

The Story of the Queen Anne Memorial Garden: Resisting a Dominant Cultural Narrative

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My purpose was to offer a counter-narrative of a group of urban residents who were dealing with a negative portrayal of their neighborhood, by retelling the "success story" of the Queen Anne Memorial Garden, a community garden they built to combat urban decline. Using narrative inquiry, I explored how fourteen garden participants collectively reconfigured the events that led to the completed garden and endowed those events with meaning and continuity. The stories, which were aggregated into a single community narrative, illustrate how a collective leisure pursuit can be part of a grassroots effort, address urban decline, and reshape collective identity.

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Communities often struggle with narratives they dislike (Rappaport, 2000; Shogan, 2002). Tragically, damaging images imposed by outsiders are often powerful contributors to the ongoing development of a negative collective identity (Cohen, 1985; Suttles, 1972), as illustrated by communities affected by urban decline. As urban neighborhoods undergo a dramatic descent due to a variety of economic and social factors, residents face the often overwhelming challenge of resisting the ills, such as crime and urban decay, that accompany such events. Subsequently, as a neighborhood deteriorates, it is not uncommon for it to develop a negative reputation among nearby neighborhoods and within the broader locality in which it is situated. The onset of urban decline, in this sense, introduces a plot twist to the neighborhood's story that changes the very character of the neighborhood and embeds its residents collectively in a tragic narrative. The collective identity of residents is, thus, tied to misfortune, which is only reinforced by outsiders and serves to disempower community members, depleting their optimism to liberate themselves from their ill-fated situations. Fortunately, efforts at urban revitalization, "the process of enhancing the physical, commercial, and social components of neighborhoods and the future prospects of their residents" (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001, p. 6), if successful, can offer a compelling counter-narrative.

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Crucial to any attempt at revitalization is grassroots involvement in urban renewal (Keating & Smith, 1996; Purdue, 2001; Williams, 1985). Thus, successful revitalization often begins with a reinvestment in human and social capital (Purdue, 2001) wherein a group of residents, even a small one, acts collectively to change the story of its neighborhood (Meegan & Mitchell, 2001; Williams, 1985). Urban revitalization, therefore, is an effort to address neighborhood decline and its associated ills by mobilizing and empowering residents to improve the sense of community among neighbors. In short, urban renewal can potentially turn tragedy into triumph.

Because initiatives undertaken to improve neighborhoods often focus on the physical environment, it is perhaps unsurprising that a community garden, initiated expressly to upgrade the streetscape within a neighborhood, is a grassroots endeavor that has been used with relative success (Landman, 1993). While it clearly serves as a geographic expression of leisure, a community garden project presumably transcends the enjoyment residents derive from the activity of gardening by aiding in the social construction of community. But how does the development of a community garden assist in offsetting dominant cultural narratives that depict the neighborhood in a negative light?

My chief purpose, here, was to offer a counter-narrative of a group of residents from a mid-sized city located in the Midwestern United States that was dealing with a negative portrayal of its neighborhood by retelling the "success story" of the Queen Anne Memorial Garden, a community garden it built to combat urban decline. Accordingly, I sought to understand how the Queen Anne Memorial Garden offered residents a counter-narrative of themselves. Using an interpretive approach to narrative inquiry, I explored how fourteen garden participants collectively reconfigured the events that led to the completed garden and endowed those events with meaning and continuity. In so doing, I aimed to learn how the development of the community garden shaped the participants' perceptions about their neighborhood and collective identity. Before detailing my approach to narrative inquiry and sharing the story of the Queen Anne Memorial Garden, I shall endeavor, first, to provide readers with a brief review of the community garden literature.

Literature Review

Community gardens, by definition, are organized initiatives whereby sections of land are used to produce food or flowers in an urban environment for the personal use or collective benefit of their members who, by virtue of their participation, share certain resources, such as space, tools, and water (Glover, in press, a). Moreover, in many cases, they are grassroots initiatives aimed to revitalize low-to-moderate income neighborhoods in urban settings (Landman, 1993; Linn, 1999; Pottharst, 1995). By converting decaying urban spaces into ornamental or vegetable gardens or both, residents transform neighborhood liabilities, namely abandoned, dilapidated lots into tangible

(e.g., fresh produce, beautification, sitting gardens for recreation) and intangible neighborhood assets. In the context of urban revitalization, therefore, these "assets" reflect a collective effort for positive neighborhood change.

While the tangible outcomes are clear, the intangible assets associated with community gardens warrant some description, particularly given their potential to influence the meanings people attach to such communal projects. Similar to the activity of gardening (Kaplan, 1973), community gardens offer several psychological benefits to their participants. By making positive, aesthetic changes to their environment, community gardeners gain a sense of pride and accomplishment, which, in turn, foster feelings of self-worth and self-confidence (Jamison, 1985; Waliczek, Mattson & Zajicek, 1996). From an economic standpoint, growing food independently saves gardeners from purchasing vegetables or fruits from commercial sources; the subsequent cost savings can, thus, create feelings of self-reliance (Jamison, 1985; Linn, 1999; Schmelzkopf, 1996). Security is also a by-product of community gardening, as the communal gardens often provide safe, open spaces (perhaps the only ones available to their members) in which participants can garden without the threat of danger or harm (Waliczek, Mattson & Zajicek, 1996). Finally, from a psychological perspective, community gardening can be a source of empowerment (Langhout, Mitchell, Beckett, Cockrell & Chenail, 1999; Myers, 1999). Community garden initiatives provide disenfranchised individuals with opportunities to join a group effort, become an active member of a community, take on leadership roles, and work toward collective goals. In short, community gardens have the potential to promote individual development and psychological well-being.

As products of the creative and therapeutic act of gardening, some might interpret the psychological outcomes I mentioned as individual benefits alone. As its name implies, though, a "community" garden offers benefits found in the *collective* nature of its associated activity, too. Self-worth and empowerment, for instance, arise from participants' involvement in the shared act of gardening and other activities related to the establishment and operation of gardening projects, activities such as grant-seeking, fundraising efforts, community cook-outs, making signs, and building fences, all of which are connected only peripherally to the activity of gardening. In this sense, community gardens are often more about *community* than they are about gardening. They offer places where people can gather, network, and identify together as residents of a neighborhood (Linn, 1999; Moncrief & Langsenkamp, 1976; Schrieber, 1997). In doing so, community gardens serve both a bonding *and* a bridging function (Glover, Shinew & Parry, 2002; Putnam, 2000); they provide spaces in which fellow residents can reinforce their ties to their neighborhood (Landman, 1993), as well as environments in which neighbors of different races, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses, among other attributes, can integrate successfully (Langhout, et al., 1999). Presumably, the background of the participants (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender) does not matter; it matters only that the participants endeavor to

join the community effort and work toward a common goal (Jamison, 1985). Underpinned by active citizenship, community gardens are governed by citizens themselves. As such, the community gardeners, not their city officials, make decisions about the urban spaces in their neighborhood. By promoting democracy and local control, community gardens often empower residents to consider an even more active role in the further development of their neighborhoods (Jamison, 1985; Linn, 1999). All told, community gardens are potential sites for community building and locality development.

In sum, community gardens have the potential to improve the appearance of neighborhoods, build a sense of community, and become community focal points and catalysts for neighborhood change. I caution readers, however, to recognize that these outcomes, as well as the others I mentioned above, vary from garden to garden. Clearly, each community garden is rooted in its own unique, complex set of historical, cultural, and structural conditions, which means, correspondingly, it holds its own collectively constructed and shared meanings, interpretations, rituals, and identities for its participants. In short, a community garden is embedded in its own unique narrative. The history and meaning behind the events that culminate into the development of a community garden bind garden participants together in a shared experience, which presumably serves to shape collective identity. Attending to the story of a community garden, therefore, is one way to explore its context and explanatory significance. With this in mind, I conducted a narrative inquiry to study the Queen Anne Memorial garden. It is to this mode in inquiry I turn next.

Conducting a Narrative Inquiry

Shared Narratives as Resources for Empowerment

A narrative, in general terms, refers to a story made up of a sequence of events, which has significance for the narrator and his or her audience (Denzin, 1989). In accordance with Rappaport (1993, 1995, 2000) and his colleagues (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000; Mankowski & Thomas, 2000; Salzer, 1998), I make use of three distinct narrative types throughout this manuscript, each of which was central to my interpretations of the issues at play in the story of the Queen Anne Memorial Garden (QAMG). First, *personal stories* refer to autobiographical accounts of an individual's own personal history. In telling their personal stories, garden participants made sense of the events that led to the development of the QAMG, as they viewed them in retrospect. In doing so, they explained how they interpreted the temporal and causal relationship between events within a narrative structure and revealed the roles those events played in the unfolding of the larger whole. Personal stories about the QAMG represented the main source of data I collected from the garden participants in this study.

Second, *dominant cultural narratives* describe those stories about persons, places, or things that contain consistent storylines and thematic content across individuals and settings. Dominant cultural narratives are transmitted

through major socializing institutions of culture (e.g., mass media, schools, churches) and in conversation, and affect general convictions, principles, and identities of most people living in that time and place. Embedded in larger cultural and social frameworks, they reflect hegemonic views, which maintain the status quo (Richardson, 1990). Accordingly, they have the potential to mislabel, disempower, and repress individuals. Those affected may internalize and believe these narratives, which often show up in their personal stories. Consequently, dominant cultural narratives can have negative implications for collective and self-identity. As I demonstrate below, the residents I interviewed were dealing with a negative image imposed on them by others who resided outside of their neighborhood.

Finally, *community narratives* denote descriptive and historical accounts that represent the collective experience and knowledge of a specific group of people. They are stories that are constructed collectively through social interactions, in a process referred to as the "mobilization of consensus" (Klandermans, 1988), and are granted community narrative status as they are shared with others. As such, community narratives are identified through consistent themes present in personal stories expressed by individual community members. The presence of a community narrative presumably reflects a shared experience and collective identity. The story of the QAMG, which I re-present below, is the aggregation of oral accounts about events that were common to the garden participants and central to their sense of collective identity. It chronicles the history of the QAMG, explaining how it began, evolved, and became what it is today. Ultimately, however, the purpose of telling the story of QAMG was to offer a counter-narrative to the dominant cultural narrative told about the neighborhood in which the garden participants lived. By "*resist[ing dominant] cultural narratives about groups of people and 'tell[ing] alternative stories*" (p. 128, my emphasis), community narratives possess counterhegemonic, subversive, and liberatory possibilities. Thus, they are necessary resources for collective empowerment, "the ability of people to gain understanding and control over personal, social, economic, and political forces in order to take action to improve their life situations" (Israel, Checkoway, Schultz & Zimmerman, 1994, p. 152). With this in mind, I conducted a narrative inquiry that focused on the interconnections between these narrative types to learn how the development of the QAMG shaped the garden participants' perceptions about the neighborhood in which they lived and countered the dominant cultural narrative with which they were dealing. Ultimately, my aim in retelling this story was to offer what Denzin (2000) referred to as a "politics of hope" whereby texts "criticize how things are and imagine how they could be different" (p. 262).

What follows is my description of the research participants, site, data collection techniques, and method of analysis associated with the study. Preceding this information, I have provided a detailed account of narrative inquiry and its aims. I hope, in so doing, to encourage other leisure researchers to add to the body of narrative inquiry, which is rarely used in our field (for what I believe is the only example, see Scott, 1991), yet increasingly prevalent in many other fields, such as anthropology (Ochs & Capps, 1996), psychology

(Guignon, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995; Rappaport, 2000), and sociology (Denzin, 1989; Franzosi, 1998; Richardson, 1990), among other fields.

Elements of Narrative Inquiry and Meaning

Narratives have two defining elements upon which I shall elaborate. They are defined, first, by an internal structure, which arranges the sequence of events in temporal order; that is, they have a beginning, middle, and end. In this fashion, narratives are diachronic in that they deal with a phenomenon as it changes over time (Schwandt, 2001); it is here that storied elements, such as plot are introduced. As Franzosi (1998) explained,

The events in the story must disrupt an initial state of equilibrium that sets in motion an inversion of situation, a change of fortunes—from good to bad, from bad to good, or no such reversal of polarity, just an “after” different from the “before,” but neither necessarily better or worse. (p. 521)

Any change to the temporal order, therefore, can jeopardize the continuity of the story at the expense of the meaning that underpins it, for it is only “through the narrative [that] temporality becomes interpretable in human terms. Time is made human; narrative is a condition of temporal experience” (Richardson, 1990, p. 124). More specifically, time embeds the narrative explanation within a specific context, which brings the audience into the project and helps them better understand and interpret the events under description. Internal structure, therefore, is judged by the audience according to its “narrative probability,” or story coherence, which pertains to whether the story content is arranged in an internally consistent or logical manner (Fisher, 1998).

Second, narratives are characterized by their thematic organization, the evaluative aspect of narratives in which the storyteller conveys the meaning he or she attaches to the event (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). In this regard, narratives allow “descriptions of why and how events happened, which give events duration, tempo, and pace” (Maines & Bridger, 1992, p. 365). Accordingly, they contain rhetorical devices (e.g., surprises, coincidences, embellishments) intended deliberately to draw the reader in and hold his or her attention (Schwandt, 2001). As Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) pointed out, “stories are told for a reason, for example, humorous stories release tension, life histories may create intimacy with the audience, and legends build group cohesion” (p. 481). In other words, story telling is a performance (Goffman, 1959, 1974; Toolan, 1988); the storyteller attempts to convince the audience, which was absent from the event, that something important took place (Reissman, 1993). Consequently, “narrative is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation” (Richardson, 1990, p. 118). Thematic organization, therefore, is judged by the audience according to its “narrative fidelity,” or story believability, which refers more directly to the performance aspect of storytelling (Fisher, 1998).

The notion that embellishment and persuasion are accepted as fundamental features of narrative research perhaps diminishes the credibility of this genre of inquiry in the minds of some empiricists and post-positivists

who might question its relevance, yet these are the very features that make stories human and so central to the moral being of individuals. Not surprisingly, “when talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they *are* revealing truths. These truths don’t reveal the past ‘as it actually was,’ aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truth of our experiences” (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 261, original emphasis). Similarly, Reissman (1993) argued, “narrativization tells not only about past actions but how individuals understand those actions, that is, meaning. Plots vary in type: tragedy, comedy, romance, and satire. Tellers pour their ordinary lives into these archetypal forms” (p. 19). As such, stories contribute to our understandings of human behavior and reasoning. In Bochner’s (2001) words, “If we trivialize these stories by calling them confessionals or mocking them as hyperauthentic, we not only invalidate the existential struggles for meaning they represent, but we also risk missing what they have to teach us” (p. 147). What do narratives teach us? Richardson (1990) offered the following answer: “Narratively, to answer the question, ‘What does something mean?’, requires showing how the ‘something’ contributed to the conclusion of the episode. The connections between the events constitute meaning” (p. 118). Applied in the context of this study, meaning was, therefore, interpreted through the stories the research participants shared about how they effectively mobilized to build a community garden and combat crime, therein countering a dominant cultural narrative.

Storytellers and Setting

The research participants consisted of fourteen members of the Old Town Neighborhood Association¹ (OTNA), a grassroots association situated within a downtown neighborhood in a mid-sized Midwestern American city. Eight participants were core members of the OTNA, that is, they were part of the most influential social circle within the neighborhood, while the remainder were residents whose participation with the OTNA was limited exclusively to a volunteer role with the community garden project. The latter group was less active in the neighborhood. All of the research participants agreed to share with me the events that led to the development of the QAMG on an abandoned corner lot in the neighborhood. Over a fifteen-year period, the OTNA attempted to rejuvenate the neighborhood to counteract public displays of illicit drug use and dealing, street violence, and prostitution. The association’s efforts to offset these illicit activities led its members to build the QAMG, one of many strategies used to combat the criminal activities that took place within its boundaries, and the focus of this research effort.

As a grassroots association, the OTNA functioned primarily

¹ Pseudonyms are used in place of the actual names of the community garden, the neighborhood association, and its members to protect the anonymity of those who participated in the study.

to provide structure and organization for the neighborhood when there is a need to act. The organization's structure can be best described as 'common interest'. Its leadership emerges as is needed, rather than being elected. Its active membership rises and falls as the location and breadth of issues or activities change. The OTNA is *potentially*, perpetually ready to take form and to take action to defend and promote the interests of the neighborhood. It is an organic entity rather than a formal organization . . . In short, the OTNA is a very real association, but functions as a neighborhood of neighbors, rather than an institution. (OTNA newsletter)

With this purpose in place, its formal mission was to "promote and preserve [the city's] oldest surviving neighborhood by honoring its past, supporting its current residents, and leaving it a better place for the future" (OTNA newsletter). Described as "an in your face, take no prisoners neighborhood association," the OTNA was motivated in its efforts "partly by anger, partly by fear and partly by the joy of rediscovering the meaning of neighborhood" (OTNA newsletter).

The research participants who shared their stories with me were split evenly between male and female participants. Though the neighborhood to which they belonged was the most demographically diverse in the city with respect to its racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition, the storytellers included only one Mexican-American and one African American, which nevertheless reflected closely the composition of the group of garden participants. The remainder were Caucasian, though all participants represented collectively a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Each had been involved to some degree in the QAMG project and was able to speak in detail about its origins and the neighborhood circumstances that led to its construction. With this criterion in mind, I selected the participants through a combination of purposive (e.g., the head gardener, OTNA president, garden committee members) and snowball sampling. There were, of course, other garden participants with whom I was unable to talk, which makes the narrative I constructed generalizable only to the group of participants I interviewed. Readers should not view it as *the* story of the garden, for, as Bridger (1996) noted, "there is rarely, if ever, a single [community] narrative in existence at a particular time. One may be dominant, but others usually exist" (p. 356). The intent of interpretive research, however, is not to generalize findings. Instead, I attempted to provide sufficient detail about the QAMG so that the reader can establish the degree of "transferability" of the findings from the case studied to another case to which they think the findings might be transferred.

Narrative Analysis

Face-to-face, conversational interviews, which lasted, on average, one hour, were tape-recorded and transcribed into text as the primary source of data for the study. Following Reissman's (1993) advice, I approached the interviews as conversations, surrendering control over the research process

to the research participants with the expectation that almost any question would generate narrative. I interrupted only periodically to help clarify or probe deeper for greater detail. I trusted that the research participants, if uninterrupted by standardized questions, would “hold the floor” for lengthy turns and organize their replies into long stories (Reissman, 1993). With this in mind, each interview began with the simple request, “tell me the story of the Queen Anne Memorial Garden,” and the remainder of the interview flowed according to the storyteller’s direction.

Consistent with narrative analysis, as outlined by Polkinghorne (1995), I organized the data chronologically, identified the elements that, in my view, contributed to the development of the community garden and the subjective connections the research participants associated with cause and influence of the events that led to the completion of the garden project, and generated a single narrative. In this regard, the analysis was unlike more conventional qualitative analyses, which tend to deconstruct narratives into common themes and explain the interconnections between them—what Polkinghorne (1995) referred to as *analysis of narrative*, as opposed to *narrative analysis*. By contrast, I took the elements of each story and constructed a community narrative. In doing so, I determined the importance of a theme, not by the frequency of representative keywords or phrases, which would have required breaking down the internal features of the story and coding or counting the parts, but by what I interpreted as its centrality to narrative fidelity, meaning, and community identity (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). In short, I synthesized the data into a story, which embodied a collaborative, dialogical process between the research participants and I, but which ultimately represented *my* interpretation of the events that unfolded. Given that “narrative explanation means that one person’s voice—the writer’s—speaks for others” (Richardson, 1990, p. 130), I wish to make clear that the final product reflected my own representation of the data.

The Story of the Queen Anne Memorial Garden: A Community Narrative

To give voice to the garden participants, I used their words and personal stories, where I felt it was appropriate, to reconstruct their community narrative. In doing so, the narrative is based on my own interpretations and aggregation of the data. Consistent with narrative analysis, my findings are presented temporally so as to give the reader a chronological sense of the events that led to the creation of the QAMG. The outcome is a “success story” that recounts events that led the OTNA to mobilize its members and build a community garden with the intent to displace a group of delinquents who occupied a corner in their neighborhood.

Neighborhood Living Conditions: “It Was Like the Wild West”

The story of the neighborhood in which the following events took place was perhaps not unlike most other urban American neighborhoods with diverse populations. Due in large part to the “blockbusting” practices of un-

scrupulous realtors during the 1960s, the neighborhood declined rapidly over the latter part of the 20th Century as it experienced an influx of low-income residents, the flight of higher income residents, and the eventual appearance of drugs and prostitution. These criminal activities, according to the garden participants, had a negative impact on the living conditions in the neighborhood. For Will, a columnist for the local newspaper, it was common during his drive through the neighborhood on his way to work for “someone [to] come out and harass you about something, proposition you or whatever. You really couldn’t drive through [the neighborhood] on a regular basis and not encounter that kind of problem.” In a similar fashion, Holt, the neighborhood historian and local property developer, described his experience in the neighborhood:

I moved into the neighborhood in the 1980s and what we had was a neighborhood where, you know, 95% of the people if not more got up everyday and went to work. They got up. They got their children dressed. They sent their children to school, and went to work, came home, did whatever anybody does. The only difference was you might have a prostitute standing on the sidewalk out in front of your home. You might even have to honk at them to get them to move out of your driveway as you are backing out. When you sent your children off to school, they might walk by three different corners where drugs were being actively dealt twenty-four hours a day. When you went to mow your lawn, you would walk your parkway to make sure that you had picked up any used condoms or used needles.

With the pervasiveness of illicit activity in the neighborhood, residents were witness to regular displays of street violence. Bea, a former president of the OTNA, spoke about her adjustment when she first moved to the neighborhood:

I spent a lot of time the first year trying to sort out what was just normal sound and what was drug related. That was very interesting. A lot of that came over the fence into [my apartment] because people were chasing each other. Some of it went up and over the fence. People were fighting, and family members were chasing people, trying to get the money that their brother had given to the drug guy. It was really like the Wild West.

Amidst the violence, Holt explained it was not uncommon for residents to hear gunshots: “We had neighbors whose houses were caught in crossfire, and they had to dig bullets out of the side of their homes.”

Perhaps one of the biggest frustrations was the fact that many of the perpetrators of these offences lived outside of the neighborhood. As Holt made clear, “at least 99% of the drug dealers, and the prostitutes, and the pimps, didn’t live in this neighborhood. They *never* lived in this neighborhood. They commuted in because the larger community knew that if you wanted drugs or you wanted prostitutes, you came to this neighborhood” (original emphasis) Bea discussed her frustration with these “uninvited” visitors:

There would be people coming down [to the neighborhood] from [the big city] with little kids who were completely unsocialized. They were really scary

because, you know, you couldn't communicate with them. They hadn't been brought up to have any identifiable set of values. People would go out and try to reason with these kids, who were mainly interested in pelting the windows with stones or shooting them out with a Beebe gun or something while they waited for their parents to, you know, do the business they had come down from [the big city] to do on this block. They were people who came into the area. I mean, periodically there would be a huge presence and everything was pumped up, the traffic, the kinds of cars, the flash of certain cars. You could just tell it was a big drug weekend that supplies had come in. It was interesting, and a little bit scary.

In order to cope with the situation, many residents took precautions to ensure their safety. When Kayla, one of the few African Americans to join the OTNA, moved into the neighborhood, her son told her, " 'Mom, if you're going to live in that neighborhood, you need a gun, a dog, and a security alarm system' . . . I didn't get a gun," she admitted, but "I got a dog and a security alarm system." Beyond these rudimentary measures, however, residents were reluctant to address the criminal activity that surrounded them. "What you do is you really do go crazy," posited Holt. "You get a little shell shocked. It's kind of like living in Beirut. You go, 'Well, why don't they just move from Beirut?' And they'd go, 'Well, we live here.'" That is, Holt argued "you accommodate yourself to it. I mean, you no longer think it's odd that, as you're falling asleep at night, that you hear gunshots outside. And that all happens very slowly." Postulating even further about the process of "accommodation" he witnessed in the neighborhood, Holt observed,

It's a strange psychology because what happened was that the decline was gradual but steady. And that's one of those things that happens bit-by-bit-by-bit as a result, as opposed to something that happens overnight. You accommodate yourself to it slowly, and as you accommodate yourself slowly to it and the changes that happen, you feel as an individual owner of a home, "That's an irritation there, but I guess I can put up with it. Okay, that's an irritation, maybe I can put up with it." And you either sell your home in a month, or if you decided you were going to grow old and die in your home, you slowly accommodate yourself to it.

As I saw it, the garden participants felt an overwhelming sense of helplessness. To cope with their surroundings, many continued with their lives as if nothing out of the ordinary was evident.

Views from Outside

Given the visible pervasiveness of illicit activity, the neighborhood developed a reputation for drugs and prostitution. In fact, Holt mentioned that the neighborhood was listed on an international web site as a desirable destination for prostitution. Marta explained "other people, like older kind of city-standard people, you get a little bit of weirdness sometime, like, 'Oh, you're living *there*'" (original emphasis). Similarly, people living outside of the neighborhood would often confront Ivan with the question "You live

where?" Bruno was disappointed to learn about its reputation when he moved to the neighborhood: "When I first moved here, I got input from just a couple of people, and it was usually negative. You know, I'm going, this is a pretty stinkin' bummer. I thought it was going to be a neat neighborhood."

Like other city residents, realtors appeared to hold similar views. Kayla discovered that "realtors would tell people, 'Well, this is a nice piece of property. If you could move the house off to a different area in town, you know, the property value would go up' or 'you sure this is the neighborhood you want to live in?'" Similarly, when Emma looked at real estate in the area, "realtors told us not to buy because we were just pouring our money down the drain because it's, you know, a bad neighborhood." Holt, who bought and refinished several homes in the neighborhood, explained how it had taken him a couple of years to secure financing for his investments in neighborhood properties. "Privately," he mentioned, "bankers were telling us that—they would deny it if I said it—but they were redlining this neighborhood, and they wouldn't loan any money on that property."

Many residents met the negative reputation associated with the neighborhood with frustration. Referring to perceptions of people who lived outside of the neighborhood, Faith discovered "If you live north of College [Avenue] this is the bad end of town. Okay, the *perceived* bad end of town. And personally, I'm kind of offended by that whole attitude because I have met some really wonderful people in this neighborhood. I probably know more of my neighbors in a larger area than people who live in the fancy subdivisions like Strawberry Hills or wherever south of College [Avenue]" (original emphasis). The other research participants shared Faith's irritation. Dawn was told by a co-worker, "Oh, you live in the hood." Angered by the description of her neighborhood, Dawn responded crossly, "there is no hood in this city!" Dawn and her husband, Adam, were further frustrated by the fact that in two separate cases they were told, right after they moved to the neighborhood, that their baby-sitters "would baby-sit [only] if we brought our kids to them." In short, the neighborhood's reputation for crime only served to create further inconveniences and frustrations for residents.

Mobilizing for Change: Grassroots Organizing

By the late eighties and early nineties, a group of neighborhood residents began to question the normalcy of the criminal activities that surrounded them. "What kind of started happening," Holt shared with me during our conversation, "is people started talking about, 'Isn't this a terrible thing' . . . they started to realize that they had gone a little crazy, that it wasn't normal to get to the place where they were, which was 'I guess it'll be all right if they at least don't come into my yard and do that,' even though we typically saw gun play." In the conversations leading up to neighborhood action, "we all kind of started realizing that we did have some power, that it was *our* neighborhood, and that we had all kind of subtly gone crazy" (Holt, original emphasis). Not unlike any other debilitating habit, the journey to-

ward recovery began with the formal recognition of the problem and a commitment to change.

A critical mass of neighbors had finally emerged with the commitment to revitalize the neighborhood and, to quote Adam, an active member of the OTNA, "reclaim our space." "There were enough people who got just tired of seeing unsavory things happen," Faith pointed out, "and they said, 'Enough is enough.' . . . We wanted to get the crackheads and the prostitutes out." As Holt explained it, "we simply got tired and fed-up with it—all of it. We decided that what was happening was neither normal nor any longer acceptable and we put ourselves to the task of setting things right." Many of the research participants characterized the group as a collection of strong-willed, determined individuals. In response to being asked how the change came about, Will said, "I guess pretty ballsy people moved in, that's all I can tell you. And they didn't like the idea of being pushed around by a bunch of guns. It's their neighborhood. It's their right to live in a decent neighborhood if they want." The group was able to work through its fears to address crime in the neighborhood.

With a commitment to collective action, the group turned toward creating a formal entity through which they could concentrate their efforts. The result was the creation of a neighborhood association. With its establishment, its members turned their attention to the built environment around them: "We demanded [from the City] new sidewalks, and we got that. And all of the sudden we felt, 'Oh my Lord, look what we did.'" The Association's success with the sidewalks served to empower the group. Excited by the its achievement, Bea thought "the fact that a group of extremely determined people with a couple of very strong leaders from within the neighborhood had organized and prevailed on the city [was fantastic]." The victory inspired other residents to join the association, though the group remained relatively small throughout its existence. Nevertheless, it motivated neighbors to embark upon several ambitious projects designed to revitalize the neighborhood, including a community policing effort, neighborhood watch, an email discussion group, a neighborhood newsletter, a festival, and a community garden project. It is this latter initiative to which I now turn.

The Queen Anne Memorial Garden: "Exhibit A"

Fresh from its victory, the OTNA was empowered to focus its attention on the criminal activity in the neighborhood. One area that required attention was a vacated lot at a busy corner within the center of the neighborhood. As Faith, the head gardener, explained, "there used to be a house there. It was torn down—I'm not sure if it burnt down or got knocked down or got bulldozed over or whatever, but it's been an empty lot for a long time, and it was becoming a hang out for unsavory characters." While these "characters" loitered on the corner, they engaged in a variety of unlawful activities. According to Faith, "people were hanging out there and dealing drugs, selling drugs and prostitutes," which, in her mind, "just brings the whole area

down. They're trashy. It's just not good" because "people live here. When people are dealing drugs and selling their wares and so forth, they're noisy when other people are trying to sleep." Complaints such as Faith's were common. Adam, for instance, pointed out, "Every single day and night, I mean all hours of the day and night, there would be people loitering on that corner, obviously doing business, flagging down cars, doing hand signals . . . There was always somebody on duty on that corner [watching out for police]." These disruptive activities were unappreciated by the garden participants.

Given the activities that took place on the lot, the grounds were strewn with "needles, broken glass, trash, I mean, there was always trash in there, litter; it just looked bad, you know," commented Bruno, a homeowner in the neighborhood. "Obviously," Dawn, a member of the garden committee, added, "there was a lot of partying going on there." Ivan, a tenacious advocate for neighborhood reform, explained that the corner "was littered with beer bottles" from a particular individual who tended to hang out there. "He would just drink beer—gulp, gulp, gulp—and then throw the thing into the yard. It was this stuff all over." In her description of the lot, Faith mentioned her surprise at the amount of garbage she had to remove to get the garden started: "I can't begin to tell you how much broken glass we've pulled out of that yard." To underscore her point, she went on to explain that, even after two years of gardening on the lot, her "girls always have to have shoes on if they're over there, just because there's too much glass because of the people who lived there before. We've also pulled out so many chunks of mortar and brick and stuff, and jammed up my little tiller several times when digging the flower beds." Moreover, Faith revealed that she had "gotten [her] hands very dirty on occasion, and cut [her] fingers on glass there pretty badly actually."

Concerned about the state of the lot, the OTNA decided to mount a collective effort to get rid of the individuals who frequented the vacated property. As Faith described it, "someone got the idea, let's rent the lot from the city. And so that's what we did. And I think the city was more than happy to rent it to us because, obviously, it is like night and day from what it used to be, it really is." With a commitment to obtain the lot, Dawn explained, "somebody said, 'Let's make it a garden.' And then I think it was Ivan who said, 'Let's name it after Queen Anne.'"

Queen Anne, an elderly African American woman, was president of the neighborhood association from 1993 to 1995, "a time when the group was at the height of its battles against prostitution and drug dealing in the area," wrote Will. As Dawn understood it,

Queen Anne's husband, her widow, was a preacher who started his own church, and she was very much into the church. She always spent her energies on that. When everyone was trying to talk to her about using her pull, she would just say, 'Oh, no.' So anyway, apparently one day they were going to church or going somewhere, and she's in the car. It's a summer day. He's in the car. They have the windows rolled down. They stop at the stoplight, and a prostitute is standing

there on Queen Anne's side; the window's rolled down. She leans in over Queen Anne and propositions her husband, at which point the story goes, Queen Anne said, 'that's enough!' And so she just started pulling everybody [together]. She would not take 'no' for an answer. She got church people to help knock on doors. The neighborhood had made the start to get organized . . . That was the beginning.

The garden was a way to pay tribute to the tireless work of Queen Anne, "a neighborhood powerhouse" as she was characterized in an OTNA newsletter. Dawn believed strongly "if Queen Anne hadn't decided she'd had enough, we'd still be where we were ten years ago probably."

With the idea of the garden and its name in place, the OTNA formed a four-member committee, which approached the city, and met with city officials to work out an arrangement. The City responded, Dawn mentioned, by saying, "'Sure, we'll lease it to you.' They drew up a legal document. We signed it as representatives . . . and they leased it to us for three dollars a year and then didn't collect the three dollars, refused to collect it. So that was funny, it was just, you know, a formality." The OTNA later applied for additional funds from the small grant program with the Neighborhood Services Department to further the development of the garden, and received several donations from other community members and local businesses in support of the project.

As it turned out, the garden proved to be an attractive way for residents to get involved in the OTNA's efforts to revitalize the neighborhood. While other approaches, such as the patrols, were more confrontational, the garden appeared to be a more conciliatory activity. Emma, the OTNA president at the time, explained: "We haven't been very involved in the patrol because, I don't know, we're a little worried about the vigilante aspect of it . . . That's why I was more interested in the Queen Anne garden, because doing positive things and encouraging other people to do positive things is much more important than doing things that are potentially confrontational, you know?" Likewise, Trevor, a neighborhood resident, mentioned, "[the garden] brings people together in a non-contentious, non-argumentative, social setting, in a way you listen to music and have something to eat instead of getting together to fight crime." In this sense, Emma thought the "the garden was a way to make a positive thing out of a negative thing." As Marta, a concerned and vigilant resident, described it, its purpose was "to convert a dangerous empty lot into something that's useful to the community."

In the view of many of the participants, the garden made a positive impression within the community. Faith claimed it was "important to all the people who live in this neighborhood . . . because you want to have a safe neighborhood. You want to have a safe place to live, a nice looking place to live, you know? You want to have a place where you feel comfortable letting your children play, and you want to be proud of where you live." With this in mind, the start of the garden achieved its primary aim by encouraging the group of individuals who frequented the lot to abandon it. Neighbors who lived in close proximity to the garden were delighted with the change.

Dawn, who lived across the street from it, remarked, "We're very happy. We no longer have to look out and see people sitting there at all hours of the night, walking across, partying." Likewise, Bruno pointed out, "you don't see as much activity like that. You still do occasionally, but you don't see the prostitutes as often." Sally, his spouse, added in the same conversation, "We don't see condoms laying on the street everyday." Kayla, too, insisted the change to the neighborhood was evident: "I think anybody in Champaign would say that we were pretty successful in moving the group, dispersing the group. I think occasionally they filter back into the neighborhood, but not in the masses that they were. They were basically taking over the neighborhood. You can definitely see the visible evidence that they're not in full force anymore." Commenting on the changes to neighborhood, Marta noted similarly, "Certainly anyone who's driven around here lately sees what's going on." Lakeisha, an African American who lives next door to the lot on which the garden is located, "doesn't say much," noted Ivan, "but I know she's pleased to death that she doesn't have to look out when she goes to work or wherever and see a bunch of beer cans." Given its success as a neighborhood project, Emma told me, she would "like to see [the OTNA] do more projects like the garden."

In sum, the success of the garden encouraged the research participants to describe it as an important symbol in their struggle "to reclaim our space." "I see the garden as an emblem of the community and the spirit here and the ability of people to get together to do something positive," said Emma "I still see it that way. I think that's its biggest value." Likewise, Bea commented, "in my point of view, it's sort of a culmination of the whole efforts of the past eight or nine years . . . It's exhibit 'A' of our success." Success, in this manner, pertained to the association's victory over the criminal element that frequented the lot. By forcing the "baddies" out, Ivan proclaimed the "[OTNA] won, damn it, and I want the world to know it! In fact, as far as the baddies are concerned, the history, the little folksy articles, and stuff like that, are basically propaganda to show this is an alive neighborhood, so that our work continues to prevail." In Adam's words, "This is our place now, and you guys can't just hang out."

Relation to Theory and Literature

The story of the QAMG suggests that a community garden, as an urban revitalization initiative, works, not simply because the environment becomes aesthetically pleasing and economically viable, but also because meanings and identities of people and places can be transformed and empowered. Thus, based on my aggregation of the personal stories of the garden participants, I believe the community narrative of the garden served three important functions. First, within the context of the community narrative, the QAMG was a visible sign of triumph over the illicit activity that had plagued the neighborhood for several years. While other OTNA-led initiatives, such as the neighborhood patrols and the neighborhood watch, had undoubtedly

contributed to the success of the residents' campaign to reduce crime (perhaps even more so than the garden), the QAMG was the only *tangible* symbol of their effort to exert local control over their urban space. It, therefore, wielded more symbolic value to residents. The symbols the garden represented, success and victory, were particularly important to the OTNA as a neighborhood association, for they presumably increased residents' confidence in the association and enhanced its credibility to outsiders (Williams, 1985), although the story does not provide evidence to support this outcome (it does, however, imply a positive future, as most success stories do). Nonetheless, victory is a goal that is consistent with most neighborhood associations faced with the unenviable task of addressing urban crime (Lancourt, 1979; Williams, 1985). "It is fair to say," wrote Williams (1985), "that every neighborhood organization has as its more immediate objectives the gaining of some tangible benefits for the neighborhood as a result of its activity," and so, with this in mind, "the organization publishes its effectiveness through its victories" (p. 113-114). In short, the QAMG, when viewed in the context of its community narrative, was seemingly the publication, as it were, of the OTNA's effectiveness.

Second, the story of the QAMG fostered in the garden participants a sense of collective efficacy, a belief that the situation was not immutable and the garden participants could change it, irrespective of a dominant cultural narrative that suggested otherwise. Indeed, as a story of collective triumph, garden participants were able to look at the events that led to the garden as evidence that they were something other than what outsiders saw them as. The story of the garden speaks to the neighborhood's transformation from a haven for illicit activity to a viable, healthy community of active residents. Moreover, as a story that illustrates the garden participants' ability to overcome challenge, its chronological end projects a positive future, as mentioned. That is, the story implies the garden participants will maintain future control over the space. In this sense, the narrative is "a prominent mode of talk on account of their capacity to turn confusing events into a suspenseful story of *overcoming*" (Polletta, 1998a, p. 429, my emphasis), which offered a sense of hope to its participants, a hope for an improved future.

Third, the garden story was employed as a frame, a persuasive device "used by movement leaders to recruit participants, maintain solidarity, drum up support and, in some instances, demobilize opposition" (Polletta, 1998a, p. 421). There is a growing body of literature that suggests frames are often exemplified through narratives (Davis, 2002; Fine, 2002; Polletta, 1998a, 1998b). As a frame, the story of QAMG was used strategically by the garden participants and the OTNA as a resource to strengthen the collective identity of the garden participants, and potentially, by extension, the neighborhood residents. In telling stories of a collective "we," garden participants helped to bring that identity into being. As Fine (2002) wrote, "stories bind individuals to each other as they recognize that they have common experiences that shape their identity and their linked futures" (p. 238). Indeed, narratives make an evolving identity part of the narrative explanation. The story of the

garden, therefore, had the potential to “turn a threatened sense of self and group into a powerfully mobilizing identity” (Polletta, 1998b, p. 429). The garden story, in this regard, brandished the potential to unite the neighborhood and provide the focus for collective, perhaps even highly emotional, affirmations of community identity. “In sharing a symbol,” Campion and Fine (1998) wrote, “community members experience a link with other members and feel themselves distinct from outsiders . . . This perceived commonality, or identity, fosters a sense of solidarity” (p. 94). Irrespective of whether the garden participants were referring to the criminal element present in the neighborhood or to the outsiders who imposed a repressive narrative on them, by referring to a “they,” the garden participants created antagonists against whom collective action was mobilized (Polletta, 1998b). Through their collective efforts to build the garden, the garden participants experienced a link with each other and felt themselves distinct from outsiders, as well as distinct from what outsiders said of them.

Consistent with each of these functions, the story, on a number of levels, was one of collective resistance. While the link between resistance and leisure has been documented by several scholars (Clarke & Critchener, 1985; Deem, 1988; Glover, in press, b; Rojek, 1997, 1999; Shaw, 1994, 2001; Wearing 1998), the present study contributes to this relatively small but expanding body of literature to include a community garden, which is, of course, a communal project, as an activity, and a neighborhood as a context in which resistance occurs. Communal projects have not, to my knowledge, been mentioned as leisure-related forms of resistance, though their inclusion makes intuitive sense. Beyond being a collective endeavor, however, the garden project was a collective form of resistance in the sense that its development involved the mobilization and empowerment of residents, thereby demonstrating leisure’s potential for social change.

I wish to emphasize the deliberateness of the garden project, which was particularly significant given that the oppressive identity thrust upon residents of the neighborhood by outsiders was challenged and resisted through a well-intentioned, yet politicized, form of leisure. The neighborhood’s reputation as a haven for crime, though perhaps not as pressing an issue as the illicit activity with which the residents were dealing, was something the garden participants set out to prove otherwise. That residents were assumed to be a collection of criminals and victims was an inaccurate characterization of the community present in the neighborhood setting, especially given the strong social networks the research participants claimed were present, yet ignored in any mention of the neighborhood by outsiders. In short, collective resistance was the *intentional* consequence of the community garden.

It is unsurprising to me that the garden group mobilized to reclaim their space; as Cohen (1985) has pointed out, communities tend to defend their territories because “their members *recognize their own voices* within them, and because they feel the message of this vocal assemblage, though general, to be informed directly by their own experiences and mentalities” (p. 109, my emphasis). Indeed, several of the garden participants expressed their con-

cern with the way they were characterized by outsiders, and felt compelled to get involved to combat the negative image of their neighborhood and the absurdity of the situation, that is, that illicit activity would seemingly continue to prosper without recourse. Cohen surmised further that community members “find their identities as individuals through their occupancy in the community’s social space: if outsiders trespass in that space, then its occupants’ own sense of self is felt to be debased and defaced” (p. 109). Here, residents faced an attack from a criminal element, as well as from outsiders who associated their collective identity with a culture of defeat. The garden participants mentioned their sense of powerlessness associated with the illicit activity they witnessed, yet they cited, too, their contempt for those who would jeopardize their sense of security. This latter concern was a principal motivator in their endeavor to reclaim the public space on which the QAMG is now located and displace the collection of individuals who had occupied the space prior to the garden.

The finding that a community garden is a form of resistance introduces a slight, yet notable, variation to Shaw’s (2001) conceptualization of resistance, which she defined, in part, as “acts that challenge the power relations of class, race, disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other forms of social stratifications” (p. 188). While the story of the QAMG was a counter-narrative that challenged a disenfranchising dominant cultural narrative, the garden group, which initiated the project, was composed of individuals whose demographic characteristics were more tantamount to those who traditionally wield power in our society. That is, they consisted largely of white, well-educated homeowners, with a few notable exceptions. Moreover, the aim of the association’s effort was the displacement of the largely young, African American male contingent involved in the sale of illicit drugs, and the young Caucasian females involved in prostitution. My characterizations of these groups are broad generalizations, of course, but my point remains: the OTNA and its ultimate ideals are consistent with those of mainstream society. In fact, the garden participants were adamant that the residents in their neighborhood were *even more* neighborly than those living in other Campaign neighborhoods, a claim they made, in effect, to further distinguish themselves from outsiders and assert themselves as part of everyday society. The community garden seemingly blurred the distinction between resistance and reproduction, the antithesis of resistance.

More specifically, the objective of the garden was to achieve a state of well-being in the neighborhood, a dominant ideology in our society, in order to counter the dominant cultural narrative associated with the neighborhood, a repressive tale that served to disenfranchise neighborhood residents for several years. In essence, the garden group sought to *reproduce* the civility that was characteristic of other neighborhood in the city, and at the same time, *resist* the implication that its identity was tied to the drug dealers, gang members, prostitutes (and their victims) who plagued the neighborhood. In her definition of resistance, Shaw did add that it is exemplified by “oppressed or disadvantaged groups or individuals, who are acting to change power relations and *gain personal or collective empowerment*” (p. 188, my emphasis).

As I read it, this addition seems to incorporate groups such as the garden group given that its story was told expressly to contrast the unfair characterization of its neighborhood. I am inclined, consequently, to view the garden as a symbol of resistance. Moreover, along with other social scientists (Polletta, 1998a, b; Rappaport, 2000; Richardson, 1990), I argue that any community narrative that represents an attempt to change an unappealing dominant cultural narrative, whether consciously or unconsciously, is a collective form of resistance.

Conclusion

Based upon my interpretations of the stories I collected, I argued here that the Queen Anne Memorial Garden was a symbol of triumph. The garden, as a symbol, united the research participants who had been struggling with their own narrative, fostered a sense of collective efficacy, and served as a frame that strengthened the collective identity of the group. The garden project, in this regard, represented an intentional act of collective resistance. This finding contributes to the resistance literature by identifying a community garden as an activity, and a neighborhood as a context in which resistance takes place. In so doing, however, it also blurred the distinction between resistance and reproduction, as the garden participants resisted a dominant cultural narrative by aiming to reproduce civility and security, characteristic of mainstream society. As such, the QAMG serves as a noteworthy example of resistance as reproduction. Further conceptual development is necessary, however, to account for those acts that embody aspects of resistance and reproduction.

Again, I caution readers against accepting the community narrative I have presented here as *the* community narrative for the neighborhood. As Prus and Fleras (1996) have made clear, community members participate unequally in discussions of community identity. Instead, discourse is often dominated by a few who choose to speak on behalf of the community (Campion & Fine, 1998). Moreover, there is a multiplicity of community narratives present within a community at one time. "These other narratives," wrote Bridger (1996), "can be used to create new audiences that will favor different lines of action" (p. 356). In my view, it is incumbent upon leisure researchers to seek out these other voices and give them an opportunity to tell their stories, too.

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