

Metamorphosis



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**White Paper #1
Community Storytelling,
Storytelling Community:
Paths to Belonging in Diverse Los Angeles
Residential Areas**

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Metamorphosis: Transforming the Ties that Bind,
A Project of the Communication Technology and Community Program,
Annenberg School for Communication,
Geoffrey Cowan, Dean,
and the Annenberg Center for Communication,
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Metamorphosis: Transforming the Ties that Bind

A Research Project of the
Annenberg School for Communication

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many people—policy makers, media, community organizations, activists, urban planners, and others—are working to try to build and revitalize urban community. A large research study at the University of Southern California has developed a new approach to understanding community that can put a powerful tool of understanding and action in these people’s hands.

Most studies of urban community have looked at economic, political, and structural factors that create community and have focused on middle-class, Caucasian areas. This new study, called “Metamorphosis: Transforming The Ties That Bind,” has examined seven diverse, residential communities within Los Angeles, arguably one of the most diverse cities in the world, from the perspective of these areas’ “communication infrastructure”—the invisible system of communication set within a community’s residential environment. People used to communicate with neighbors at the local coffee shop and food store; these experiences created a sense of “belonging,” or a feeling of attachment to a residential area that motivates everyday acts of neighborliness. Today, 60 percent of people in the U.S. live in cities with populations of over one million, and even small towns have lost their sense of belonging. What opportunities do today’s urban residents have to “story-tell” about their community among each other? How can local media and community organizations help residents talk about their community? And how does this “storytelling” (or lack of it) affect residents’ experience of belonging to their community?

Now in its fourth year, the Metamorphosis Project has made visible the elements of a communication infrastructure that can foster effective community whether an area is rich or poor, populated by new immigrants or old timers. The project has developed a method of diagnosing the weak links that cause community to break down and has created research-based recommendations for strengthening community. It is possible to build vibrant, effective community even in poverty-stricken areas and in cities where more languages are spoken than there are zip codes.

The key to building community among residents of urban areas is residents’ storytelling about their community. A complete “storytelling neighborhood” network consists of ***residents, community organizations, and local media*** that together are generating and sharing stories about the community. The most effective thing that media and community organizations can do to strengthen community is foster storytelling about and within that community. Community organizations, for instance, can use their activities as the proverbial backyard fence or front porch around which people used to gather to share stories. Local media can help spread those stories and spark new ones, perhaps drawing on community organizations as sources that can provide real news and insight.

A community’s storytelling system is set in a ***residential communication environment***, which can enable or inhibit storytellers as they work together to imagine their neighborhood through storytelling. A lack of safe community spaces (such as parks, stores, and libraries) does more than lower community morale; it damages the very voice and soul of community.

“Storytelling is the most important social force in the world.”

– Jerry Levin, CEO,
AOL-Time Warner

The following paper discusses these findings and elaborates them in the context of the seven communities we studied: African-American residents of Greater Crenshaw, the mostly Protestant Caucasians of South Pasadena, the Mexican-origin immigrants of East Los Angeles, the mostly Jewish Caucasian residents of affluent West Los Angeles, Central American-origin residents of the Pico Union district, the Korean-origin residents of Koreatown, and the Chinese-origin residents of Monterey Park.

INTRODUCTION: A NEW APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY

What makes communities work? The question is as old as civilization itself. “It takes a village to raise a child,” as the African proverb goes. But what creates the village? What gives residents a sense of cohesion and mutual purpose that can foster civil society? What does it take to keep community members informed and talking to one another? How can we revitalize residential communities when residents feel unconnected to that community, when they are unable to take collective action, when apathy rules?

Policy makers, media, community groups, cultural leaders, and others who strive to improve 21st-century urban community face challenges that can seem overwhelming. Never before in history have people of so many different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds come together as neighbors. Diversity and high immigration are the norms of today’s urban life, making the old ways of community-building nearly obsolete. New technology opens further opportunities and challenges for community, with some people fearing that residents will ignore their local community as they forge distant online connections. Attempting to counteract sprawl and other modern ills, urban planners attempt to create better transportation systems, more green space, residential enclaves, and renewed downtown areas; but too frequently they do not achieve that elusive “sense of community” that they seek. All of these efforts are hampered by crime and by budget shortfalls that translate into few safe places for people to come together in their neighborhoods.

Clearly the time has come for a new approach to understanding urban community. This approach must do much more than merely point out the problems and gamely try to fix the symptoms. It must be holistic and systemic, developing a research-based analysis on what actually does make diverse, complex 21st-century community work—and where and how it breaks down. It must look at the intangible but essential nature of community itself, the ties that bind people into “belonging” to each other. Community is more than roads, more than shared bartering, more than common political leaders. Finally, the new approach must make concrete recommendations that span differences—the ethnic, socioeconomic, political, and historical diversities within a single area—and help knit urban residents into cohesive civil society.

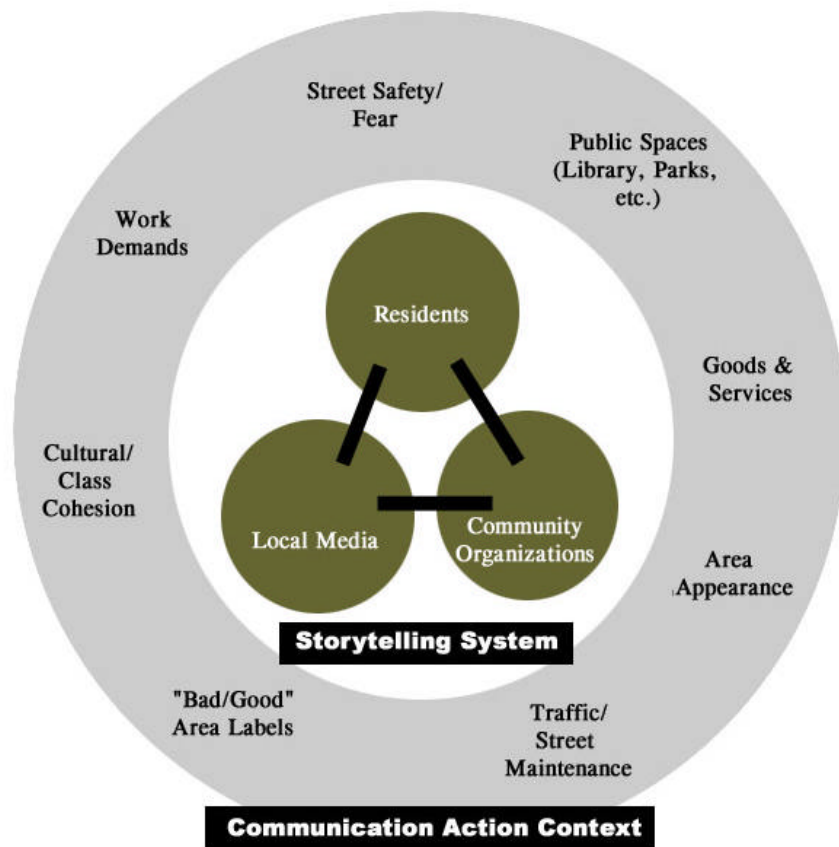
In the wake of the Los Angeles civil disturbances in 1992, researchers at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California (USC) began to explore a different paradigm for examining community. Instead of looking only at the economic, political, and socio-structural factors that shape community, they investigated how members of a community *communicate* among themselves and with others—how they forge “the ties that bind.” They launched a massive research study to investigate the “communication infrastructure” of seven distinct residential communities (each with a particular historical definition and ethnic majority) in the heart of Los Angeles. The study was called “Metamorphosis: Transforming the Ties That Bind” to reflect the social transformation, or metamorphosis, currently underway in urban centers all over the world.

The Metamorphosis Project is an in-depth examination of the transformations of urban community under the forces of globalization, new communication technologies, and population diversity. It looks at these changes through the lens of **communication**.

“Communication infrastructure” is a new term that we are introducing to urban studies. A communication infrastructure is **the invisible communication or “storytelling” system that makes community possible, set in its residential communication environment.** The “storytellers” in the system include residents, local media, and community organizations. The residential communication environment includes public spaces (where people can gather to share stories), the degree of safety in an area, and other environmental factors. Like a political or economic infrastructure, a communication infrastructure is usually taken for granted. We hardly even see it until something goes wrong

Figure 1 depicts the communication infrastructure that undergirds community:

Figure 1. Communication Infrastructure



The mission of the Metamorphosis Project is to make visible the basic elements of a communication infrastructure so that it can be an effective tool for policymakers, activists, and residents who are working to build urban areas into stronger and more effective communities. This model can help us understand how community is forged, where and why it breaks down, and what we can do to revitalize community.

The rest of this paper reviews how the communication infrastructures of the seven, highly diverse, residential communities we studied affect the strength of community in those areas. We use those findings to identify key principles for community-building, and then translate that information into recommendations for strengthening urban community in general.

RESEARCH METHODS: COLLECTING THE DATA OF DIVERSITY

First we will briefly review how we gathered the data that helped us understand the relationship between a communication infrastructure and community. The Metamorphosis Project focused on **seven major residential areas of Los Angeles**, approaching the areas from the perspective of the ethnicity that has shaped the tone and character of that neighborhood ¹:

- East Los Angeles from the perspective of Mexican-origin residents
- Greater Crenshaw from the perspective of African American residents
- Greater Monterey Park from the perspective of Chinese-origin residents
- Koreatown from the perspective of Korean-origin residents
- Pico Union from the perspective of Central American-origin residents
- South Pasadena from the perspective of Caucasian (plurality of Protestant) residents
- Westside from the perspective of Caucasian (plurality of Jewish) residents ²

Ethnic and linguistic diversity among the study areas is obvious. But if we take only three additional measures—recency of immigration, residential tenure, and home ownership—it quickly becomes apparent how these seven communities are diverse in other ways too (Table 1):

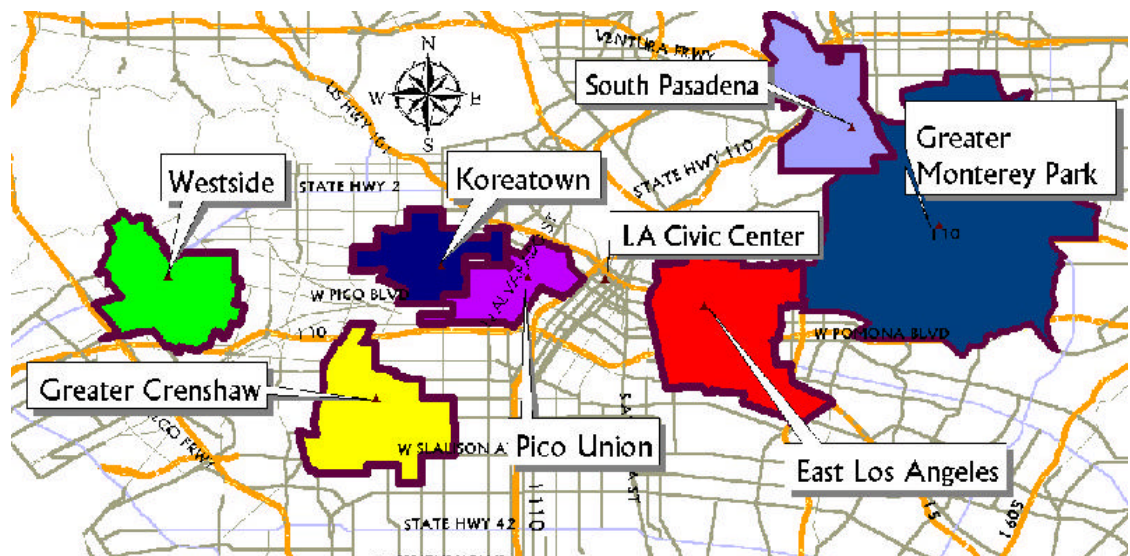
Table 1
Seven Study Samples: Immigration Generation, Residential Tenure and Home Ownership

	Percent 1 st or 2 nd Generation Immigrants	Percent Residing in the Neighborhood More than Ten Years	Percent Home Owners
Greater Crenshaw	21.8	52	47
South Pasadena	16.8	49	54
East LA	75.7	56	31
Westside	30.5	49	59
Pico Union	96.7	26	6
Koreatown	98.3	16	10
Greater Monterey Park	95.0	25	46

Most urban research fails to reach new immigrant communities in spite of their obvious importance because of the difficulty of gathering data in multiple languages. With a **multilingual research team**, the Metamorphosis Project gathered extensive data in new-immigrant areas by using **multiple languages**, allowing respondents to use their preferred language of discourse. In addition to **English**—the language of the “old immigrants” we interviewed—we collected data in **Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, and Spanish**.³

In spite of the many differences between the study areas, all of them lie within a ten-mile radius of the Los Angeles Civic Center, as shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2. Map of the Metamorphosis Project Study Areas



Just as we used multiple languages to access residents in these study areas, we used multiple research methods to gather information. Here we mention only those most relevant to the subject of this paper (with others to be discussed in future White Papers):

1. **Telephone Survey:** We used random digit dialing to obtain between 250-312 household interviews (40-47 minutes) in each study area, for a total sample of 1,812 households.⁴ Multi-lingual interviewers asked questions about respondents’ communication practices, participation in community organizations, travel patterns, and their demographic characteristics. We asked how often a respondent talked with neighbors about the neighborhood itself. Importantly, we also asked respondents about their subjective and

The variable we call “**belonging**” represents a resident’s feeling of attachment to a residential area that motivates everyday acts of neighborliness. A “belonging index” for each resident was based on that resident’s answers to eight questions, such as how many people the respondent knew in the neighborhood, whether the respondent believed there was neighborliness in the community, what neighborly acts occur, and so on.

objective experience of “belonging” to their neighborhoods.

2. Community Issues Focus Groups: For each study area, we drew approximately 20 participants (10 per focus group) from the samples of telephone survey respondents. These people joined us in focus groups to share their views on topics such as the issues that join and divide residents, and the features of their communication environments that enable or constrain “belonging.” These semi-structured group discussions were conducted in the language of the respondents.

3. Interviews with Community Organizations: When we interviewed people initially over the telephone, we asked them to identify the most important community organizations in their everyday lives. Then we tracked down these organizations and interviewed their staff members about their communication practices, particularly how they “told stories” concerning the community—e.g., stories the organization shared with media, fostered among its clients, etc. We also asked about the organization’s mission, history, and resources.

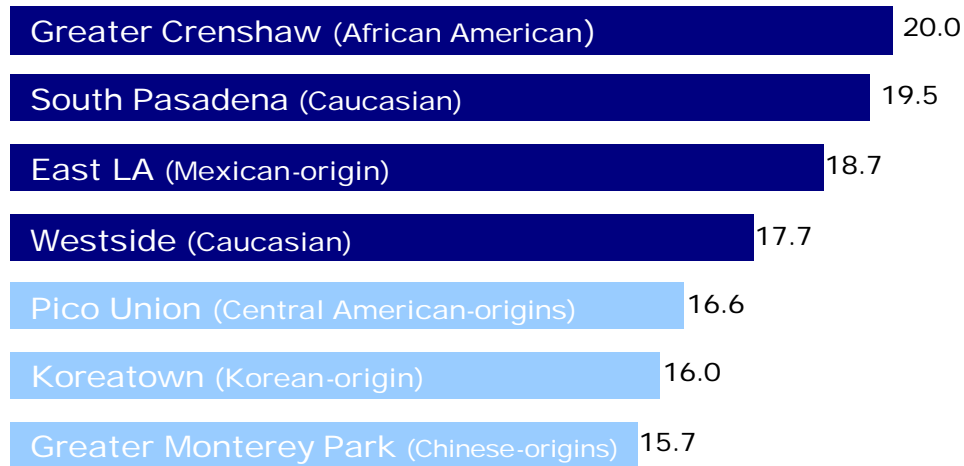
4. Interviews with Producers of Local Media: We conducted a census of local media in each study area. Local media range from media targeted to particular ethnic groups or residential areas to public (non-commercial) media that are located in an area. We interviewed the producers of many of these media with respect to their production goals, target audience, resources, and storytelling practices.

RESULTS: “BELONGING” IN THE SEVEN COMMUNITIES

Of the seven areas we surveyed, which had residents with greater experiences of “belonging”? Our results might be surprising to some people who would assume that residential areas peopled by city’s ethnic majority (Caucasians) would have the strongest sense of belonging to their community. After all, many of these people own their homes, have been living in Los Angeles for a long time as the city’s elite, and speak the language of mainstream media. We might assume, too, that residents of areas characterized by recent immigration and low home ownership would score low on “belongingness.”

Not so. The highest levels of belonging occur among **African American residents of Greater Crenshaw (1st)**, followed by **Caucasian residents of South Pasadena (2nd)**. Moderate-levels of belonging are found among **Mexican-origin residents of East Los Angeles (3rd)**, in spite of that area’s relatively high percentages of recent immigrants. Just behind East Los Angeles residents are the **Caucasian residents of the Westside (4th)** place, in spite of having the highest proportion of homeowners than in any other sample area). The lowest levels of belonging are found among **Central American-origin residents of Pico Union (5th)**, **Korean-origin residents of Koreatown (6th)**, and **Chinese-origin residents of Greater Monterey Park (7th)** or last place, even though a full 46 percent of these residents own their homes, just one percentage point below home ownership in the Greater Crenshaw area). Figure 3 summarizes the data on the mean level of belonging among residents studied in each area:

Figure 3. Levels of Belonging in Seven Residential Study Areas



NOTES: The belonging index score ranges from 0 (lowest) to 40 (highest).

WHAT HELPS PEOPLE “BELONG” TO THEIR COMMUNITY?

In all study areas, **a resident’s participation in storytelling about the neighborhood proved to be the strongest predictor of that resident’s degree of “belonging.”** This occurred regardless of an area’s wealth, immigrant population, and tenure of residents. The reason that some communities had higher levels of “belonging,” while others were low, had to do with the ability of that community’s storytelling system and communication environment to foster storytelling by residents about the community. **Policy makers, media, community organizations, and others can increase residents’ experience of “belonging” simply by building the storytelling system and communication environment to help residents talk to one another.**

Belonging matters. As we defined it through our survey questionnaires, belonging is not merely a warm feeling that residents have toward their community. It includes residents’ motivation to engage in “acts of neighborliness”—a foundation of civil society.

A “storytelling neighborhood” involves the storytelling system—which includes the **residents** as well as storytellers such as **local media and community organizations**—set in the **residential communication environment**. The following sections will discuss the elements of the storytelling system, followed by analysis of the actual storytelling systems of each of the seven study communities. Then we will turn to the residential communication environment.

Storytelling occurs when people talk with each other about their neighborhoods. We employ the verb form, “**storytelling neighborhood**,” to emphasize the active construction of neighborhoods through discourse. Storytelling is the act of constructing identity through narrative discourse, and “storytelling neighborhood” is the act of constructing an identity as a member of a residential neighborhood.

RESIDENTS TALKING TO ONE ANOTHER

Our research demonstrates that **efforts by policy makers, media, community organizations and others to get residents talking with their neighbors would increase these residents' experience of belonging.**

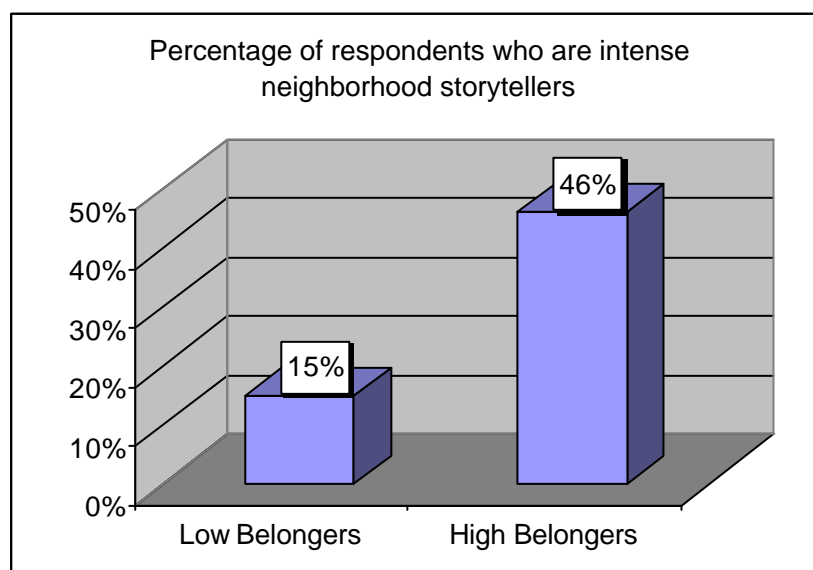
Earlier we described the “belonging score index” where we measured respondents’ experience of belonging. We divided respondents into “low,” “medium” and “high” belongers. At the same time we gathered this data, we also inquired about the intensity of neighborhood discussion, asking if respondents talked with other people about their neighborhood, anywhere between “never” to “all the time.” We called this “neighborhood storytelling.” Based on their scores, those who never or infrequently talk about their neighborhood were labeled “morose,” those who talk a moderate amount of time “chatters,” and those who talk very frequently or all the time “super-talkers.”

“The most important thing is for the city to develop a community and strength in the community, and when I say community I mean people-to-people community ... it's the life and blood of the city.”

–West Hollywood resident Richard Giesbret, quoted in “Westside Weekly” section, *Los Angeles Times* (May 20, 2001)

The correlations between “belonging” and “talkativeness” –or, more precisely, “neighborhood storytelling” –will please those of us who like to talk. As shown in Figure 4, almost half (46%) of the people who are most involved with their communities (high belongers) are “supertalkers.” In contrast, only 15% of those who are least likely to be involved with their community (low belongers) are “supertalkers.” On the other hand, almost two-thirds (61%) of low belongers are “morose,” contrasted to less than a quarter (22%) of high belongers, who are also “morose.”

Figure 4. Creating “Belonging” Through Neighborhood Storytelling—All Respondents



In short, the main contributing factor relating to individual residents that we found to enhance people's experience of belonging was people's sheer talkativeness with their neighbors about the neighborhood. Whether they had the proverbial backyard fence or not, some people in these communities carried on conversations as if they did. The more they did, the more residents felt and acted as if they were part of an active community.

What can urban activists do to get neighbors to talk to one another about their community? They can help build an integrated community storytelling system to help residents connect with each other—the next subject of our discussion.

BUILDING THE “STORYTELLING SYSTEM”

A community's storytelling system either encourages or impedes individual residents from talking about their neighborhood (as we have seen, the key factor increasing their experience of belonging). What features in a community's storytelling system help or inhibit neighbors from talking with each other about the community? How can we strengthen the various components in an area's storytelling system to help residents connect with each other and imagine community together?

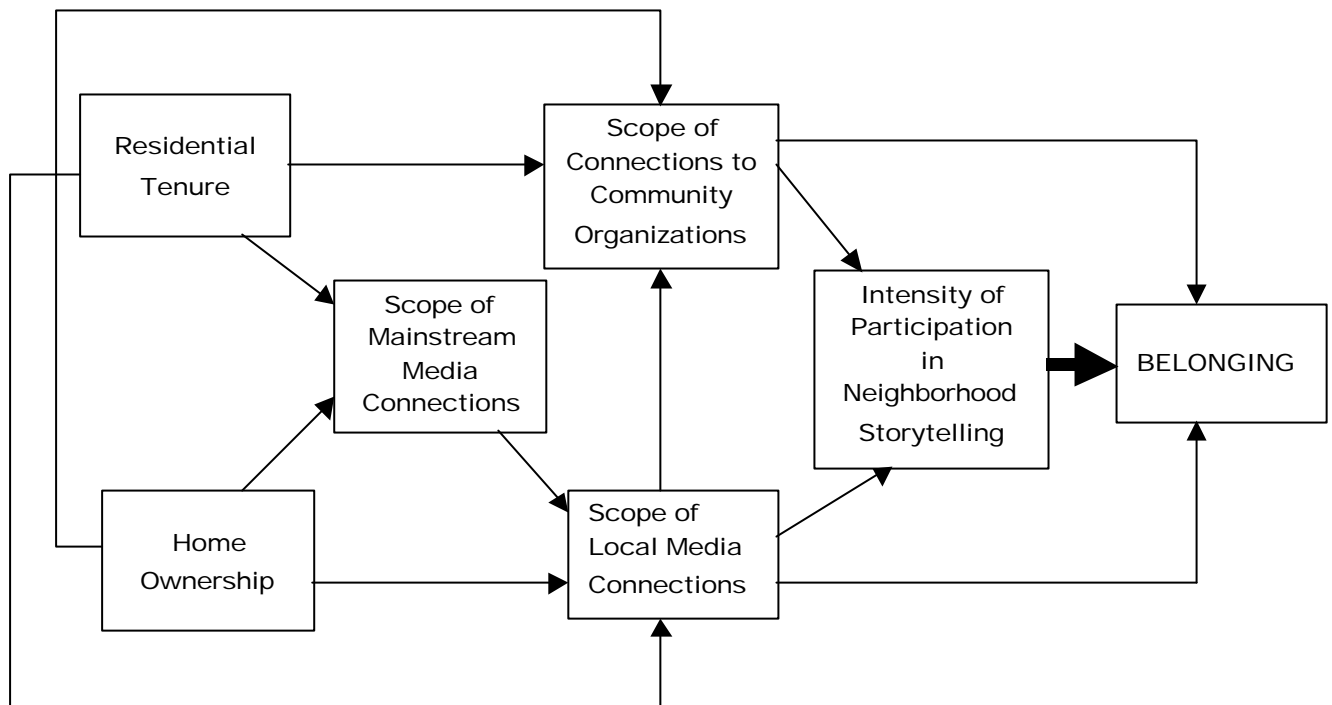
In each of our seven study communities, we gathered information on various measures relating to residents, their communication behavior, and their degree of “belonging.” In addition to the belonging and other measures described above, we inquired about respondents' scope of mainstream media connections, scope of local media connections, and scope of connections to community organizations. We also gathered information on structural factors such as residential tenure and home ownership, as well as general demographic information and residents' “intensity of participation in neighborhood storytelling.”

As we drew correlations among all these measures and analyzed this data, we arrived at an ideal storytelling system where the various storytellers worked together to foster the greatest experience of “belonging” among residents. We also saw that factors such as recency of immigration, home ownership among residents, etc., mattered most in how they affected residents' ability to access and tell stories about their neighborhood.

We scored “intensity of participation in neighborhood storytelling” by asking each respondent, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents “never” and 10 “all the time”: “How often do you have discussions with other people in your neighborhood about things happening in your neighborhood?”

We developed a model called “the Storytelling Neighborhood” that features key storytellers—**residents, community organizations, and local media**—fostering participation in storytelling about the neighborhood, and thus belonging. It is this storytelling system that is the heart of the communication infrastructure of belonging. This model appears as Figure 5 on the following page. After we describe the various components in Figure 5, we will discuss how each of the seven study communities measured up against the ideal storytelling system.

Figure 5
Storytelling Community: The Ideal Storytelling System



Each of the players in the storytelling system potentially contributes to residents' experience of belonging. Reading from left to right, we begin with a resident's **tenure in the neighborhood** and **home ownership**. Other researchers commonly find that these characteristics positively affect community integration. From our perspective, they do so because they affect people's opportunities and motivations to be engaged with the storytelling system. For example, "old timers" compared to "newcomers" to an area have had more opportunity to establish connections with mainstream media and, more importantly, with community organizations and with local media. Homeowners are more likely than renters to establish these connections because they have more motivation to monitor the residential environment to protect their investment.

Next is the resident's scope of connections to **mainstream media**—big English-language commercial operations. Some studies of the effects of mainstream media, such as those in the tradition of "social capital" research, conclude that mainstream television negatively influences civil society or community concerns, while newspapers play positive roles. Since we regard mainstream media as storytellers of the broader city, region, or nation, we do not really expect them to be as involved in the kind of storytelling that would directly increase people's belonging to their neighborhoods. Rather, we expect that people who have broad connections to many mainstream media will develop a daily practice of weaving media stories into their lives, and this practice is likely to extend to reading, watching or listening to local media.

A resident's scope of connections to **community organizations** also influences that person's pathway to belonging. Many researchers have noted the importance of membership in

community organizations for building social capital. But our research implies that it is more than sheer membership or participation that matters. The most important community-building role of community organizations comes from their involvement as vital parts of the communication infrastructure of belonging.⁵ They can do this in several important ways: by putting residents in touch with each other around shared concerns (including their shared residential locales), by linking residents to other community organizations in the area, and by telling neighborhood stories to residents directly or indirectly (for example, by getting these stories in the local media). Community organizations can be builders of “community capital” when they provoke and enable residents and local media to be storytellers of their community.

A resident’s scope of connections to **local media** affects his or her experience of belonging. Past research—limited primarily to old immigrants—suggests that local media positively influence community-building. However, we looked far beyond this conventional “local media” (such as local newspapers or radio) to include the full range of local media available in people’s communication environments—from relatively large commercial outlets to the mom-and-pop newsletter or publications produced by interest groups, religious organizations, and other institutions. We also included the abundant new immigrant and ethnic media, often produced in languages other than English, and public non-commercial media.

Residents’ connections to these various players affect the **intensity of their participation in neighborhood storytelling**—which, as we saw earlier, has a positive effect on their level of **belonging**, the end goal of this storytelling system.

No matter their ethnicity nor socio-economic status, people can create a sense of belonging if they talk to each other about their neighborhoods, both the good and the bad. These neighborhood stories, told over the backyard fence, on the sidewalk, at the local park, and in other public spaces, motivate and enable residents to imagine their residential areas as “their” communities.

The lines connecting the various players in Figure 5 show that there are many possible pathways to belonging. For example, a resident we interviewed on the telephone might be a homeowner with high connections to local media. A “**direct path**” to belonging would mean that watching, reading, or listening to local media allows this resident to keep on top of what is happening in her neighborhood, and this increases her sense of belonging. In this case, an arrow goes directly from “scope of connections to local media” to “belonging.” There are also “**indirect paths**” through which a resident’s connections to local media can lead to belonging. A resident’s connections to local media might serve to stimulate her participation in neighborhood storytelling, which, in turn, leads to belonging (arrows going from “scope of local media connections” to “intensity of participation in

neighborhood storytelling” to “belonging”).

There are additional pathways, too. The resident’s connection to local media might make her more interested in her neighborhood, which means she decides to participate in community organizations (arrow going from “scope of connections to local media” to “scope of connections to community organizations”), which, in turn, makes her more likely to belong (arrow going from “scope of connections to community organizations” to “belonging”). Or her connections to local media might make her more likely to talk with her neighbors about the neighborhood and, thus, to develop belonging feelings and actions (arrows going from “scope

of connections to local media” to “intensity of participation in neighborhood storytelling” to “belonging”).

The Metamorphosis research was structured so that we could discern all these direct and indirect pathways to belonging. From our statistical analyses for each study area, we gleaned a number that expressed the strength or weakness of every possible connection between the various storytelling agents in the model storytelling system for each area. For instance, the greater the contribution of residents’ connections to local media to their level of belonging, the higher the number we assigned to this pathway. The number is based on the community average.

Now we will review the storytelling systems in the seven study communities. They varied dramatically. ⁶

A TALE OF SEVEN COMMUNITIES: STORYTELLING SYSTEMS AND COMMUNITY “BELONGING”

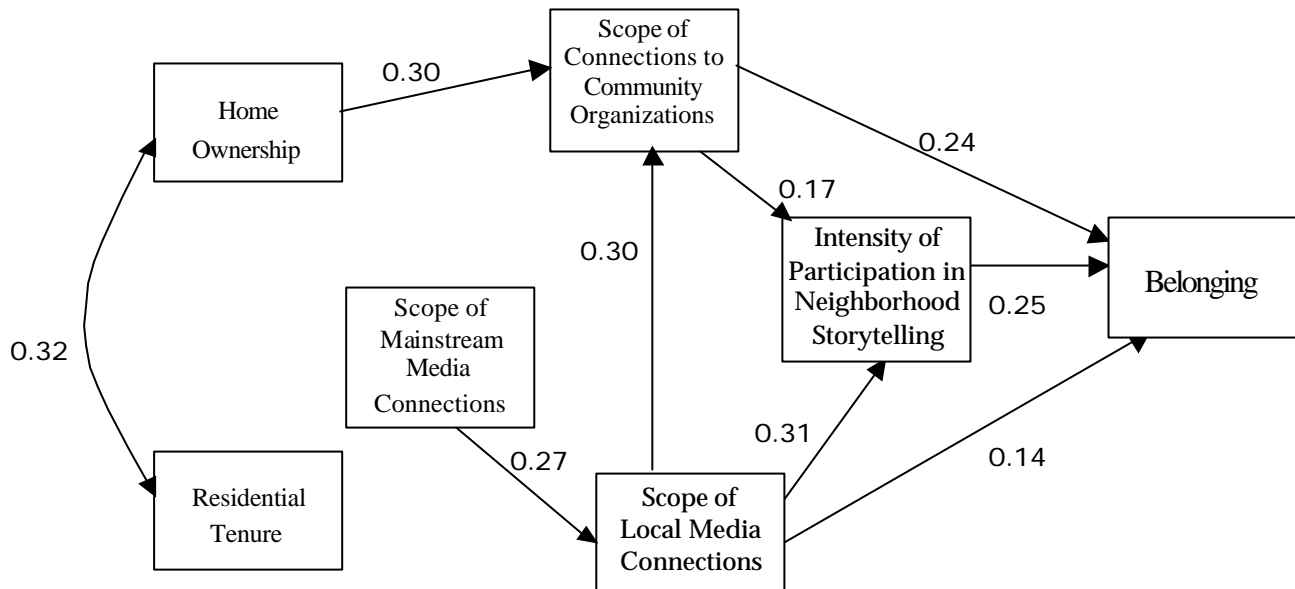
Across all study areas, two major factors determined whether the residents of a study area had a high or low level of belonging: (1) the integration and strength of the storytelling system, and (2) the intensity with which the residents “story-tell” their neighborhoods.

In the following pages, we present our findings on each community in the order of residents’ reported experience of belonging. To help describe how each community’s storytelling system matches up against the ideal model, we have created a figure, based on Figure 5, for each community. This allows us to see where an area’s communication infrastructure is strong, and where it falls short. As we discuss the findings for each area and examine the figures, we will focus upon two diagnostic questions:

- *How well integrated is the storytelling fabric? Are there missing links?* An integrated storytelling system would have all of the links or lined arrow connections that are contained in the ideal storytelling model. Missing links occur when there is no arrow connecting two factors because one factor does not significantly affect the other. As we have said, some missing links are more important than others. Links become more important as you move from the left hand to the right hand side of each figure.

- *How strong is the storytelling fabric? Are there strong and positive links between storytellers?* The numbers next to each arrow represent the strength of the link between factors. All of the links included in the figures are statistically significant, strong enough to be included. The higher the number, the stronger the link. A positive link means that one factor increases the value of another factor. For example, .30 next to the line going from “scope of local media connections” to “scope of connections to community organizations” (see Figure 6) means that broad connections that residents have with local media have the desired effect of increasing the scope of these residents’ connections to community organizations. A minus sign in front of a number indicates a negative link. For instance, “scope of connections to mainstream media” sometimes decreases the “scope of connections to local media”; a resident’s connection to mainstream media can mean fewer connections to local media.

**Study Area 1, Figure 6:
The Actual Storytelling System of African American Residents of Greater Crenshaw**



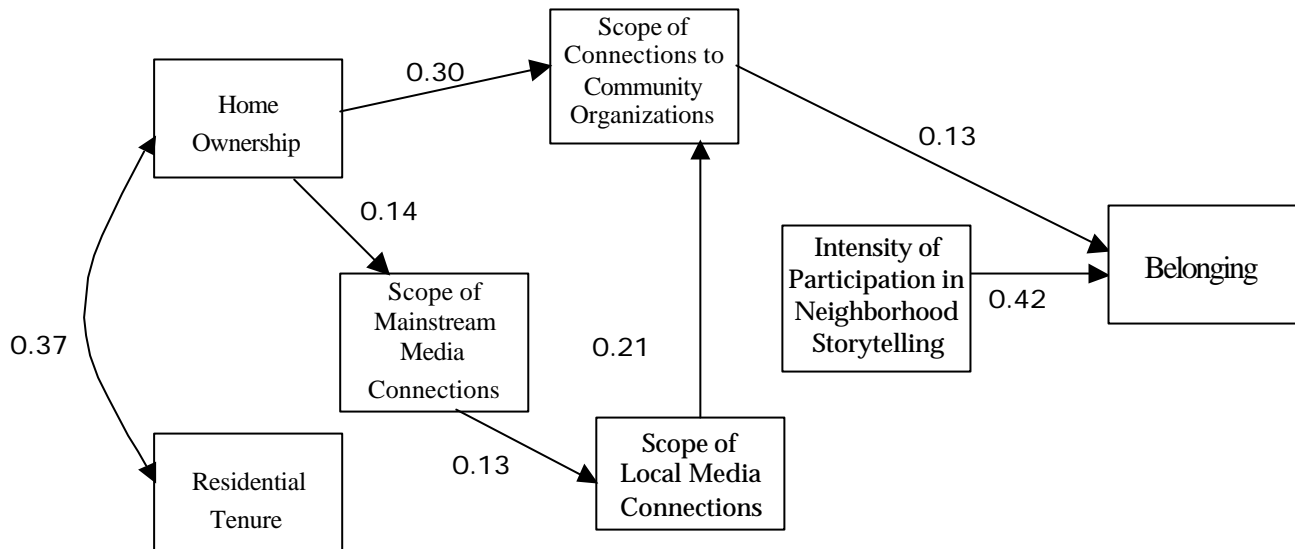
Note: The numbers next to each connecting line reflect the strength of the connection. When there is no line connection, there is no significant connection between variables.

African American residents of Greater Crenshaw have the highest level of belonging because they have an integrated storytelling system. There are only a few missing links in Figure 6 where we found no connections of statistical significance. Compare Figure 5 with Figure 6 to see how closely—at least relative to the other study areas—the Greater Crenshaw area has all components of the model. The skeletal structure of an ideal storytelling system is in place among these largely old immigrant residents of Greater Crenshaw, and this is a rich community building resource.

But some of the numbers alongside the lined arrows are low, indicating key links that could be strengthened. While *local media* seem to be doing a pretty good job—residents broadly connected to them engage in neighborhood storytelling to a greater degree than residents with narrower connections—residents’ connections to *community organizations* are not doing as good a job.

Nevertheless, there are key areas for community-building in Greater Crenshaw. A missing link in Greater Crenshaw’s storytelling system (albeit the only one) is the finding that neither homeowners nor longtime residents are more likely to have broad mainstream media connections than renters and newcomers. We would expect the homeowners and longtime residents to have strong connections to mainstream media as part of their orientation to the local neighborhood and the larger Los Angeles scene. Why don’t they? We see a “connection problem” where the stories produced by mainstream media have little interest for these residents.

**Study Area 2, Figure 7:
The Actual Storytelling System of Caucasian Residents of South Pasadena**



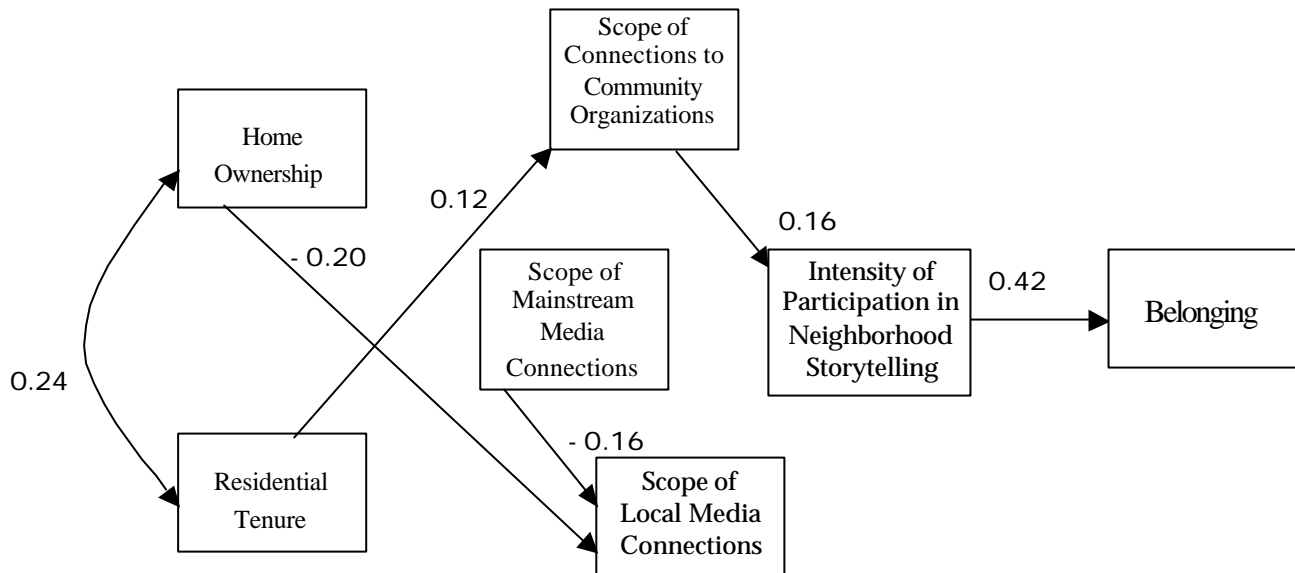
Note: The numbers next to each connecting line reflect the strength of the connection. When there is no line connection, there is no significant connection between variables.

While this old immigrant study sample has the second highest level of belonging, there are both missing and weak links that show how the storytelling system could be improved to raise the level of belonging to an even higher level.

Figure 7 gives a clear picture of where the burden of story telling neighborhood lies—with the residents themselves. By far the strongest link to belonging is the positive contribution of residents’ participation in neighborhood storytelling. Both local media and community organizations could be much more centrally involved in the storytelling process. Their potentials as key storytellers of the neighborhood are not being realized. We see that *local media connections* do not increase participation in neighborhood storytelling; residents who widely consume local media are not more likely to “story-tell” their neighborhoods than residents who do not consume local media. Moreover, broad consumption of local media makes no direct contribution to belonging.

Having broad connections to *community organizations* does contribute directly—if somewhat weakly—to belonging. However, the fact that broad connections to community organizations do not increase the intensity of residents’ participation in neighborhood storytelling poses both a problem and an opportunity for improvement.

**Study Area 3, Figure 8:
The Actual Storytelling System of Mexican-Origin residents of East LA**



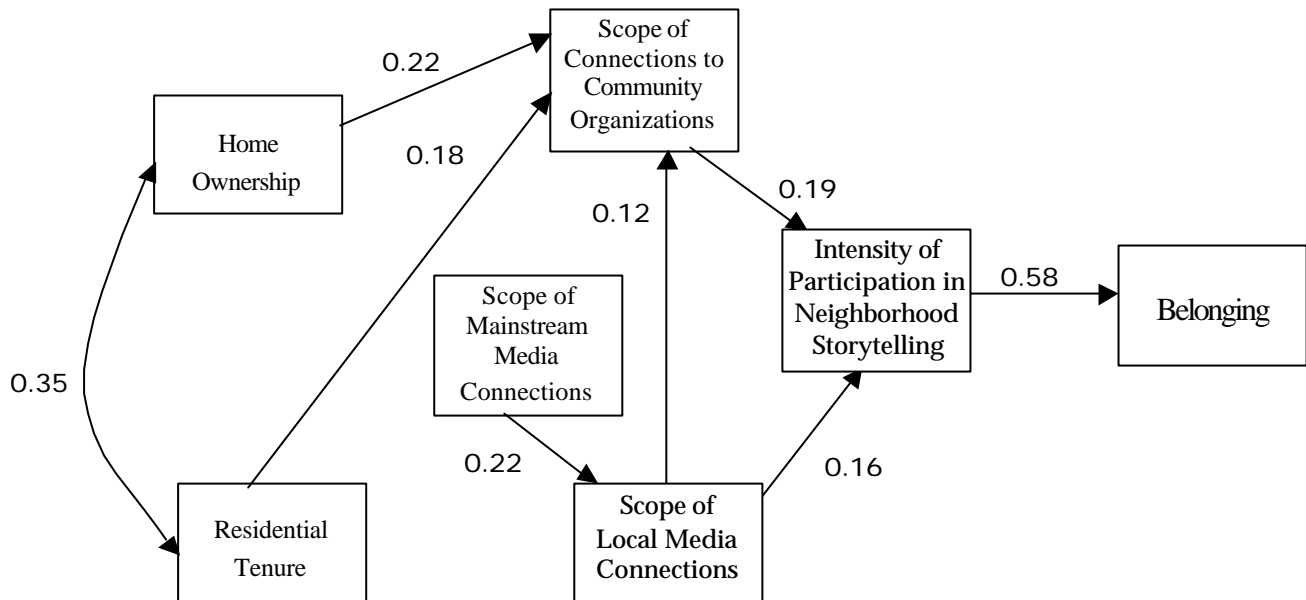
Note: The numbers next to each connecting line reflect the strength of the connection. When there is no line connection, there is no significant connection between variables. Minus signs indicate a significant negative connection.

Mexican-origin residents of East Los Angeles have the third highest level of belonging. By far the strongest source of belonging is the residents' participation in neighborhood storytelling. Residents' connections to *community organizations* do increase the intensity of their participation in neighborhood storytelling. Ideally, though, this connection would be stronger.

Of the many missing links, those concerning media, both local and mainstream, are most compelling. Residents who are broadly connected to *local media* are no more and no less likely to participate in neighborhood storytelling, connect to community organizations, or to belong. Why is this? Also, there is a negative link between connections to mainstream and local media. This suggests that residents who are most interested in the stories that mainstream media tell are significantly less interested in the stories that local media tell. And finally, there is a negative link between home ownership and local media; homeowners are less, not more, likely to connect broadly to local media.

Why these findings? Our interviews with local media can shed some light (and we will discuss this in depth later). Many local media have an ethnic focus and may emphasize connections to readers' countries of origin instead of the local area—which would explain why some local media do not seem to help residents “belong” to their current local area.

**Study Area 4, Figure 9:
The Actual Storytelling System of Caucasian Residents of the Westside
(West Los Angeles)**



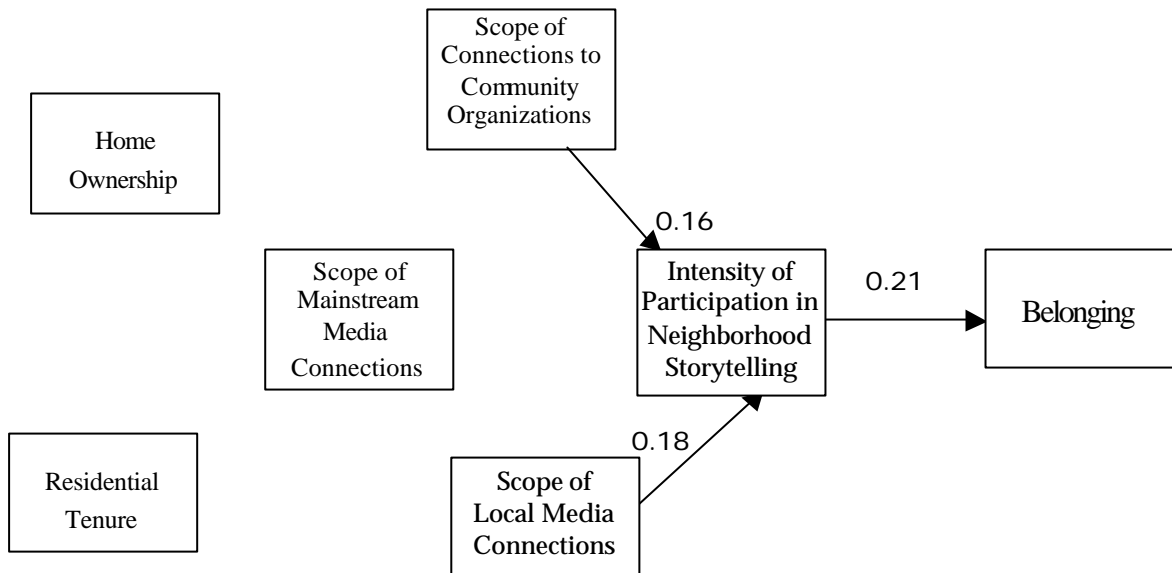
Note: The numbers next to each connecting line reflect the strength of the connection. When there is no line connection, there is no significant connection between variables.

These residents of the Westside have the fourth highest level of belonging. The first thing that jumps out when looking at Figure 9 is the very strong connection between residents' participation in neighborhood storytelling and belonging.

While residents' connections to both *community organizations* and to *local media* encourage residents to story tell their neighborhoods, neither of these connections directly increases residents' level of belonging. And curiously, while homeowners and old timers (compared to renters and newcomers) are more likely to connect broadly to community organizations, they are not more likely to have broad connections with local media.

Overall, the storytelling system among Caucasian residents of the Westside is relatively well integrated, but could be improved by more and stronger connections between key storytellers.

**Study Area 5, Figure 10:
The Actual Storytelling System of Central American-Origins Residents of Pico Union**



Note: The numbers next to each connecting line reflect the strength of the connection. When there is no line connection, there is no significant connection between variables.

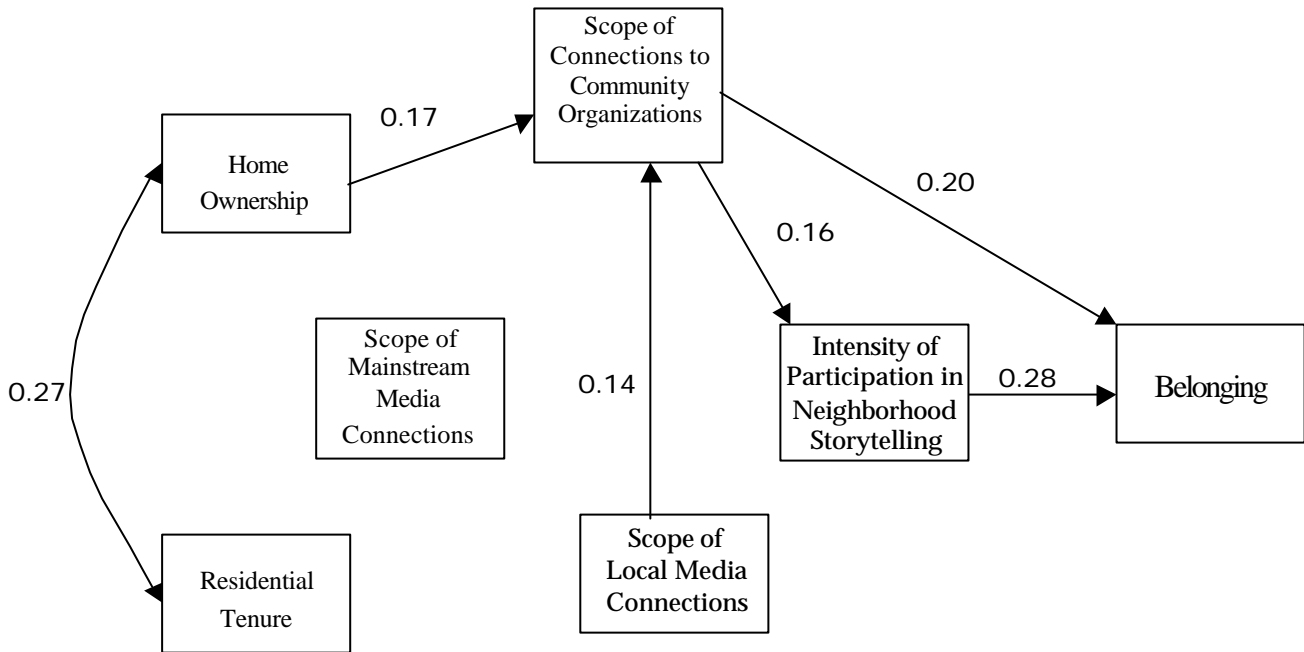
The overwhelming majority of Central-American-origin residents of Pico Union are first or second-generation immigrants, and this presents a challenge to all key storytellers when it comes to belonging. The mean level of belonging in this study sample ranks fifth.

However, though it may be weak, the heart of the storytelling system is in place: Residents’ participation in neighborhood storytelling contributes to belonging, and both connections to *community organizations* and to *local media* encourage such storytelling. Missing links are direct effects of residents’ connections to community organizations and to local media on belonging. Nor is there a link between connections to mainstream media and to local media, suggesting that residents who connect broadly to mainstream media do not also connect broadly to local media.

Structural characteristics (home ownership and residential tenure) play no role; there is too little variation in these characteristics for them to have a significant effect (i.e., the vast majority of these residents are renters).

We will discuss the special problems of new immigrant study areas (which also include Koreatown and Monterey Park) under “Additional Recommendations,” later in this paper.

**Study Area 6, Figure 11:
The Actual Storytelling System of Korean-Origin Residents of Koreatown**



Note: The numbers next to each connecting line reflect the strength of the connection. When there is no line connection, there is no significant connection between variables.

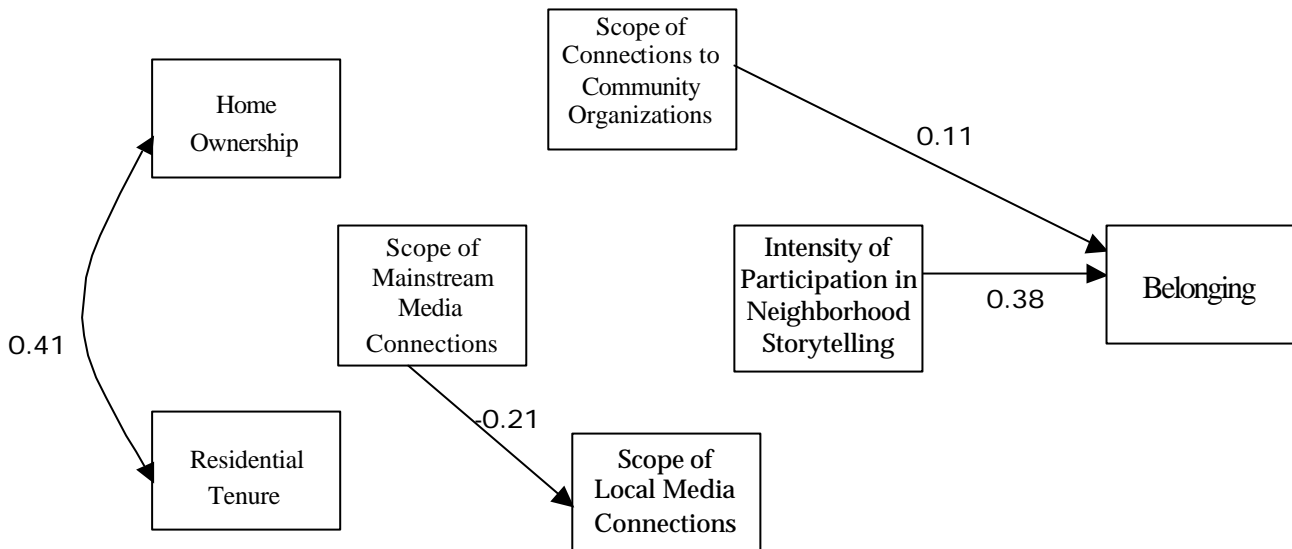
Korean-origin residents of Koreatown have a low level of belonging; they rank sixth out of the seven study areas. The challenge for community-building is great: the vast majority are first or second-generation immigrants, and only one in ten is a homeowner.

Despite these obstacles, some important elements of the ideal storytelling system are in place, even if weakly. Residents contribute to their own sense of belonging by participating in neighborhood storytelling, and *community organizations* encourage such storytelling. Broad connections to community organizations also contribute directly to belonging.

However, important links are missing. Broad connections to *local media* do encourage broad connections to community organizations, but they do not encourage residents to participate in neighborhood storytelling, nor do they contribute directly to belonging. There is no link between connections to mainstream and local media, and being a homeowner or residing in the area for a relatively long period of time does not increase the likelihood of being connected to mainstream media.

All in all, we have the beginnings of a storytelling system that could be considerably strengthened to bring important payoffs for an increased sense of belonging.

**Study Area 7, Figure 12:
The Actual Storytelling System of Chinese-Origins Residents of Greater Monterey Park**



Note: The numbers next to each connecting line reflect the strength of the connection. When there is no line connection, there is no significant connection between variables. Minus signs indicate a significant negative connection.

Again, the vast majority of these residents have been in this country for only one or two generations. This study area sample has both the least integrated storytelling system and the lowest level of belonging. Residents do not get much belonging benefit from their connections to either community organizations or to local media. The residents are the primary constructors of their own sense of belonging.

While residents who are broadly connected to *community organizations* have higher levels of belonging, these connections do not encourage them to participate in “storytelling” their neighborhoods. Nor do *local media* play a role in the storytelling system. Residents with broad local media connections are no more likely than residents with narrow connections to participate in neighborhood storytelling, connect to community organizations, or to belong.

Structural characteristics also have little to do with the process. Most puzzling in this regard is that a relatively high level of home ownership does not seem to have its ideal effects. Homeowners are no more likely than renters to connect to community organizations or to local media.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO CREATING A “STORYTELLING NEIGHBORHOOD”: THE RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT

We have seen improving a community’s storytelling system can enhance residents’ ability to “story-tell” about that community, and thus to experience belonging to that community. But we also need to pay attention to the residential or environmental context in which that storytelling system is set. Residents need an environment that allows, even encourages, them to come together—to talk with each other. When their environment lacks basic services, secure public places, or a friendly atmosphere, it discourages residents from engaging the neighbors or, even, strangers in a way that creates that good feeling of being at home. Here we ask a third diagnostic question: *Is the communication environment conducive to development of an integrated and strong storytelling fabric?*

Each storytelling system is set in its own communication environment—its psychological, cultural, physical, and economic characteristics, plus such factors as security—that affect the likelihood that people will feel able and willing to communicate with each other, and thus experience belonging to their neighborhood. When we conducted focus groups with residents, we asked them to describe various constraints on storytelling and belonging.⁷ Of all factors that were discussed, we will present the most important here:

- Mainstream media portrayals of the area as undesirable or bad
- Unsafe streets, fear of crime, and fear of retaliation
- Homeowner/renter divisions
- Unkempt residences and poor area maintenance, including upkeep of streets, sidewalks, etc.
- Cultural features such as ethnicity, immigration generation, age, and value orientation
- Work pressures
- Poor quality and low availability of consumer goods and services
- Poor quality public schools
- Other constraints such as traffic, industry, and housing costs

Addressing these challenges will do more than merely making physical improvements. **Improving the residential environment helps the storytelling system—and thus residents’ experience of belonging to the community—to flourish.** After reviewing what residents said about these challenges, we will present a summary of the environmental challenges in each of the seven study areas.

Mainstream Media Portrayals of the Area as Undesirable or Bad

Greater Crenshaw (African American), East Los Angeles (Mexican-origin), and Pico Union (Central American-origins) participants spoke about the debilitating effects of mainstream media portrayals of their areas as places where people would not want to visit, much less live. We do not have objective content analyses to assess the accuracy of these observations, but it is perceptions that matter when it comes to effects on storytelling and belonging. When residents feel that their area is stigmatized in the minds of “outsiders,” it

makes it harder for them to imagine their area as a viable community or to have the kind of neighborhood pride that motivates investment in building community.

Unsafe Streets, Fear of Crime, and Fear of Retaliation

Participants from most study areas observed that they restricted their communication behavior because of unsafe streets, fear of crime, or fears that attempts to control undesirable behavior would lead to retaliation. Only the Caucasian participants from South Pasadena and the Westside did not focus upon these constraints. Korean-origin participants from Koreatown were most concerned about these features of their communication environment, and this may reflect their experiences in the 1992 uprising.

“I want to hear how you'll make the libraries and animal shelters and traffic and trees and sidewalks better, because what people wake up to in the morning and go home to at night matters as least as much to the soul of a city as who the police chief is. I want to hear that there's more to livable neighborhoods than just making them 'safe'—it's not much of a boast if all you can say is, 'Well, you won't get mugged in our part of town.'”

– Patt Morrison, *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 2001, in a column addressed to the mayoral candidates

These fears affect people's willingness to engage neighbors and strangers. Residents' perceptions of unsafe streets or fear of crime can create a closed storytelling system where residents limit their communication contacts to only a small circle of relatives and friends. Such fears literally narrow the range and time of travel (e.g., only go where you have to, and only during certain hours). This closes off opportunities to open the circle of neighborhood contacts. Fear of retaliation for efforts to control undesirable behavior also undermines storytelling and belonging in important ways: It reduces the likelihood that people will join community organizations designed to improve their areas, and it prevents the development of a sense of efficacy that “we” can make things better. In other words, such fear corrodes the very storytelling system that could mobilize effective action.

Homeowner/Renter Divisions

Participants from four study areas noted homeowner/renter divisions as an obstacle to the development of an integrated storytelling system. In some cases, these divisions represent class differences (Greater Crenshaw and East Los Angeles), while in others they represent a combination of class and ethnic differences (South Pasadena and Greater Monterey Park).

In the view of some homeowner participants, renters have less investment in the area. Renters felt that there are fewer efforts made to include renters in community affairs. It is true that homeowners have a distinct advantage in fostering a shared sense of belonging when they create “homeowner associations” that bring them together around shared concerns. Community organizations in these areas might be particularly well positioned to involve renters in comparable associations, or to create community-building strategies that create storytelling links between homeowners and renters. The fact that some of our focus group participants were renters and very involved in their communities indicates that it is a mistake to write them off in community-building efforts.

Unkempt Apartment Houses or Homes, and Poor Area Maintenance

Participants in six of the seven focus groups—all but South Pasadena—discussed one or another negative effect of poor maintenance of the residential environment. In some cases, these included poorly maintained apartment houses (Greater Crenshaw and Pico Union), and in others poorly maintained homes or yards (Greater Crenshaw, East Los Angeles, the Westside, and Koreatown). Participants’ observations converged around inadequate city services—which not only created safety concerns, but also were demoralizing. Participants from both rich and poor areas pointed to the effects of bad and unsafe roads (e.g., potholes and too few stop signs), unsafe/broken up sidewalks, and inadequate tree trimming.

The “broken window” thesis describes how physical deterioration in an area tends to increase crime. This thesis can extend to the deterioration of the storytelling system. For example, participants indicated that when their efforts to improve the appearance and safety of their streets and sidewalks failed, they began to believe that neighbors could not come together to achieve common goals. While some noted the negative effect of unkempt homes, litter, or other unattractive sights on property values, their greater concern was their inability to feel proud about living in the area.

Cultural Features: Ethnicity, Age, and Value Orientation

All focus groups mentioned one or another culturally-oriented constraint on the storytelling system. Sometimes these were literal communication barriers—people not understanding each other’s language. Participants from Pico Union, Koreatown, and Greater Monterey Park noted the difficulties posed by historically diverse resident populations, and participants from Greater Crenshaw, South Pasadena, East Los Angeles, and the Westside framed the problem in terms of new immigrants moving into the area.

It should be noted that cultural diversity is not always ethnically based. For example, most residents of East Los Angeles originate from Mexico, but some are newcomers and others are old timers. Participants from Greater Crenshaw and Koreatown observed age-related differences, expressing their feelings that the younger people had less commitment to community than the youth of yesteryear did. Participants from the Westside emphasized how “values” were different—namely, individualistic value orientation evidenced by walls and gates separating neighbors and preventing easy contact.

When the stories told by residents, community organizations, and local media play off one another to tell the story of a neighborhood, they allow residents—whether rich or poor, old or young, new or old immigrant—to imagine their areas as communities deserving of their attachment and attention.

A storytelling approach offers a way to help communities appreciate differences while building a shared community story. For example, local media could tell the story not only of its target cultural audience but also of the whole residential area—its history, activities, issues, and change. Community organizations that serve the residential area, rather than a particular cultural constituency,

can play an important role. The challenge is to make cultural/ethnic diversity a part of the imagining of “our community.” This imagining is created through a vibrant storytelling system.

Work Pressures as a Constraint on the Storytelling System⁸

Focus group participants from all study areas mentioned one or more work-related limitations on their capacities to participate in neighborhood storytelling. The nature of work these days limits our abilities to story-tell our neighborhoods, whether we are rich or poor. Residents from relatively rich areas (South Pasadena and the Westside) focus on time—having too little time left over after work, or the time it takes to commute to and from work. Residents from less wealthy areas have these concerns as well, but some of them (East Los Angeles and Pico Union) also note that they need multiple jobs to survive economically.

While some theorists suggest that a decreasing allegiance to civic culture accounts for the loss of “social capital,” perhaps some of this decline is not cultural. Perhaps it is a feature of our everyday communication environments where we either have to, or are encouraged to, devote most of our energies to work.

This dilemma is not easily ameliorated—but we do have one suggestion. Media can tell this important story. If our relationships to the workplace prevent us from establishing relationships at home—from having the time to engage our neighbors in shared stories, from connecting to local media, and from joining community organizations—then community suffers.

Poor Quality Consumer Goods and Services

One of the most heated discussion topics that arose in five study areas (Greater Crenshaw, East Los Angeles, Pico Union, Koreatown, and Greater Monterey Park) was the poor quality of goods and services available in the area. From the participants’ point of view, this was perceived as a devaluing of their and their area’s importance in economic and political decision-making. This certainly can demoralize residents and/or undermine their sense of collective efficacy.

From a storytelling perspective, there is another consequence to the poor quality of goods and services in an area. It causes people to leave their areas to find good grocery stores, movie theaters, shopping malls, and the like. In some cases, the problem is the total absence of services; for example, there is no first-run movie theater in East Los Angeles. The more that residents go outside of their areas for such consumer services, the less time and opportunity they have to meet and greet each other as fellow residents.

Poor Quality Public Schools

Whatever problems there are with the public schools, generally they are most extreme where new immigrants live. Residents of wealthier areas have the option of sending their children to private schools. Participants from East Los Angeles, Koreatown, and Greater Monterey Park specifically noted the quality of the public schools as a constraint on their sense of belonging.

Efforts to upgrade the public schools are likely to have big community-building payoffs. Ideally, schools offer children and their parents a safe public place where residents can assemble to story-tell their neighborhoods—to collectively imagine their communities as “on the way up,” rather than as “stuck” in an undesirable place.

Libraries have a natural connection to the schools. We found that they are important parts of the storytelling environment no matter the wealth of an area, but especially in relatively poor or unstable residential areas.

Other Environmental Constraints

Traffic and transportation. Traffic-related concerns varied from congestion and the aggressive driving it produces (the Westside, Koreatown, and Greater Monterey Park) to the proposed extension of the 710 Freeway through South Pasadena. The transportation system is part of our communication environment because it takes us to common places or divides us—for example, east or west of a freeway. Impatient, impolite, even angry drivers can affect the quality of life, and congestion not only drains time but energies from our ability to forge community connections.

Industrial and transitory zones. Koreatown participants understandably noted as a constraint that their area is primarily an economic service center and a transition zone for new immigrants. That is, it is less of a residential than a service area or a temporary place of residence. A challenge for activists and policymakers concerned with this area and its adjacent neighbor, Pico Union, is to convene activists and researchers around the question of how one builds strong community in areas where many residents stay only long enough to move to another area. In our view, this is more than possible if policymakers and activists conceive of such areas in storytelling terms. To give up on these areas is unacceptable, especially when in-migration is likely to continue for some time.

Housing costs. Participants from South Pasadena and the Westside noted that housing costs constrained community. For example, participants who rented wanted to become homeowners, but could not afford it. In some cases, parents who had bought their homes when prices were considerably lower wanted their grown children to move back to the area, but escalated home costs prevented this from happening.

Constraints in Each of the Seven Communities

Table 2 on the following page presents summaries of environmental constraints *by each community*.

Table 2. Constraints to Neighborhood Storytelling, by Community

Obstacles	Greater Crenshaw (African American)	South Pasadena (Caucasian)	East LA (Mexican-Origin)	Westside (Caucasian)	Pico Union (Central American-Origins)	Korea-town (Korean-Origin)	Greater Monterey Park (Chinese-Origins)
Mainstream Media Portrayal as an Undesirable/Bad Area	X		X		X		
Fear of Crime/Unsafe Streets			X		X	X	X
Fear of Retaliation for Social Control Efforts	X					X	
Homeowner/Renter Division (1): Class	X		X				
Homeowner/Renter Division (2): Class/Ethnic		X					X
Poor Area Maintenance:							
(1) Poorly kempt apartment houses	X				X		
(2) Unkempt homes/yards/litter	X		X	X		X	
(3) Inadequate city services (road repair, tree trimming, sidewalks)	X		X	X	X		X
Cultural Features:							
(1) Existing ethnic diversity					X	X	X
(2) New immigrants	X	X	X	X			X
(3) Language barriers	X			X			
(4) Lower commitment/young people	X					X	
(5) Individualistic value orientation				X			
Work Pressures:							
(1) Too little time			X	X	X	X	X
(2) Too many jobs			X		X		
(3) Travel too far to work	X	X	X	X			
Poor Quality/Costly Consumer Goods/Services	X		X		X	X	X
Poor Quality Public Schools			X			X	X
Traffic (1) Congestion/Aggressive Driving				X		X	X
Traffic (2) Freeway Extension		X					
Area Primarily an Economic/Service Center						X	
Residential Instability/Transition Zone					X	X	
High Cost of Homes		X		X			

MORE RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO INCREASE “BELONGING” AND BUILD COMMUNITY

The communication infrastructure concept—which includes both the storytelling system and residential communication context—is a new, research-tested tool that policy makers, media, community organizations, urban planners, and other activists can use to help build community. While an area’s residents are the most critical storytellers and can, neighbor by neighbor, construct a sense of belonging, today’s urban communities require more than the efforts of residents alone to construct shared belonging for the larger residential area. This is where neighborhood-builders—policy makers and urban planners—and the storytelling talents of community organizations and media can come in.

Below we provide additional recommendations. Though we divide them into suggestions for policy makers and urban planners, mainstream media, local media, and community organizations, these various players should work together for the best results.

Recommendations for Policy Makers and Urban Planners

The more we create opportunities for residents to come together to “story-tell” their neighborhood, the stronger that community will become. City Hall discussions about improving our residential environments are more than just economic concerns. Such efforts hold the promise of having very important community-building outcomes.

Globalization and cyberspace open wonderful new opportunities for connecting with other people. But residential areas still matter, perhaps even more than before. It is in our residential areas that we experience life most sensually.

In allocating funding for community improvements, urban planners and policy makers should prioritize those proposed improvements that will foster neighborhood storytelling, and should carry them out in a way that overtly serves to bring neighbors together, face-to-face. This strategic allocation of effort would do more than “merely” make streets safer, extend a library’s hours, or improve school facilities, for instance: It would give people a place to gather where they can co-create their community. These places can become the mortar for the building blocks constructed by residents, helping residents feel that they belong to a specific neighborhood, and helping that neighborhood have a sense of belonging to the larger area.

Mainstream Media

Media stories are among the most powerful catalysts for person-to-person storytelling that there is. Hundreds of conversations each day begin with, “Did you read the story in the paper that...,” or “did you see the news story last night on...”

Being storytellers themselves, media are aware of their power in fostering storytelling among their readership. They help *create* consensual reality through this function. And they are aware of their role in a democratic society to inform—and launch this community storytelling—in a way that is characterized by accuracy and balance.

But often in the rush to gather and present news, media fail to be sensitive to the potential broad-brush consequences when reporting “bad” things. Most of us build our perceptions of residential areas from the stories we hear, read, listen to, or watch.⁹ It has always been the case that “news” usually means bad news, and the media play an important role in alerting us to bad things that are happening. But it is possible for news stories to report news without painting whole areas as bad. The business investment and development implications of such area stigmatization are extremely important to consider. Newsrooms can sensitize reporters to these issues. Headline writers especially can learn not to frame topics in ways that stigmatize an entire area when the story itself is something much more narrow.

Conversely, media can continue to consider the power—and reader appeal—of what has been called “civic journalism”: defining “news” as the *good* things that occur in a neighborhood or region. Surely the “balance” that journalists strive for can be extended to include good news nearly as much as the bad.

Two examples from the *Los Angeles Times* on April 23, 2001 can illustrate these points. A headline and lead in a Metro Section story read: “Big Hearts and Strong Hands Build a Ballpark: Highland Park community works together to turn a former DWP lot into a ball field.” The frame of this story enables neighborhood storytelling in a way that stands in marked contrast to the kinds of stories that our focus group participants noted. This headline illustrates the important halo effects that stories can have—in this case, a glowing halo for Highland Park. Unfortunately, more typical is a fallen halo, as in a headline and lead on the same page: “Santa Monica Stung by Gang Program Failure: A city-funded effort by three activists quickly unravels. They, officials trade criticism.”

Local Media

Media stories are central to our understandings and abilities to act effectively in our environs. If local media do not tell these *neighborhood* stories, mainstream media will not fill the void. The goals of local media producers understandably vary according to whether they serve primarily new or old immigrant communities.

Local Media Serving New Immigrant Communities. It is understandable that new immigrants want to keep on top of events in their home countries and that local ethnic media want to be responsive to this fact. Indeed, some of these media are owned and operated by corporations that are located in the country of origin—making country-of-origin stories cheaper than local news since the “foreign” stories are often “ready to feed” and do not require original reportage.

Of course, most local media have to be concerned with their financial survival. This concern has been heightened by the availability of country of origin news on the Internet. Nonetheless, we argue that financial survival is not inconsistent with increased storytelling of the local residential area. While residents will inevitably vary in their level of concern for their residential area, it is this area that most directly and concretely affects their everyday

Local media often miss the boat by telling stories about a particular ethnic group or a country of origin, rather than telling the everyday stories of what is happening in the residential area where their listeners, viewers, or readers live.

lives. Thus, residents' need to stay on top of both the country of origin *and* the local residential area can motivate them to watch, read, or listen to local media.

There are ways in which local media could provide local coverage for a relatively low cost. For instance, local media might draw directly on local community organizations for stories. Indeed, while new immigrants can find country news on the Internet, they cannot find local media stories there about community organizations and their activities. Local media can help new immigrants learn more about the resources available in their local area. If local media encourage residents to become involved in those organizations, all the better from the community-building point of view. As another option, local foundations that are interested in community-building could help support community coverage in local ethnic media.

Local Media Serving Old Immigrant Communities. Our findings indicate that local media are playing their storytelling roles for African American residents of Greater Crenshaw, but they could be even stronger storytellers of that neighborhood. Our findings also suggest that there is room for improvement for local media serving Caucasian residents of South Pasadena and the Westside. As with new immigrant areas, we argue that commercial survival can be enhanced, not retarded, by local media playing a stronger role in "storytelling neighborhood."

In other research, we have found that public television and radio are important to residents in South Pasadena and the Westside. There have been debates about the extent of local programming produced by these media, but our research suggests that to the extent they offer local programming, they can help build community. Such storytelling seems completely consistent with the community service roles of these media.

Local Media in All Communities. One of the many practical implications of our findings is the benefit of strong connections between local media and community organizations. The activities created by community organizations are often good stories because they concern social, health, labor, legal, political, and economic issues that are important to residents. A stronger connection between these two key storytellers could benefit residents and the larger community by increasing the integration and the strength of the storytelling system. In other words, these storytellers—local media and community organizations—need each other to accomplish their respective missions.

Community Organizations

Community organizations can directly contribute to community-building by more actively telling neighborhood stories and by encouraging this kind of storytelling among residents.

Community organizations play an incredible number of important service delivery roles, and they do so under generally low resource conditions. Many community organizations have to expend too much of their resources and energies to survive financially. Most community organizations cannot afford the luxury of a staff person who is devoted to communications (or storytelling). The Metamorphosis research team has given considerable thought to how community organizations could maximize their community-building roles without interfering with the performance of their missions. We are working directly with

community organizations to develop realistic storytelling strategies, and we have developed an advisement package for this purpose. We work with community organizations to help them:

- Use the Metamorphosis research findings to understand the crucial storytelling roles that community organizations do and can play.
- Think about how their everyday activities could better incorporate storytelling roles.
- Design and implement realistic strategies for how their organization can increase storytelling contacts between their members or clients, not only to create interpersonal network bonds that strengthen community but also to promote a shared neighborhood orientation.
- Design and implement realistic strategies for creating links between their organization and the local media that their members or clients access; these links can result in more local media coverage of the community organization and its residential locale.
- Effectively involve local storytellers in their activities—such as the long-term resident or the local librarian who knows the area and its history.

CONCLUSION

This White Paper has offered good news to policy makers, urban planners, media, community organizations, and others who are interested in building stronger community in today's diverse urban areas. **It is possible to strengthen community by strengthening the communication infrastructure in an area.** This happens by improving the integration of the community's storytelling system—the residents, local media, and community organizations—and by creating communication environments that help residents come together into a “storytelling neighborhood.”

We live in a time when the exciting forces of globalization draw our attention to communities that are unbounded by place. But we ignore our residential areas at our peril. In this paper, we have introduced the concept of “communication infrastructure” as a comprehensive diagnostic tool to not only determine the strength of residential community, but also to identify those features of the communication environments of different residential areas that need attention. Our research has sought to make visible the communication infrastructure of different areas in order to improve our understanding of urban community.

So much has changed, yet one eternal verity remains: Community is created through good old-fashioned story telling. The sage or tribal elder told stories about the tribal group—its history and its culture—that created a sense of “we” and, in the process, created a sense of belonging among members of the tribe. In this way, storytelling is the symbolic glue of community. Today, the storytellers are different, but the essential nature of the process is the same.

Strengthening the communication infrastructures of both old and new immigrant residential areas can directly and positively contribute to the revitalization of civic culture. The basic components of the ideal storytelling system that we have employed to diagnose the strength of residents' sense of “belonging” are also the basic components of what makes for a

strong civil society. This is why we believe that the communication infrastructure perspective that we have employed in our research has much to contribute to builders of community and builders of civic culture. The stories that people tell are the tools for both construction projects.

FUTURE WHITE PAPERS FROM THE METAMORPHOSIS PROJECT

Community and the Internet. How is the Internet being woven into the everyday lives of diverse peoples? What are its costs and benefits for individuals, ethnic groups, and communities? This paper explores these questions.

Broken Bonds at Work and Broken Bonds at Home. The ways we work and the conditions in which we work have important effects on family and community life. This paper shares information that can help employers, employees, and civic policy makers make informed policy decisions—and suggests what additional information should be gathered to improve this decision-making.

Community Organizations. How well do community organizations sustain and enlarge neighborhood conversations? The communication strategies used by diverse organizations are examined to assess the extent to which community organizations are equipped to assume vital communication roles and their capacities for building strong communities.

Perceptions of Fear. Fear has devastating effects on residential areas. It can undermine residents' sense of belonging by making them hesitant to talk with neighbors or to greet and meet strangers. It can stigmatize and isolate areas when people avoid traveling to them out of fear—whether the fear is warranted or not. It can also retard economic development. This paper reviews how fear is constructed through storytelling—by people and by the media—in Los Angeles. It also provides some suggestions to help media, policy makers, communities, and others correct distorted perceptions.

The Globalization of Everyday Life. Globalization does not unfold only in world economies; it also and importantly unfolds at the grassroots of everyday life. How do everyday people, not just governments and corporations, create the meaning of new technologies—their *actual* uses (which might not be the intended ones)? How do these everyday people resist or create the ways that macro globalization translates into everyday practices?

New Immigrants and Local/Global Identities. Before we can know if the new immigrants of today will act like the immigrants of old, we need to understand much more about how new immigrants are negotiating their local and global identities. This paper explores one facet of this question: how new immigrants are using new and old communication technologies to maintain old bonds and/or to make new ones.

Something Old, Something New: Communication Technologies. How will new communication technologies affect old communication technologies? This paper offers a glimpse into the way that people communicate in their everyday lives—a communication profile.

Travel and Communication Patterns Among Communities. Where we travel, how we get there, and where we avoid going are products not only of geographic concerns, but also of social and psychological factors. What are the communication consequences of travel patterns? How do they affect the ways in which different areas of the city and, thus, different ethnic groups come into contact with one another?

The Impact of New Communication Technologies on “Everyday Folk.” Every time a new communication technology bursts onto the scene, experts tell optimistic and pessimistic stories about what it will do to us and to our society. Everyday people and diverse cultural groups are often left out of the picture. By presenting the hopes and fears of “everyday people,” this paper provides a more grounded, textured basis from which we can anticipate the social and cultural effects of new technologies.

ENDNOTES

¹ There is a wealth of additional information about each study area available on our web site (<http://www.metamorph.org>).

² There is no completely satisfying way of identifying our study samples. We recognize that we are mixing ethnicity, race, and religious characteristics. We also recognize that many of the groups identified in terms of their country(ies) of origin will have residents who are American citizens. The labels reflect our best effort to label in a way that captures group characteristics without having to double the length of the labels.

³ In late spring/early summer 2001 we will expand our study to an eighth area (Glendale) where we will study multiple ethnic groups and collect data in Armenian, English, and Spanish.

⁴ This figure will exceed 2000 households when the Glendale area is added.

⁵ A future White Paper will be devoted entirely to a discussion of the community-building roles of community organizations.

⁶ The study samples vary widely in average levels of education, income, and age, but these differences are controlled such that those variations cannot account for the different storytelling systems we observe.

⁷ While these participants are people who do “story-tell” their neighborhoods and are, thus, likely to be more informed about their areas, their observations may or may not reflect the views of the larger residential area study samples.

⁸ We examine this constraint on the storytelling system in detail in a future White Paper: Broken Bonds at Work and Broken Bonds at Home.

⁹ In a future White Paper, we examine the origins and accuracy of people’s perceptions of Los Angeles residential areas—where they feel fear and where they feel comfortable.