18,633 supportive voters for the campaign ○ made 61,126 personal contacts with voters to turn them out to the polls ○ made Charlie and Charlie look pretty damn silly • We mobilized over 1400 business owners to oppose the health insurance rate hike bill! • We knocked on over 100,000 doors in 102 towns to talk with Mainers about getting involved in our campaigns! • We collected 4,000 (and counting) signatures to pass a clean energy referendum! • We organized 100 Mainers to occupy a bridge and Augusta and demand policies that will help the 99%! • We organized Mainers to attend the Anthem rate hike hearings and speak out against insurance company greed! • We distributed 8,114 brochures and engaged in 902 face-to-face conversations on doorsteps in Maine about the benefits available to Mainers under the Affordable Care Act!

Appendix B: Important Actors

I reference the following people from MPA throughout this thesis. I list their names and titles here for easy reference.

JESSE GRAHAM, Executive Director

AMY HALSTED, Associate Director

BEN CHIN, Director of Political Engagement

GEN LYSEN, Lewiston Organizer

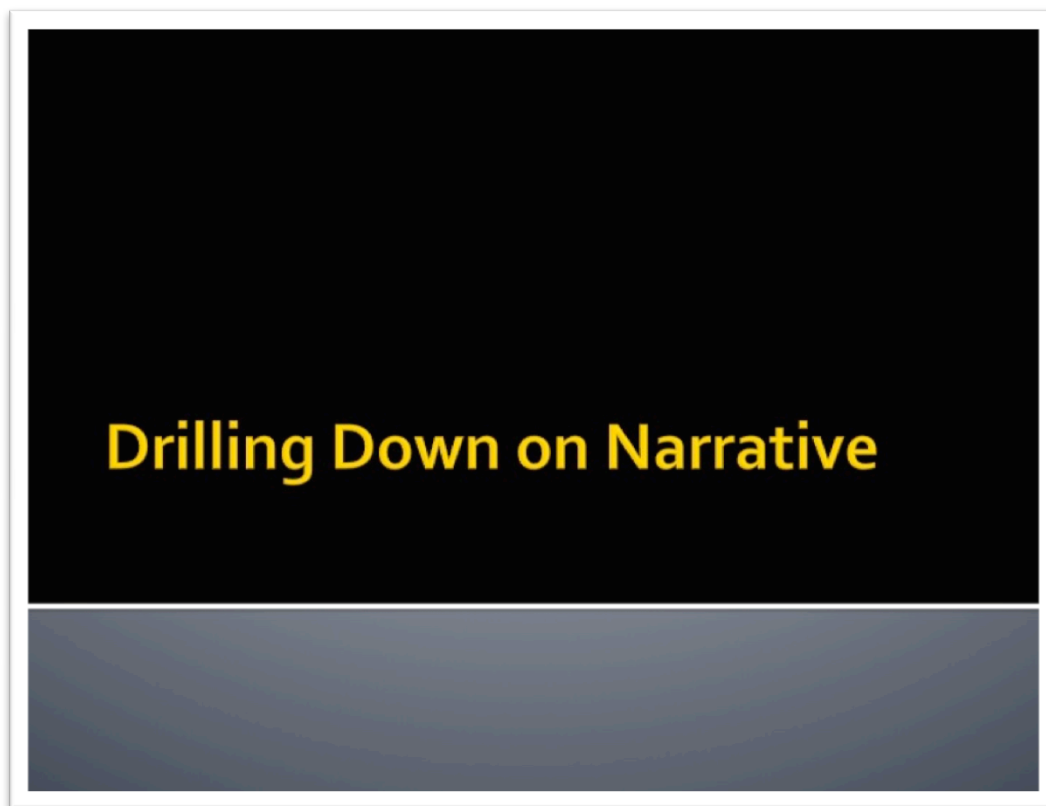
JENNIE PIRKL, Portland Organizer

JONATHAN HILLIER, Augusta Organizer

DOUG KEMPNER, MPA Intern

Appendix C: Narrative PowerPoint

Ben Chin and I developed the following PowerPoint to introduce the topic of narrative at the December 2011 retreat. To facilitate group discussion, we designed the slides with animation so that the text would not appear until prompted and people could brainstorm ideas unaffected by the bullet points developed by MPA. Although this generated fairly free-flowing conversations about narrative, it is important to remember that this presentation was developed by MPA with a certain set of values and goals in mind. With this in mind, we can approach the content of the PowerPoint as a narrative, itself.



What are some progressive values?

- Community
- Fairness/Justice
- Love
- Equality
- Inclusion
- Compassion
- Caring for next generation
- Freedom (civil rights movement)
- Family

What are some conservative values?

- Personal responsibility
- Freedom
- Family
- Individualism (take care of yourself)
- The "Free" Market
- Small Government
- Underlying racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc...

What do you notice about those values?

Similarities? Differences?

Is progressive "freedom" the same as conservative "freedom"?

How do we talk about those values?

With a narrative!

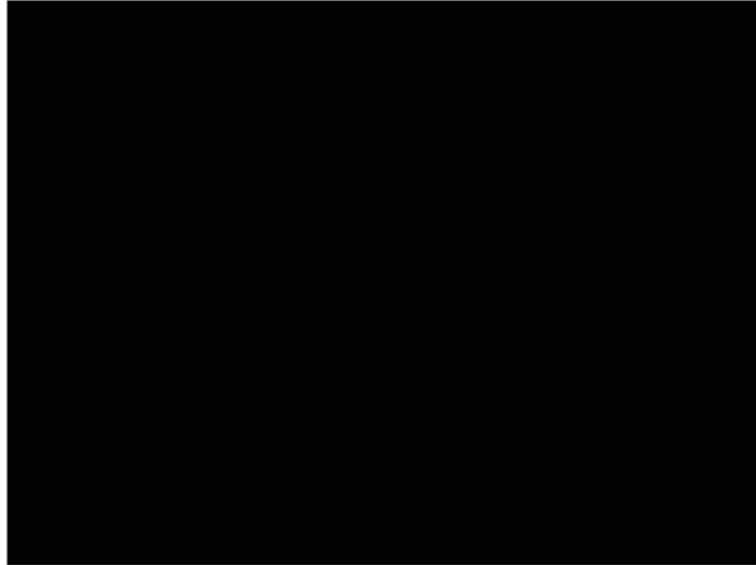
What is a Narrative?

- Story
- Conveys values
- Conflict
- Bad guys
- Good guys
- Resolution

Why is narrative important?

- It's how we think and remember information
- We don't remember facts and statistics
- It's how we shift our culture's values

Conservative Example 1: Health Care



Health Care Ad Breakdown:

CHARACTERS:

- Good Guys:
 - Small Businesses
 - Workers
- Bad Guys:
 - Government

CONFLICT:

- Problem:
 - Bad economy
 - Government wants your money (taxes)
- Solution
 - No health care reform
 - Call Snowe and Collins

Conservative Example 2: Immigration



Immigration Ad Breakdown

CHARACTERS

- Good Guys:
 - Family smiling on the steps
 - Construction worker
 - White collar office guy
 - Couple struggling with Bills
 - Senior alone at old folks home
 - Happy Sharon Angle and Husband
- Bad Guys:
 - Immigrants crawling under fence
 - Sen. Harry Reid

CONFLICT

- Problem:
 - Safety at risk
 - Jobs at risk
 - Social security at risk
 - Tax breaks for "illegal aliens"
- Solution:
 - Arizona immigration law
 - Lower taxes for non-immigrants (implicit)
 - Take away immigrants' social security (implicit)
 - Elect Sharon Angle

Conservative Example 3: Rick Perry Ad



Rick Perry Ad Breakdown

CONFLICT:

- Problems:
 - APOCALYPSE!!!
 - Urban decay—who lives there?
 - Poverty, homelessness, job loss
 - Lack of hope, pride
- Solutions:
 - Not a single policy—just values!
 - Cowboy Toughness = personal responsibility
 - Bright shiny cities = free market
 - Military = only thing government is good for

CHARACTERS:

- Good Guys:
 - Rick Perry
 - Extras:
 - Awe-inspired child
 - Awe-inspired woman
 - Cheering crowds
 - Construction workers
 - Soldiers
 - Tough old guy
- Bad Guy:
 - The ultimate irresponsible Black Man: Obama

Overall Conservative Narrative

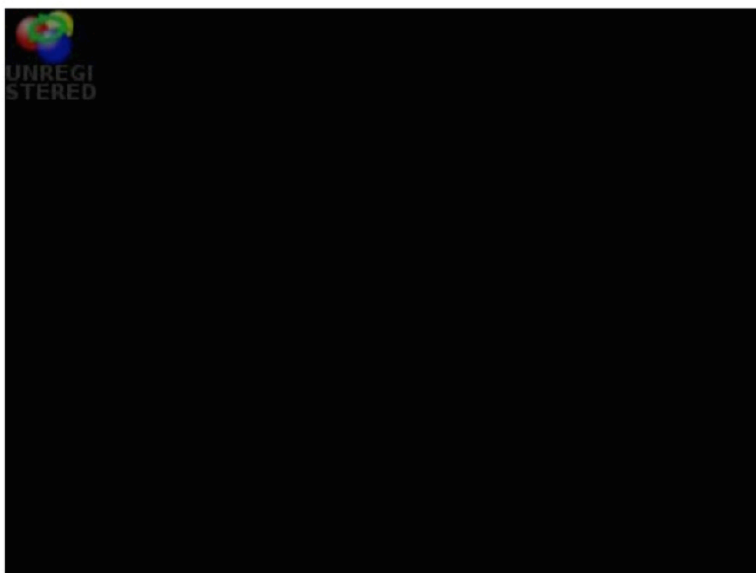
CONFLICT

- Problem:
 - Too much government taxes and regulations
 - Not enough free market
 - Too many irresponsible, unpatriotic, work-hating people: immigrants, people on welfare
- Solution:
 - Less government
 - Get tough on irresponsible people

CHARACTERS

- Good Guys:
 - Working, responsible Americans
 - Usually white and working class
- Bad Guys:
 - Government
 - Irresponsible, weak, out-of-touch liberals
 - Often people of color like immigrants

Good example of a (bad) narrative



Breakdown of the (bad) Narrative

CONFLICT

- Problem:
 - Deficit
 - Might force people to work blue collar jobs
- Solution:
 - Not clear....

CHARACTERS

- Good Guys:
 - Are there good guys?
- Bad Guys:
 - Are there bad guys?

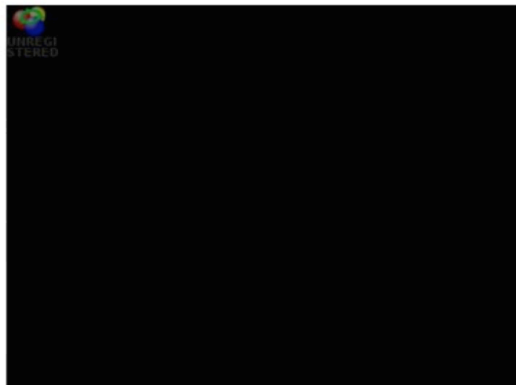
Bad Ideas it reinforces:

- Creates space for conservative solutions
- Makes people fear the working class
- Is deficit actually the problem?

That means....

...there is a better way for progressives to do narrative!

Progressive Example 1: Paul Wellstone



Paul Wellstone Breakdown

CONFLICT

- Problems:
 - Corporations and rich have too much influence
- Solutions:
 - Elect a regular guy to office!

CHARACTERS

- Bad Guys:
 - Rich people
 - Polluters
- Good Guys:
 - Farmers
 - Families
 - Working class: labor-endorsed
 - Middle class: his house and family

Progressive Example 2: Chellie



Chellie Ad Breakdown

CONFLICT

- Problem:
 - Bob has cancer and must fight with insurance companies
- Solution:
 - Health care reform
 - Elect Chellie

CHARACTERS

- Good Guys:
 - Bob
 - Chellie
 - Everyone that fights insurers
- Bad Guys:
 - Health Insurance Companies

Overall Progressive Narrative

CONFLICT

- Problems:
 - Hard workers can't make ends meet
 - Corporations and profits seem more important than people
 - Politicians that don't listen to the people
- Solution:
 - Better leaders
 - Start listening to the people

CHARACTERS

- Good Guys:
 - Farmers
 - Families
 - Working class
 - Middle class
- Bad Guys:
 - Rich people
 - Heartless conservatives
 - Corporations

Narrative Recap

- Tells a story
- Conveys values
- Has conflict, solutions, characters
- Shows people what to think
- Helps people understand the world
- Can be done **well**, can be done **better**

So what next?

Think about how we talk about problems, frame solutions, and identify the actors.

The way we present each of those elements might support a conservative narrative, or it might further our own cause.

It's up to US to make sure we're telling the right story!

Appendix D: Campaign Ad Transcriptions

The following are transcriptions of the campaign ads Ben Chin and I selected for the narrative workshop at the December 2011 MPA Retreat. The ads are listed in the order that we discussed them at the retreat. Each grouping of Narration/Visual/Text represents a different scene. Narration and text are transcribed word-for-word, and the visual elements are expressed as accurately as possible. Single slashes (/) between words in the description of the text denote a line break, and double slashes (//) denote an animated transition between words during the depicted scene. Text color, when relevant, is noted in parentheses and refers to all preceding words. Audio elements, such as music and tone of voice, are not addressed. Unless otherwise noted, the narrator is anonymous.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce: Employers for a Healthy Economy²⁵⁰

Narration: 10% of Americans unemployed

Visual: Video of people doing calculations at a table.

Text: 10% unemployment

Narration: businesses struggling,

Visual: Video of a light-skinned employee using a paper cutter.

Text: 7.2 million lost jobs

Narration: and Congress's latest healthcare bill makes a tough economy worse.

Visual: Video of a white male shaking his head as he does number calculations.

Narration: Health insurance costs will keep going up. Nearly two thirds of employers say they'll be forced to cut benefits,

Visual: Video of a white male manager speaking with a group of male and female employees.

Text: "Raise deductibles or copayments" / -Kaiser Health News

²⁵⁰ U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "Employers for a Health Economy – Struggling."

Narration: while Congress raises billions in new taxes to cover hundreds of billions in new spending by a government drowning in debt.

Visual: Video showing concerned male and female employees standing in a circle.

Text: 1.2 trillion federal deficit

Narration: Tell Senators Snowe and Collins we can't afford this healthcare bill.

Visual: Video of a white male manager speaking with a group of male and female employees.

Text: Employers for a Health Economy / Tell Senators Snowe and Collins to StartOver! / And get Health Care Reform Right. / 202-224-3121. / Paid for by the US Chamber of Commerce.

Sharron Angle: Best Friend²⁵¹

Narration: Illegals sneaking across our border, putting America's safety and jobs at risk.

Visual: Large square video on the left that depicts three darker-skinned people walking along a fence at night. Two smaller, stacked, videos on the left; one depicts a light-skinned woman with light-skinned children, and the other features two light-skinned construction workers.

Narration: And what does Harry Reid do? He comes out opposed to Arizona's tough new immigration law.

Visual: Black and white photo of Harry Reid looking off into the distance.

Text: Harry Reid (yellow) / opposed Arizona's new (white) / immigration / law (yellow)

Narration: Nevada's families struggling with the nation's highest unemployment.

Visual: Three video boxes: a stressed wife being comforted over the finances by her husband, a single man sitting at a table, and two men in suits in front of a computer.

Text: Families struggling (yellow) / with the nation's highest (white) / unemployment (yellow)

Narration: Harry Reid? He votes to give special tax breaks to illegal aliens,

Visual: Black and white still image of Harry Reid.

Text: Harry Reid (yellow) / votes to give special / tax breaks (white) / to illegal aliens (yellow)

Narration: and to give illegals social security benefits,

Visual: Video of three darker-skinned people walking along a fence at night.

Text: Harry Reid (yellow) / votes to give illegals (white) / Social Security Benefits (yellow).

²⁵¹ Sharron Angle, "Sharron Angle TV Ad: Best Friend."

Narration: even for the time they were here illegally.

Visual: Black and white still image of Harry Reid giving a speech.

Text: Even for the time they were here (white) // illegally (red).

Narration: Harry Reid, the best friend an illegal alien ever had.

Visual: Black and white still image of Harry Reid looking at the camera out of the corner of his eyes.

Text: Harry Reid (red) / the best friend / an (grey) illegal alien (red) ever had (gray).

Narration: Angle: "I'm Sharron Angle, and I approve this message."

Visual: Video of Sharron Angle and husband walking along a wooded path.

Text: Sharron Angle / for U.S. Senate. / Paid for by Friends of Sharron Angle. Approved by Sharron Angle.

Rick Perry: Proven Leadership²⁵²

Narration: "Despite all the nay-sayers who are predicting failure, our economy's growing again. No more manufactured crises, no more games, we are headed in the right direction." "I love these folks who say, well, this is *Obama's* economy. And that's fine. Give it to me!" (All are sound bites from Obama's speeches.)

Visual: Video montage of empty playground and subway, flickering lights, thunderstorm, rain, boarded up houses, and a peeling Obama campaign poster.

Narration: "Zero jobs." "Not a single job." "No jobs, zip, zero." "People are demoralized. What has happened?" "Zero new jobs." (Various speakers.)

Visual: Obama campaign posters and images.

Text: Zero jobs in Month of August / (9.2.11 – CNBC news). // Zero hope.

Narration: President Zero.

Visual: Empty stadium with Obama symbol.

Text: Zero Change.

Narration: "One in six Americans is living in poverty." "One in six Americans." "All time low." Obama sound bite: "But we're pointed in the right direction." Other speaker: "Headed in the wrong direction." (Various speakers.)

Visual: Video of a homeless person, Obama campaign imagery, and news headlines.

Text: "U.S Poverty rate hits all-time high." / U.S Census Bureau – 9.13.11

Narration: "I'm just getting started!" (Obama sound bite.)

Visual: Black screen.

²⁵² Rick Perry 2012, "Rick Perry – Proven Leadership."

Note: Rick Perry narrates the remainder.

Narration: “A great country requires a better direction.”

Text: In 2012

Visual: Video of horses running on the beach, flag flying on capitol, and green fields.

Narration: “A renewed nation needs a new president.”

Visual: Video of Perry giving a speech to a crowded room, children looking up into the sky, and various media sources.

Text: America will discover // a new name for America.

Narration: “the United States of America really is...”

Visual: Video images of ridges, green fields, the Statue of Liberty, and free-roaming livestock.

Narration: “the last great hope of mankind.”

Visual: Image of the earth from space

Narration: “It’s time to get America working again.”

Visual: Video of Perry shaking hands with mechanic workers, visiting a construction site, and giving high-fives to retail workers

Narration: We don’t need a president who apologizes for America.

Visual: Perry meeting and talking with people wearing military uniforms

Text: A president // Who served for Freedom.

Narration: “I believe in America. I believe in her purpose and her promise. I believe her best days have not yet been lived.”

Visual: Image montage of the Statue of Iwo Jima, 1940s black and white video of a man and a woman in front of the Statue of Liberty, a little boy with an airplane while fighter planes fly through the sky above, and Perry interacting with the media.

Narration: “I believe her greatest deeds are reserved for the generations to come. And with the help, and the courage of the American people”

Visual: Church, little boy drawing a flag in sidewalk chalk, well-lit shopping strip

Text: A President // Who will lead a nation

Narration: “we will get our country working again. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America!”

Visual: Video of Perry shaking hands with people, a sunrise, a store sign with the word “Open,” people clapping and cheering, and Perry saluting the screen.

Text: Perry for President. Paid for by RickPerry.org, Inc.

Moveon.org: Child's Pay²⁵³

Visual: Video clips pan through a young white boy washing dishes in a dark commercial kitchen, a young white girl vacuuming the floor in a hotel, a young white girl attending to glass bottles that pass by on a conveyor belt, a young white boy jumping off the back of a dump truck and collecting trash, and a young black boy fixing a tire in a mechanic's shop.

Text: Guess who's going to pay off / President Bush's \$1 trillion deficit

Visual: Black screen.

Visual: Video of a young white girl working the cash register at a grocery store.

Paul Wellstone: Classic Ad²⁵⁴

Note: Paul Wellstone narrates the entire ad.

Narration: "Hi, I'm Paul Wellstone, and I'm running for the United States Senate from Minnesota. Unlike my opponent, I don't have six million dollars, so I'm going to have to talk fast."

Visual: Paul Wellstone standing outside.

Narration: "This is my wife, Sheila, and our children."

Visual: Wellstone walks onto the screen and points to his family, standing in a line on the lawn.

Narration: "This is my house in Northfield, where I've lived for 21 years."

Visual: Wellstone walks across the screen and points to his house, which is behind him.

Narration: "My son, David, farms, and I've worked with Minnesota farmers for years."

Visual: Wellstone standing in front of a barn and silo.

Narration: Wellstone: "We must stop the poisoning of the land and the air and the water."

Visual: Wellstone in front of a lake.

Narration: "I'll lead the fight for national healthcare."

Visual: Wellstone in front of a hospital emergency room.

Narration: "I've been a teacher for 24 years."

²⁵³ Moveon.org, "Child's Pay."

²⁵⁴ Paul Wellstone, "Classic TV Ad - Fast Paced Paul Wellstone - 1990."

Visual: Wellstone in front of a school

Narration: Paul Wellstone won't slow down after he's elected. Vote for Paul Wellstone on November 6. (Anonymous narrator.)

Visual: Video of Wellstone getting on his green bus and the bus driving down the street.

Text: Vote for Paul Wellstone. November 6.

Chellie Pingree: My Brother Bob²⁵⁵

Note: Chellie Pingree narrates the entire ad.

Narration: "When my brother, Bob, was diagnosed, he fought two battles: insurance company, and his cancer. Bob died fourteen months later, with the guilt of knowing that his wife and child were left with nothing. But my family's not unique. We saw first hand how broken the system really is.

Visual: Chellie Pingree sitting in a living room, holding a photograph of her brother and infant nephew.

Text: Chellie Pingree

Narration: "That's why, in the Maine Senate, I stood up to the big drug and insurance companies to lower costs."

Text: Pingree stood up to / the drug and insurance companies. Passed the Maine Rx bill.

Narration: "I'm Chellie Pingree, and I approve this message because in Congress, no one will work harder to fix this broken system."

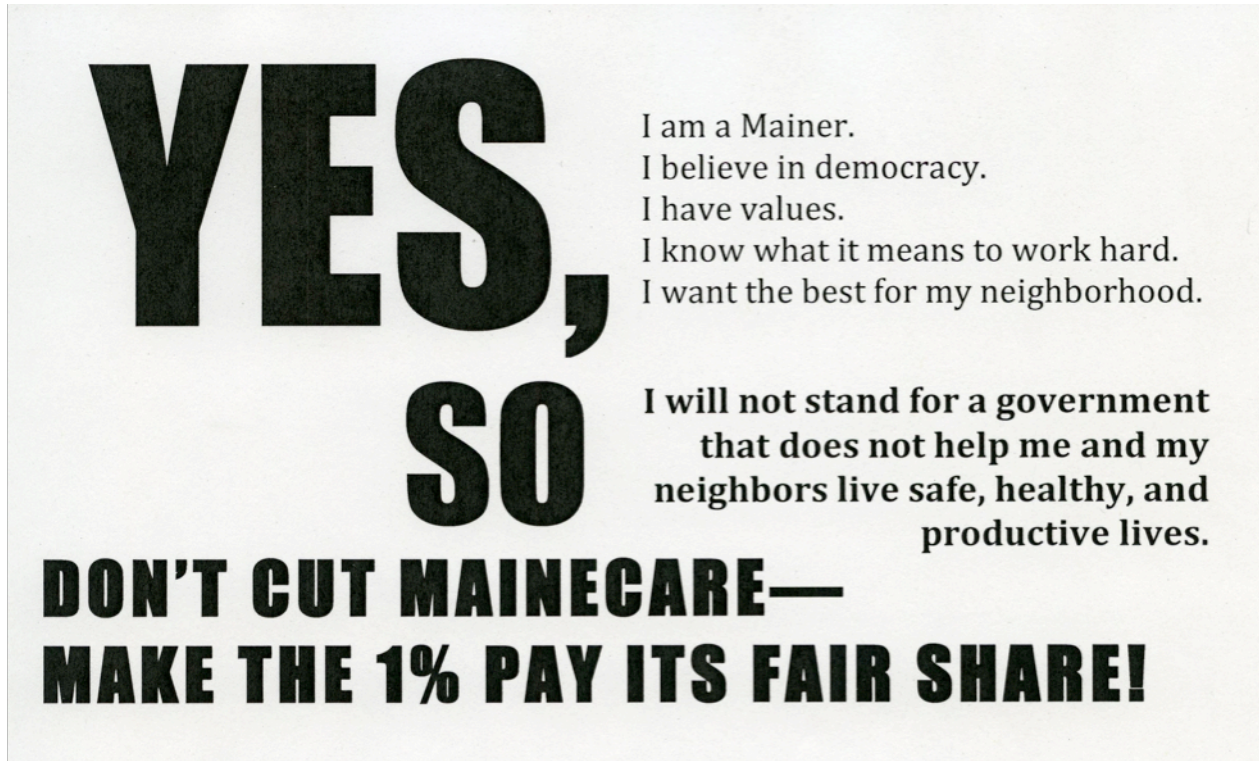
Visual: Pingree in her living room.

Text: Chellie Pingree. / For Congress. / www.chelliepingree.com. / Paid for by Pingree for Congress. Chellie Pingree approved this ad.

²⁵⁵ Chellie Pingree, "My Brother Bob."

Appendix E: Canvass Materials

Figure E.1 Postcards



We say NO to a government that only takes care of the 1%

Dear Governor LePage,

I am writing to tell you that I will NOT stand for cuts to MaineCare that keep people from getting the healthcare they deserve.

I oppose your attack on the hardworking Mainers who make ends meet through Unemployment Insurance and Worker's Compensation.

Collecting a fair share of taxes from the 1% will more than pay for these programs.

Name

Street

_____, ME _____
City Zip

Phone Text updates?
 Volunteer?

Email

We say YES to a government that takes care of the 99%.

Figure E.2 Survey

2012 Working Families Survey

Initials no.

Health

The Governor's proposal cuts or reduces benefits for over 100,000 people on MaineCare. Answering the questions will give a rough idea if you could be affected by any of the cuts.

- 1. Do you have health insurance? Yes No
a. If YES, is it: MaineCare Medicare Employer Private Insurance Other:

If you have private insurance, has your monthly rate increased?
Unsure No (\$0) \$1-\$50 \$51-\$100 \$100-200 \$200+

- b. If you're on MAINECARE, we need to know a few things to see how cuts will affect you:
i. How many people live in your household, including you?
ii. What are the ages of everyone in the household?
iii. Do you know the approximate household income? This includes employment, disability insurance, TANF, etc.
iv. Do you qualify for disability insurance (SSDI)?

Look at the attached chart and determine where the family is relative to the federal poverty level.
The family is at % of the federal poverty level.

How many people in your household might be affected by the following cuts?

- The Governor proposes to CUT the following people from MAINECARE:
PARENTS between 100%-200% of the Federal Poverty Level
Adults 21-64 YEARS OLD with NO CHILDREN AT HOME, NOT DISABLED, and UNDER THE POVERTY LEVEL
19 and 20 YEAR OLDS UNDER 150% of the federal poverty level.
The Governor proposes to REDUCE prescription drug ASSISTANCE in the following ways:
SENIORS (over 65 years) and the DISABLED who are between 100%- 185% of the poverty line will LOSE all assistance (Medicare Savings Program)
SENIORS 62-65 and the DISABLED who ARE NOT ON MEDICARE will LOSE assistance (Drugs for the Elderly Program)

Here are services that will be cut for all adults on MaineCare. If they share what specific services they've used, please circle. Otherwise they can indicate generally that they've used one or more.

- Dental, vision, Adult Family Care, Attendant Services
Physical Therapy, Ambulatory Surgical Center, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) Clinics
Occupation Therapy, More than 5 in-patient hospital stays, Targeted Case Management
More than 15 out-patient hospital visits

Have you ever used one or more of the services listed above? Yes No

- 2. Have you ever delayed going to the doctor because a doctor's visit cost too much? Yes No

Jobs

The Governor has proposed to make it harder to get unemployment insurance and worker's compensation, and we want to see how that will affect people.

3. Do you have a job(s) right now? Yes No, I'm looking for work No, I'm NOT looking for work
 No, I'm disabled

a. If YES, DOES have a job:

- i. How many jobs: 1 2 3 4 or more
- ii. What do you do for work? _____
- iii. Are you looking for an additional/different job? Yes No
- iv. Total hours worked/week: less than 10 10-20 20-40 40 40-50 50-60 60+
- v. Check benefits: Paid sick days Unpaid sick days Vacation Retirement Health Ins.
- vi. How often do your hours get rescheduled?
 A few times a week A few times a month A few times a year Almost never
- vii. Do you see any opportunities for career advancement at your current job? Yes No
- viii. Do you know how to apply for worker's compensation? Yes No

b. If NO, DOES NOT have a job and is not disabled:

- i. How many months has it been since you had a job: 0-3 3-6 6-9 9-12 12+
- ii. In that time, how many jobs have you applied for? 0 1-5 6-10 11-20 21-50 51+
- iii. Have you gotten any job offers? Yes No
If yes, why didn't you take the job? Pays a lot less than what I used to make
 No transportation No childcare Other? _____
- iv. Have you ever applied for unemployment? Yes No
 - If you have applied for unemployment, how was the process on a scale of 1-5?
 1: Extremely quick and easy 2: Fairly easy 3: Moderate/okay
 4: Fairly long and confusing 5: Extremely long and confusing
 - If no, do you know how to apply for unemployment benefits? Yes No
- v. Are you on unemployment right now? Yes No
 - If yes, how long? 0-6 weeks 6-12 weeks 5 months-1 year over a year
 - If no, have your unemployment benefits run out? Yes No
If they have run out, how are you making ends meet? (Check all that apply.)
 Other programs (like Food Stamps, TANF) Credit card debt
 Moved in with relatives/ friends Skipped medical care
 Other: _____

Basic

Race: Native American Hispanic or Latino Asian Arab or Middle Eastern
 Black or African American White/Caucasian (Not Hispanic or Latino) Other _____

Gender: Male Female Transgender

Immigrant or refugee? Yes No

Primary language? English Spanish Somali French Other _____

4. What are your two most important values from this list?

- Faith Fairness Self-determination Community
 Family Taking care of the next generation Other? _____

Additional notes and information from the conversation – please write clearly!

PLEASE FILL OUT FOR EACH SURVEY:

Surveyor Name: _____

Address of Contact: _____

Possible one-on-one? Yes No

Monthly Income

Household Size	100%	130%	133%	150%	165%	170%	185%	200%	250%	300%
1	\$908	\$1,180	\$1,207	\$1,362	\$1,498	\$1,543	\$1,679	\$1,815	\$2,269	\$2,723
2	\$1,226	\$1,594	\$1,631	\$1,839	\$2,023	\$2,084	\$2,268	\$2,452	\$3,065	\$3,678
3	\$1,545	\$2,008	\$2,054	\$2,317	\$2,548	\$2,626	\$2,857	\$3,089	\$3,861	\$4,633
4	\$1,863	\$2,422	\$2,478	\$2,794	\$3,074	\$3,167	\$3,446	\$3,725	\$4,657	\$5,588
5	\$2,181	\$2,836	\$2,901	\$3,272	\$3,599	\$3,708	\$4,035	\$4,362	\$5,453	\$6,543
6	\$2,500	\$3,249	\$3,324	\$3,749	\$4,124	\$4,249	\$4,624	\$4,999	\$6,248	\$7,498
Each additional person	\$319	\$414	\$424	\$478	\$526	\$542	\$589	\$637	\$796	\$955

Figure E.3 Takeaway sheet

How will the Governor's proposed legislation affect me and my family?

My household is at _____% of the federal poverty level.

Someone in my family might LOSE Medicare if they are (check all that apply)

- A parent BETWEEN 100%-200% of the poverty line
- An adult 21-64 years old with NO children at home and are NOT disabled
- 19 or 20 years old and UNDER 150% of the federal poverty level

Someone in my family might LOSE Medicare if they are (check all that apply):

- Over 65 or disabled and between 100%- 185% of the poverty line
- OVER 62 or DISABLED but NOT on Medicare

Have you ever used any of the following services? The governor proposes to CUT them for ALL adults on MaineCare.

- Dental, vision
- Physical Therapy
- Occupation Therapy
- More than 15 out-patient hospital visits
- Adult Family Care
- Ambulatory Surgical Center
- More than 5 in-patient hospital stays
- Attendant Services
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases Clinics
- Targeted Case Management

The Maine People's Alliance can help!

Maine People's Alliance has 32,000 members throughout Maine and works toward social, economic, and political justice for all Mainers. We work on a variety of issues, including

- Healthcare
- Affordable Housing
- Worker's Rights
- Immigration
- The environment
- Racial Justice
- Economic Justice

Please come to the follow-up meeting we're holding with people who are affected by the cuts we talked about today. We want to hear your stories and get to know you!

We are meeting on _____ at _____ at _____.

For more information, contact your organizer.

Lewiston: Gen Lysen, 207-782-7876

Augusta: Jonathan Hillier, 446-0303

Portland: Jennie Pirkel, 207-797-0967

Appendix F: Semester One Reflection, December 9, 2012

Community-based inquiry is fairly common in some of the social sciences at Bates, such as sociology and psychology, but there is not a very strong relationship between community-based inquiry and politics. Because of that, I had not considered community-based inquiry a viable point of departure for my politics thesis. Instead, I assumed that my thesis would, if I developed the right question, address abstract ideas that could be applied to community organizations. I certainly did not think that my thesis could involve direct interaction with the world that exists beyond the four walls of the library. Although I was disappointed with this conclusion and secretly wished I had been a sociology or psychology student who is expected to do community-based research (CBR) at some point in her Bates career, I conceded to this perceived reality. To appease the thesis process, I developed an academic question that addressed the power implications of service delivery in social services such as welfare and food supplements.

In mid-September, however, I changed my mind. I realized that I would have a difficult time remaining invested in work that did not have direct relevance to the world I see and engage with when I am not in a classroom. After making that decision, my next step was to meet with Georgia Nigro, the interim director of the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships (HCCP). To my great relief, Georgia thought there were easy overlaps between politics and community-based research, so we started talking about logistics. I left that meeting with one discrete task: identify a community partner by October break (October 18). This would give me about a month to acquaint myself with the CBR methodology and meet with a variety of community organizations to find a partnership that was collaborative and productive. After forging a partnership, my focus would turn to

issues of developing a question, figuring out how to answer the question, conducting the research, and evaluating that research for both my community partner and my thesis.

“Learning” Community Based Research

Before the fall of my senior year, my only experience with CBR was a brief research project the previous summer when I interned with the Volunteer Lawyers Project, a legal aid program based in Portland, Maine. The internship was accompanied by some research and a seminar on CBR, but I left the program with more questions than I had before the program. What is the role of the community partner in CBR? How does the researcher create incentive for community participation in the research? Should the researcher even think about incentive, or does the ideal partnership involve equal interest in the outcome? Should the researcher go to an organization with a question, or should the question be collaboratively developed? Does the research benefit the community as much as it does the researcher? How are effective decisions made in a collaborative research partnership?

All of these questions led me to the existing literature on CBR. My research uncovered an entire field of inquiry that goes by a variety of different names. Community-based research, Action Research, Participatory Action Research, Participatory Research, and Collaborative Research are some of the more common variations. In addition to this information, there are also endless personal and scholarly accounts of community-based inquiry ranging from topics of lead poisoning prevention to community relationships with law enforcement. It soon became very clear that I could write an entire thesis on the variations and opinions that exist within community-based inquiry.

As I read scholarly sources on community-based inquiry, I also explored what a community-based thesis would look like in practice. I came across two basic models: a community-*based* thesis would involve direct work with a community partner on a shared question, whereas a community-*informed* thesis would involve gathering information from the community and using that information to pursue a question that I developed. I was more interested in the former so that there was natural community investment in the research project. That also seemed like a good way to guarantee that the topic of the inquiry was worth exploring.

To explore this distinction, I read several theses that fit into both categories. This had the dual benefit of clarifying my options for a community-based thesis and exposing me other student work. From this exercise, I got a better sense of the expectations for community-based theses, learned how other students have addressed the various tensions of collaborative research, and noted strategies for more effective collaboration more effective. There were several limitations to these examples, particularly that none of them were very recent and that none of them addressed a topic that seemed methodologically related to the type of topic that I would be interested in pursuing. That said, reading accounts of CBR, both student and professional, was helpful in isolating key methodological points and recommendations for fruitful collaboration.

Finding a Community Partner

All of this background research was happening while I navigated the logistical challenge of networking among community organizations in Lewiston and greater Maine. My search began with several brainstorming sessions with professors and advisors who have strong

connections to the community. These brainstorming sessions were augmented by my own experience working in the community, and I soon found myself with an almost endless list of organizations and individuals to contact.

I began in the Bates sphere by talking to professors and faculty members who might have project ideas or connections to community organizations in Lewiston or other parts of Maine.

- Ellen Alcorn (Faculty, HCCP)
- Anna Bartel (former Professor of English, HCCP)+
- Bill Corlett (Professor of Politics, thesis advisor)
- Marty Deschaines (Faculty, HCCP)
- Elizabeth Eames (Associate Professor of Anthropology)+
- Emily Kane (Whitehouse Professor of Sociology)
- Peggy Rotundo (State Representative, HCCP)
- Jen Sandler (Visiting Assistant Professor of Education)+
- Nicole Witherbee (Visiting Professor of Politics)
- Dick Wagner (Professor Emeritus of Psychology, State Representative)

These conversations yielded the following list of organizations:

+ These names came up in conversations with other professors and faculty, but I did not end up discussing my thesis plans with them.

- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Equality Maine
- Catholic Charities
- Fair Housing League
- Family Independence Initiative
- Family Self Sufficiency Program
- Harlem Children's Fund
- Lots to Gardens
- Maine Association of Interdependent Neighborhoods
- Maine Center for Economic Policy
- Maine Equal Justice Partners
- Maine People's Alliance
- Maine Women's Fund
- Muskie School of Public Policy
- New Beginnings
- Opportunity Alliance
- Pine Tree Legal Assistance
- Preble Street Teen Center
- Radical Acceptance
- St. Mary's Nutrition Center
- Trinity- Jubilee Center
- United Way of Greater Portland
- Visible Community
- Volunteer Lawyers Project
- Women, Work and Community

Through these initial inquiries it became very clear that there was no shortage of opportunities for a community-based politics thesis. Instead, the question was in what direction I would find the thesis topic that would yield a year's worth of enjoyable collaboration.

I began researching the organizations listed above to better understand what research might come out of a partnership. Some of the organizations fell off my list after this initial research. I found that I was most interested in working with an organization that addressed social injustice on a more systemic level. I thought that partnering with an organization that used a systemic approach to social injustice would fit better with the policy aspect of politics that interests me. I also considered the type of injustices that the organization focused on. My personal biases led me toward groups that approached issues of economic inequality, particularly among diverse populations (i.e. not limited to just immigrants or just youth).

Another factor I considered was the role of Bates alums and students in the organization with which I partnered. Because many researchers suggest that community based research can reinforce insider-outsider dynamics between the researcher and the

community, I was eager to work with an organization that was established in the community and did not already have strong ties to Bates. Basically, I did not want my thesis to become a partnership between a Bates student and an organization of Bates alums.

Those criteria determined whether the organization got an initial inquiry, which I made either by email or by phone. After making contact with the organization, I was able to evaluate the most important element of the potential partnership: whether collaboration seemed like a feasible option. I evaluated this based on several factors. The first was obvious: if the organization did not respond to me, I took them off the list. Similarly, if the organization was difficult to get in touch with or not particularly responsive, it eventually fell off the list. Assuming I was able to establish reliable communication with the organization, there were two essential questions that informed my assessment.

First, is the organization already thinking about potential research topics? Does the organization have some enthusiasm for collaborative research? Those questions were extremely important because I wanted to work with an organization that was already engaged in or excited about research. Based on my truncated study of CBR, I thought a partnership would be most successful if the community partner was already somewhat committed to the research process. Approaching a community organization with a research question did not seem like the best way to engage in a collaborative partnership. Instead, I was interested in working with an idea that the organization had already identified as a topic of interest. All of this meant seeing evidence of organizational commitment to a topic of inquiry that related to the daily activities of the organization. As with the previous criteria, this requirement took several organizations off of my list.

The second set of questions that finalized my assessment of a potential collaborator was about the type of interactions I had with the person I contacted at each of the organizations. This criterion is extremely subjective and not something that I can completely quantify, but it is founded on the belief that a partnership will be most successful if the two partners are able to engage with each other in a constructive way. When assessing this component of the relationship, I considered things like the flow, speed, and depth of the conversation, the give and take of ideas, and the overall willingness of the individual to engage with a college senior on a collaborative research project. Through these conversations, I could generally get a feel for what the partnership might look like.

Meanwhile, I needed to be prepared for a thesis that had no community element. This was a difficult contingency to plan for, because I did not want to sacrifice the opportunity of a collaborative research project. On a practical level, having a backup plan meant two things. First, I set myself a “must identify community partner by today” date. That date was October 18, and I pledged that I would abandon my quest for a community partner if no likely prospects arose by that point. Because I did not want to be completely behind should the CBR element not come together, I continued to do research about that initial question of service delivery and devised a couple of questions that were more community-informed, as opposed to community-based, options. In addition to that research and general research on potential community partners, I continued to read about collaborative research models. As the semester progressed, I came dangerously close to hitting my deadline and retreating to the library with my tail between my legs.

By mid-October, shortly before my self-imposed deadline, I had two options. These two options arose from conversations with close to a dozen organizations, which I had

whittled down through the initial criteria and other considerations, like strange intra-organization dynamics (changes in leadership, merges, etc.) and inflexible timelines. The first option was to work with a small community organization with a somewhat fluid leadership structure. I spoke extensively with one of the leaders, who was enthusiastic about a partnership, but I was unsure about the purpose of the research collaboration. The group had an existing topic that it was interested in (why it is difficult to retain members/sustain interest in the organization), but the practicality of the inquiry was not very clear. There were also potentially complicating community implications of this organization's work; I did not begin to understand these dynamics, but I got the sense that there were some politics at work. As a result, I was hesitant to work with this organization.

The second option was to work with an organization that managed Family Development Accounts (FDA) and promoted money-saving, asset-building behaviors among low-income earners. This option was slightly clearer in its relevance to the structure and goals of the organization. My inquiry about collaborative research was warmly received by one of the program coordinators (who happened to be a Bates alum), and we met over lunch to discuss our potential partnership. Prior to our meeting, the program director had circulated an email to the office to brainstorm potential research topics. The director of one of the satellite offices had a particular question of interest: Why does a no-catch, zero-risk savings program that matches four-fold every dollar saved by program participants have rather low participation? What steps can the organization take to increase that participation?

This question was inviting for several reasons. First, it was grounded in Clintonesque policy innovation of the 1990s that promoted asset-building as an anti-poverty

method. This inquiry would give the chance to study practical implications of socio-economic policy, which was exciting. Second, this question was related to my personal interest in economic justice. I would get to study models of poverty alleviation while comparing participation and recruitment strategies across those initiatives. Third, there was a clear reason that this question was being asked, so I could imagine the implications my study might have on the future of the organization. Fourth, there was extensive and fairly accessible information on other organizational approaches to FDAs, so I could begin to imagine the directions in which this inquiry could develop. Finally, this partnership would yield a viable community-based research project, and my alternative options, by that point, were looking increasingly unappealing. Because of these considerations, the FDA question quickly became a favorable option to both the agency question and the fallback plan. After doing a fair amount of foundational research and convincing myself that the content of the question would provide ample material for analysis, I decided the question and partnership were worth pursuing. That was October 17.

The next day, I happened to connect with Ben Chin, the Political Engagement Director of Maine People's Alliance (MPA) and a 2007 Bates graduate. I had not previously considered MPA as a potential partner because of the organization's strong connection to Bates. The organization is populated by Bates alums, and I have since found out that non-Bates staff in the organization often tease the Bates graduates for their disproportionate numbers. Because of prior experience working with MPA, I also had some reservations about the extent to which I would be able to work with the organization to develop a collaborative research project. I did not want to become, for lack of more tactful language, the hard labor.

Because of those considerations, I had not been diligent in setting up a meeting with Ben despite my initial inquiry several weeks earlier. On October 18, we connected by phone for a conversation that I thought would be a brief explanation of my plan to research FDAs and a, “Thanks, but I have decided to go in another direction.” That is not what happened, however, and within half-an-hour I was sitting across the table from Ben at MPA as we ate our respective brought-from-home-lunches out of glass pyrex containers. That was 12:15; I didn’t get back to Bates until 6:30pm.

After what I diagnosed as a “one-on-one,” Ben invited me to spend the afternoon at MPA in anticipation of future collaborative research. I did some preliminary policy research, sat in on a Get Out The Vote phone conference, and attended a staging meeting that preceded a conversation with Representative Mike Michaud about immigration. All of this was followed up with a debriefing at a local coffee shop and, finally, a thesis topic.

When I met with Ben for the first time, there was something in our exchange that clicked in a way that I had not previously experienced. First, there was a question. MPA had spent time over the last couple of years working on the question of worldview, or how a progressive organization can develop a coherent understanding or projection of the world as it is and as it could eventually be. Second, there was a sense of urgency around this question. MPA had dedicated time to this topic, and some of the staff members suggested a desire to further develop the idea. Additionally, the contemporary political environment and my own progressive biases meant almost automatic investment in the question. Third, Ben thought at a pace and in a way that I could identify with. I felt motivated to set my expectations high, and I knew that my work would be subjected to critical feedback that would ensure the relevance of my inquiry to the future of the organization. I was still aware

of my initial hesitations and did not want to prematurely commit to a new thesis topic, but I also had a good feeling about the direction this partnership could take.

To make a long story short, on October 18, the day of my deadline, I settled into a partnership with MPA that I felt would create challenging, productive, and worthwhile content for my thesis. Though this decision culminated the logistical challenge that had dominated the last several weeks, it marked the beginning of a completely new challenge: working collaboratively with an organization that has different goals than the Bates College honors thesis process. This tension began with discussions about a research topic and quickly developed into conversations about work expectations, deliverables, and chapter topics.

Developing a Question

As I said earlier, one of the main appeals of working with MPA was that the organization already had an established topic of interest. MPA had coordinated workshops and discussions on narrative, and several staff members had devoted time to reading about various conceptions of narrative. The organization also regularly uses the three faces of power as developed by GPP and, therefore, has a language with which to discuss the elusive narrative that they hope to institutionalize. The dedication within MPA to the theme of narrative was essential to the development of a salient research question. That said, some legwork still needed to be done to come up with an actual question; I did not walk right into an academic, honors-thesis-worthy question.

The matter of question development was the first manifestation of the “community partner – academic researcher” tension that I had read about in various discussions of

community-based research. On the one hand, I needed a question that was in line with the research interests and capacities of MPA. I could not pursue a question that did not fit with the organization, nor did I want to. My ultimate goal was to produce something that would be useful to MPA. At the same time, my question also needed to accommodate the academic expectations of the Bates College Department of Politics. This was also where my obvious self-interest was exposed: I want to graduate. To this end, I needed a well-developed, substantial question. Going forward, the task was to isolate the key points of narrative at the nexus of practical execution and academic paradoxes. The hope was that a collaboratively developed question could satisfy both my interests and the interests of MPA. If all went well, MPA would take away some practical information about narrative, and I would get to graduate.

Because of the complexity of this task, it took several meetings and email volleys to get to an actual question. These exchanges happened primarily with Ben, who was an invaluable resource because of his familiarity with both the Bates thesis process and some of the theoretical underpinnings of the narrative debate. The preliminary question, which Ben sent to the staff email list for review, was as follows: *How can community advocacy organizations facilitate the development of a grassroots narrative that creates political momentum for progressive social change through policy?* Just as any scholar would revise and revisit everything from word choice to question length, so did MPA and I waffle back and forth on the specifics of the question. There were particular concerns about what to call MPA (some of the options were community organizing group, community advocacy group, progressive community organization, and politically oriented community organization). In addition to that issue of naming, which MPA had struggled with in the

past, there was a question about how explicitly to address the notion of policy. Policy was also a loosely defined term in MPA's lexicon, so the relationship between the idea of narrative and policy was not very developed throughout the partnership.

To my great relief, the question became significantly clearer after I did some research. This research involved reading a number of community organizers that various people at MPA recommended. Some of the staff members also had suggestions about other texts, some of which were in the "organizer's handbook to policy" category and others of which were more hard-core political theory (such as Iris Marion Young). Supplementing these sources with additional research in the realm of social movement framing theory and politically-oriented rhetoricians ultimately yielded a series of questions that related the urgency of the narrative to the specific work that MPA imagined doing with policy. At this moment, my task became clear. The questions successfully placed academic analysis, the experience of community organizers, practical organizational concerns, and MPA's goals in the context of narrative. In other words, through a fairly collaborative process, MPA and I developed guiding questions that have the potential to provide useful information to the organization while also underlying a thesis. Collaboration step one: done.

Collaboration in Action

Deciding to work with MPA was only the beginning. The question development process put some of the collaboration strategies to work and established conceptual boundaries around the type of research I would be doing with MPA, but there were other elements of our partnership that needed to be figured out. Namely, what exactly would I be

doing as a student researcher with MPA? How would we conduct our research, and what would our research partnership look like?

In late October, after digesting the novelty of the new partnership, I took a list of questions to a meeting with Ben. These questions, some of which were related to the question development, also included more practical questions about how I would be interacting with MPA. To begin, I needed to know if I would be working with Ben Chin, himself, or if I would be working with Ben Chin, a representative of MPA. I also needed to better understand the role of the organization's membership: how much would I be working directly with the members? Would I have "access" to people for workshops, focus groups, and interviews? These questions yielded more practical questions about the actual structure and organization of MPA. Who is the staff? How many staff work at MPA, and in which offices? How frequently are there concerted efforts to bridge the staff-member divide? How are decisions made? Who evaluates the organization's progress, and how?

I also had questions about narrative: what scale of narrative did MPA hope to develop? Was the narrative something that would frame action on a single policy, or would it become an encompassing narrative that would frame all of MPA's political activities? Did MPA already have a working definition of "narrative"? Is the narrative reflective or determinant? Is the narrative derived from current understandings of the world, or is the narrative applied to the world to yield certain understandings?

In addition to these questions, there were three questions that were central to the success of our collaboration. Ben and I had previously discussed these topics in the context of a potential partnership, so I was not worried about developing workable answers now that the partnership was underway. That said, they still needed to be answered before

proceeding with research. First, what did MPA expect from me? What would my daily work be like, and what would I produce at the end of the partnership? Second, what was MPA's timeline? How does MPA's timeline fit with my thesis timeline? Third, what could I expect from MPA? How frequently would I be meeting with staff and how would MPA engage with the academic thesis component of the partnership?

The answers to these questions began with a title. MPA dubbed me the "Policy Intern," which gave me a bit of status in the pecking order and legitimized my interactions with both staff and members. Along with this title came a basic work expectation: spend about six hours per week working on MPA tasks that were (more-or-less) related to narrative development. This work would generally include policy research and other research related to our collaborative inquiry into policy and narrative. At times it would include other activities, like in November when I spent several hours door-knocking to encourage people to vote or in December when I went to the fall retreat. The hours I worked with MPA were not logged or managed by anyone, so they were more of a benchmark to establish common expectations with staff. This also signaled to me what the general expectation was in terms of quantity of work, which was very helpful considering my tendency to be overly thorough in my work.

After several more conversations with Ben, we also identified some concrete tasks that I would focus on during my time at MPA. These tasks were defined in anticipation of several deliverables that I would produce by the end of the academic year. First, I would develop a list of policy proposals for the 2012 legislative session. Second, I would help coordinate candidate endorsements for the 2012 elections. Third, I would recommend strategies for responding to adversarial policy proposals in the 2012 session. Fourth, I

would provide a written synopsis of the collaborative process I used to develop those positions. These concrete expectations would inevitably yield a variety of tasks over the course of the year, as each component would be developed collaboratively through methods that had not yet been defined.

Out of these expectations came a timeline, of sorts. Since the much of the work I would be doing was to prepare the organization for the 2012 legislative session, there would be some prep-work in December with work really picking up in early January. A platform committee would convene in early January to address many of the concrete deliverables (the policy proposals, candidate endorsements, and policy defenses). There was also an early December deadline: MPA has an annual winter retreat that would happen December 3-4, 2011. One of the topics of the retreat was narrative as it relates to the organization's plans for 2012 and beyond, and I was invited to lead a workshop with the members about integrating narrative into MPA's standard operating procedure. These two time periods were as close as I imagined I would get to a solid timeline.

Overall, the MPA schedule actually complemented some of the deadlines of the Politics Department, which was conceptually convenient but logistically challenging. Wrapping up my first semester work with a retreat on narrative seemed like a clean break: preparation for the retreat would further develop the question, which could, in turn, be refined after assessing the reaction of the members to the narrative workshop. This fit very well with the literature review component of my thesis, though simultaneous development of the workshop materials and the literature review was fairly time consuming. It was also nice that the legislative cycle would be starting with the first of the year; this would give me a chance to prepare initial thoughts over break before the semester's work picked up too

much. MPA obviously did not have anything to do with the timing of the legislative session, but it was still convenient. Finally, MPA understands that the narrative question will long survive long after my time as a thesis student. That means the overall goal of our research is to create opportunities for further development of the narrative. Basically, MPA does not assume that I will have a concrete answer to our question, but rather that our research will propel MPA in the direction of narrative development. This takes some of the pressure off, as it means I do not feel the need to develop a model or theory for narrative policy. This approach is a good illustration of the collaborative relationship I have with MPA: we approach each other with clear expectations while remaining realistic about the attainability of those accomplishments. This partnership is the single most important accomplishment of the entire semester.

Accomplishments

There are two concrete accomplishments that arose from the abstract accomplishment of building a collaborative research partnership with MPA. The most notable of these is a review of the literature. This was an interesting task, as my focus was on both what MPA needed in terms of practical justification for the question and what my academic readers would be looking for in terms of a theoretical foundation in which to situate my inquiry. At first, these two needs seemed impossible to accommodate simultaneously. MPA staff generally read community organizer types who emphasize practical elements of organizing, whereas the academic field would expect a model or theory that connected narrative to policy. I was surprised to find, as was MPA, that the organization's practical discussions of narrative actually spoke to academic approaches to

the relationship between modern society, policy, and narrative. There was also significant theoretical work within MPA on power and worldview that created space for academic discussion. Through dedicated work from both MPA staff and extensive reading on my part, I was able to craft a chapter that (I believe) addresses the practical interests of the organization while satisfying the academic expectations of the college.

Another very practical accomplishment of the semester was MPA's winter conference, which was held in Augusta from December 3-4, 2011. Ben invited me to work with him on a narrative workshop that would open the conference on Saturday. Ben planned to begin with MPA's vision for 2015, which would include commentary on the general relationship between progressive and mainstream politics. I would then discuss the ways in which a narrative approach would facilitate the progressive vision for 2015. To this end, Ben and I developed a multimedia PowerPoint presentation that included video clips from ad campaigns. These videos, three of which were conservative campaign ads and three of which were progressive campaign ads, each contained a story. The purpose of the workshop was for the participants to identify the components of the story: the good guys, the bad guys, the conflict, and the resolution. This exercise was based on the assumption within the literature on narrative that suggests the power of small stories to inform a broader narrative or understanding of the world.²⁵⁶

Overall, the workshop was well received. MPA staff and members were engaged throughout the 45-minute presentation, and I did not have time to take all of the questions and comments that were generated over the course of the session. Several people approached me later in the conference to express interest in the topic, clarify elements of

²⁵⁶ See Appendix C for a copy of the narrative component of this PowerPoint.

the presentation, engage in additional conversation about narrative, and thank me for bringing a new element to the discussion of worldview and progressive change. The workshop was also referenced several times in oral and written evaluations as a strong element of the conference. Overall, the presentation was a milestone because it not only solidified my collaborative partnership with MPA but also reinforced the research question and facilitated group discussion of narrative.

The semester as a whole was characterized by countless successful moments in the collaborative relationship that was developing between MPA and myself. All of these accomplishments, whether concrete or abstract, illustrate the potential for this collaboration to be mutually beneficial.

Going Forward

At this point, there are three basic ideas that will carry me into the second semester of this thesis. The first is tied to the primary accomplishment of the semester: I have to keep being collaborative. Our research will only be as strong as our partnership, which means I must make a concerted effort to maintain the momentum we have developed over the past few weeks. I will keep working with one eye on MPA and one eye on the Politics Department and hoping that an interesting and productive collaborative inquiry will arise out of the divide between academia and “the real world.”

Now is also the time to start thinking about best practices of CBR. This will likely mean submitting materials to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as I come closer to identifying my methodology. So far, I have been in communication with Georgia Nigro of the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships (HCCP) about good practices until I

determine the particular elements of my research. This dialogue will continue next semester when I become a Community-Based Research Fellow with the HCCP. As part of the Fellowship, I will participate in a weekly seminar that addresses various themes of collaborative research, including IRB. Through discussions, assignments, and the wisdom of peers who are also doing community based research, I hope to refine my research strategies and better understand how to design a meaningful partnership. As is to be expected, I will continue to maintain confidentiality, accurately depict my methodology, and reflect responsibly on the process and progress of my research.

The other known component of this partnership is collaboration on the 2012 Platform Committee. I recently received an inquiry from Ben about assisting with the development and management of this committee, which will be chaired by a board or community member and populated by a combination of board members, staff members, and community members. The purpose of the committee is to begin a dialogue about MPA's agenda for the upcoming months. This means designing the candidate endorsement process, discussing policy topics of interest, and preparing defensive strategies for adversarial legislation. I do not yet know the specifics of this work, but I expect the committee to form in early January. This work will be highly collaborative, and I look forward to having a bit of a structure through which to evaluate the relationship between policy and narrative.

To summarize, this has been a fascinating experience so far. I have learned incredible things about communication, clarity, and expectations, and I do not expect the learning to dry up anytime soon. I am the first to admit that there have been several times

when I all but waived the white flag of surrender, particularly during the early development stages in September and October. Despite the challenges, I feel very lucky to be having this experience. An incredible community partner reached out to me and is excited about engaging in collaborative inquiry about narrative and policy. I have been integrated into the fabric of the organization, and I feel like a valuable part of the team.

Early on in the process, some people questioned why I would want to give my thesis over to a community organization. This question came during those early times of frustration and confusion when I could not imagine who I would be working with, what my topic would be, or how I would ever synthesize a seemingly endless flow of unquantifiable ideas into a single thesis, let alone a coherent research question. At that point, I did not have a good answer to the question, and collaboration seemed overly optimistic, at best. Now, though, I challenge the assertion that I am “giving my thesis over.” I argue that I have only made the commitment to work collaboratively on a topic with an organization that has far more expertise and experience than I. In other words, it is probably more apt to say that MPA is giving me my thesis.

Appendix G: Semester Two Reflections, March 15, 2012

In contrast to pleasant feelings of closure that I experienced at the end of first semester, second semester felt like a fight for my thesis. This challenge spawned from feeling as though I was a bridge between two disconnected worlds. The organizing work that I did downtown with MPA and the academic work I did in the library at Bates seemed like two separate activities, and the distinction between these two activities affected how I saw myself in relation to this single thesis. At MPA, I was a member of a community of Mainers working for progressive change, whereas at Bates, I was a student researcher trying to understand the dynamics of the progressive change-making that I organized and experienced in the field. Unifying those two experiences required not only attending to the intellectual channels between activism and academics, but also respecting the implications these two identities had for the integrity of my person. Unfortunately, for reasons I discuss below, much of the semester was characterized by the sense that I had bitten off more than I could chew.

Balancing Timelines

As an organization, MPA mobilizes very quickly. There are strong lines of communication between the chapter areas, and organizers talk regularly about campaigns, strategies, and activities. Even though I was just an intern, I was part of this environment from my first day at MPA. For the most part, I loved the sense of urgency that drove the majority of MPA's activities. This demonstrated that the organization was doing important work and it satisfied my desire to be *doing*. That said, I found that the demands of MPA

were often somewhat incompatible with the demands of my academic schedule, and vice versa.

A week before classes started for the semester, I was back in Maine to dedicate a solid week to my thesis work. I had thought that meant long hours in the ceramics studio producing work for my senior project in studio art, but the week quickly turned into MPA organizing camp. I was participating in conference calls, drafting meeting agendas, and imagining the practicalities of a mid-winter door-to-door canvass. “This is really a ‘hit the ground running’ sort of thesis,” I noted to myself between these activities, “I’m hoping that this is... not going to [be] the catalyst for the busiest and most stressful semester of my [Bates career].” That was January 4, and I was completely unaware that the organizing would continue at breakneck speed until mid-February.

Throughout those months, I was constantly on call. Handfuls of emails poured into my inbox everyday, most of which needed to be read and many of which needed responses. Planned and unexpected phone calls and meetings, following-up with volunteers and staff about progress on different parts of the survey development, defending the necessity for values-related questions on the survey, identifying target populations, and designing a data entry process were surprisingly time-consuming activities. Even though I thrive in fast-paced environments that require multi-tasking and efficient prioritization to actually get work done, I frequently felt as though the demands on my time were too extreme given the other commitments I was balancing as a full-time student.

For the most part, that feeling was a factor of the personalities of MPA as an organization and myself as a person. I had known from previous work with MPA that the organization was good at “making the ask” and would find ways to keep me involved as a

volunteer. I also knew myself well enough to be aware of my tendency to set high expectations for myself. I am fairly agreeable and like to please people, which means that “No, I’m sorry, I cannot do that today,” is not generally part of my rhetoric. Together, these are two of the reasons why I put off contacting MPA in the fall about collaborating on my thesis. Once I made that call in October, however, I was hooked, and my thesis adapted to fit the schedule and expectations of MPA.

On that token, some of the academic deadlines were inconvenient for the work I was doing with MPA. The early December chapter due-date, for example, fell just over a month after I partnered with MPA, which did not give me very much time to prepare my initial thesis work. Those early chapters were also due just days after the retreat and well before I had additional content with which to contextualize my work with MPA. Later in December, the holiday break sent me home to Minnesota for a couple of weeks. Even though I returned to Lewiston before classes started in January, I had missed some important MPA moments. Later in January, there was a direct conflict between the academic and practical sides of this thesis: the January 11 thesis review with the department conflicted with an important organizing meeting at MPA. I obviously went to the thesis review meeting, as one of my stated priorities is to graduate, but this moment represented one of the few times I prioritized the academic element of my work ahead of what I was doing with MPA.

The rest of the year was about doing what I could with MPA in spite of the academic timetable. The most recent example of this is MPA’s March 16 Lobby Day, when members from throughout the state descend on the State House for a day of training and lobbying. I have only been peripherally involved in organizing this day, but I am told that some of the day’s work will spawn from the work I organized with MPA over the course of the year.

That said, I will not be able to incorporate any elements from that day into my thesis. Although I will attend part of the day, this event falls at a hugely inconvenient time given the impending due dates of both of my theses. As I discuss below, these timeline challenges determined what my thesis could become, because I felt that it would be impractical and inappropriate to impose an outside schedule or set of expectations on an organization like MPA.

Personal Development

Over the course of the semester, navigating these two worlds has made me develop as a student, a researcher, and a collaborator. I had to balance inconvenient schedules, accommodate the tensions that developed from differing expectations of my community partner and academic advisors, and write a thesis that somehow captured the gamut of experiences I had with MPA in an academically appropriate way. One of the most noticeable changes in my approach to community-based research was attitudinal: I began the year thinking that I had to accommodate every request by MPA, but I am ending the year with a renewed sense of my prerogative to think independently and in an academic capacity. In the beginning, I did my best to minimize the academic element of this collaboration because I did not want it to get in the way of the work MPA was doing. Now, I have a revised understanding of the value of academic contributions to community work.

I spent the majority of my time with MPA in a fairly reactive role. I responded to queries and requests by the organization, and I did my best to accommodate the direct political work that the group organized. I thought that it was most important to do as I was asked or told; after all, what did I know as a student researcher with limited experience in

community-based research? Because of MPA's obvious focus on direct action, the priority of our collaboration was the political work we organized together. To this end, I was expected to do a variety of more administrative tasks, such as prepare volunteer lists for the canvass, create agendas for weekly planning calls, and do turn-out calls. These tasks are essential components of any organizing position, and they were linked to some of the narrative-activities I organized with MPA. That said, the narrative activities I had a larger role in organizing –namely the workshop and the canvass– were proposed by MPA as either preexisting or feasible activities with which to address narrative. The exception to this was the model for a follow-up meeting, which I felt was an important component of the narrative development process.

This approach came into conflict with my academic expectations for our collaboration, which included the assumption that I would be *designing* research with MPA. That said, my research activities were not necessarily completely aligned with organization's focus on direct action. This difference in focus was to be expected: MPA has practical political goals that fall within very strict timelines and are not entirely conducive to an extended theoretical inquiry into narrative development. I, on the other hand, had the distinct expectation of graduating in May, which meant I needed to produce a thesis and address some of those more theoretical questions of narrative.

Although my reactive approach to working with MPA facilitated a cooperative relationship, I did not feel as though I was designing or developing my thesis. Instead, I felt as though I was trying to tease a thesis out of the work that I was doing with and observing at MPA. This created some tension with the expectations my academic work, as I was worried that my somewhat passive interactions with MPA would limit the legitimacy of my

inquiry. This tension is illustrated by a number of smaller exchanges I had with MPA over the course of the year, including several conversations about the stated research question of my thesis. MPA essentially had a research question when I started working with them in October. Throughout October and November, Ben and I had several discussions about the nuances and implications of the question, but there was always a divide between the relevance of the question to the work at MPA and to my thesis. For the most part, I minimized those differences and continued to pursue my research alongside the work I did with MPA. This reactive approach had somewhat terrifying consequences for my thesis: I did not have much control over the activities at MPA. My academic work was contingent on the information I could glean from activities and processes that MPA envisioned, and I had no way to foresee what those activities would be or what that information would look like.

This provided an invaluable learning experience about overcoming imbalanced goals and recognizing the need to develop my own sense of ownership of the process. I began thinking more critically about the activities I was organizing, and I began to see the connection between my academic and practical work. I managed to capture this discovery in a short reflection in mid-January:

I'm finding myself caught up on narrative and how narrative (the personal stories) are translated into narrative (the overarching explanation for the world). I was approaching that as something I needed to figure out before I could do the thesis work, but now I'm realizing that those questions are the ones that I need to explore *in* my thesis.

Although this appears to be a fairly straightforward conclusion, this realization marks a distancing between my goal and the goal of MPA: I am interested in the academic piece and MPA is interested in the practical piece. Whereas I had originally thought that I needed to "figure out" narrative before leading narrative activities with MPA, I came to realize that

“figuring out” narrative *was* my thesis. This realization developed out of the need to integrate the academic and field components of this research so that I could produce a single, coherent set of findings to both MPA and my academic advisors.

As a result, the particular focus of my thesis has shifted from acceptance of MPA’s actions and models into a more critical assessment of the organization’s activities. This brings our question about narrative into a hybrid realm between practical and theoretical research and creates the space in which I could conduct academic research that is related to MPA’s questions about narratives. I realized that I no longer had to do the academic research on the side, as that information was wholly relevant to the problem of narrative development. As a testament to that progression, in second semester, I used a single notebook, instead of the two separate notebooks of first semester, to organize my work with MPA and on my thesis.

This realization was also important because it illustrated my development from a fairly reactive and passive scholar into a more proactive and critical scholar. I am accepting my place as an academic in my relationship with MPA, and this allows me to turn my focus back to creating content worthy of a thesis. I began making critical decisions about which experiences I had with MPA were relevant to this inquiry, and I began to de-emphasize elements like analysis of the survey data that, although important to MPA, were less related to the material I would use to approach our research question.

That said, there is still some friction in the relationship between the work I did for MPA and the work I am doing for my thesis. Some of this has to do with an unclear chain of command that obscures the authority I have within MPA to make decisions about research design and implementation. I had worked fairly closely with Ben during the first semester,

and our partnership continued through the first weeks of February while we were developing, testing, and conducting the survey. Throughout those weeks, I was responsible for interactions with volunteers and staff, and I had to make some decisions about division of roles and prioritization of activities for the canvass. Due to my position as a part-time student-intern, my decisions were never completely final, and MPA had to make decisions and get work done even if I was not present.

Overall, the challenges I experienced in navigating community-partner relationships would be difficult to avoid in first-time research partnerships. At the beginning of the process, I was very hesitant to act in any way that would not be completely consistent with MPA's values and expectations. My perspective certainly developed to accommodate a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between researcher and community-partner, but I have by no means perfected the interaction.

Academic Resources and Tensions

One of the best things about second semester was participating in a Community-Based Research (CBR) Fellowship through the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships. Run by Georgia Nigro and Holly Lasagna, the fellowship program sought to provide a space for learning and reflection about CBR. This was accomplished through weekly meetings during which a group of eight students completing CBR projects could discuss relevant literature, reflect on our challenges and successes in the field, and pose both theoretical and logistical questions to the group. The group helped me refine aspects of the survey, develop strategies for navigating some of the challenging work dynamics that

popped up throughout the semester, and reflect on the incredible challenges and rewards of community-based research.

The CBR Fellowship also provided an excellent forum in which to discuss the squeaky wheel of community-based research: the Institutional Review Board. I had begun looking into IRB during first semester, but I did not need to start thinking about approval until second semester. I communicated with IRB throughout the survey development process, and I worked with MPA to pursue IRB in as unobtrusive a fashion as possible. That said, the IRB process is another example of the divide between community partner and the academy. At one point, MPA told me that the survey would continue whether or not it was approved by IRB. They suggested that, if I did not receive IRB approval, I could frame my thesis on the “coincidence” of getting to observe the survey development and dissemination process. Although I agreed with MPA about the inconvenience of the IRB process to the timeline the organization was working with, I was somewhat taken aback by the implication that my thesis could be framed on such a packaged version of the truth. As it turned out, I did not need to submit my project to IRB for approval, but this still provided plenty of material for conversations with my CBR peers over the course of the semester. At this point, I am convinced that more can be done on the side of the community partner *and* the academy to facilitate more productive, collaborative partnerships.

Final Thoughts

My initial reasoning for doing a community-based thesis was that it would get me out of the library and into the field. I was more excited about doing work that was practical and useful than I was about producing something academically motivated. Over the course

of the year, I found myself in countless unexpected situations. Some of these provided incredible joy and laughter, like a conversation I had with an elderly hard-of-hearing man about his pet birds during the door-to-door canvass. Others of them created stress and anxiety, like when expectations and timelines did not integrate well. In most of these moments, I was humbled by the hunger for progressive change expressed by MPA members and staff, and I was inspired by the hard work of incredibly diverse and capable volunteers. That said, the year was not easy sailing. This type of work really takes a toll, which I felt by the time March rolled around.

To close, I do not regret my decision to do a collaborative thesis. In fact, even knowing what I know now about the challenges of community-based research, would likely do it all again if given the choice. This has certainly not been an easy semester, but it has been a hugely informative semester. I have lived some of the central challenges that spawn from community-based research, and I have developed both personal and practical strategies for navigating those challenges. My thinking as an academic has been greatly enriched by the awareness I gained through political fieldwork, and I like to think that the political work I did (and will continue to do) is similarly enriched by my academic pursuits. I remain indebted to the people, organizations, and academics that aligned to make this thesis possible.

Appendix H: Remaining Questions

The following questions developed over the course of the semester and deserve additional thought as institutions like Bates College pursue community-based research on a more institutional level. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but rather describes a set of considerations that characterize some of the central challenges that students of community-based research are likely to encounter.

What is the appropriate role for a student researcher in the context of an established and experienced community partner?

What should a student researcher do if a community-partner is unresponsive to her suggestions about research design?

When is the student an agent of her thesis, and therefore the authority on a project or activity? When is the student a representative of the community partner, and therefore subordinate to the organization's authority?

When is it okay for a student researcher to have an opinion, and when is it better for the student researcher to defer to the experience and perspective of the staff?

What is the priority in the collaboration: useable information for the community partner or a rock-solid academic piece? Are the two necessarily in tension with one another?

How can students remedy academic goals that do not accommodate the goals of community partners, and vice versa?

What is the best way to be critical? How should a student handle information that suggests room for improvement on the part of the community partner?

How can student-researchers accommodate the need that many organizations have for labor while still attending to a research question?