

## CHAPTER 10 : INNOVATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE NARRATIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK

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The NPF started as an iterative scientific journey exploring whether narratives play a role in the policy process (McBeth, Shanahan, and Jones, 2005; McBeth et al., 2007). Because we were prepared to be wrong—even warned and such—we never would have predicted what the next fifteen years would yield. Yet, two things happened. First, our results held over time, indicating that narratives could be systematically and thus reliably studied as a critical mechanism of policy change. Second, scholarly interest in the NPF exploded. Thus, with the NPF’s seminal naming (Jones and McBeth, 2010), subsequent articles (e.g., Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth, 2011), and the first edited volume (Jones, Shanahan and McBeth, 2014), we set out to create a comprehensive framework for the study of narratives in the policy process.

While the NPF began with the three of us, we had always intended to create a welcoming and intellectually energized research environment where others would not only join us in studying narrative, but also shape and advance the NPF as a framework that sheds light on the complexities inherent in the policy process. Indeed, we have grown into a diverse, international community of NPF scholars. As of the end of 2022, a Google Scholar search for “Narrative Policy Framework reveals over 2300 articles from across the globe, including Europe (Esposito et al., 2021; Goldberg-Miller and Skaggs, 2021; Kuenzler, 2021; Kuhlmann and Blum, 2021; Rychlik, Hornung, and Bandelow, 2021; Valero, 2021), Russia (Schlaufer, Gafurova, et al., 2021; Schlaufer, Khaynatskaya, et al., 2021; Uldanov et al., 2021), India (Hud,a 2018), and Indonesia (Habibie et al., 2021), among other locations. The diverse and international NPF community is the heart and soul of the NPF research program. In honor of our expansive community, we chose to publish this edited NPF book as an open access book to ensure a quicker and more equitable dissemination of this collection of NPF research. This book is a launching pad for directed NPF

research, and this chapter aims to highlight some of the new possibilities that emerge from the contents within.

This second volume of the *Science of Stories* is a collection of some of the very best contemporary NPF research, developed and implemented by our growing NPF community. This volume showcases both the kinds of insights that can be discovered when applying the NPF, as well as illuminates the protean nature of the framework. In this chapter, we discuss the chapters by examining (i) new applications of traditional NPF concepts, (ii) the introduction of new NPF concepts, (iii) new methods for text analysis in the NPF context, and (iv) new applications for the NPF. We conclude with future directions for NPF researchers based on the findings and lessons bound within this edited volume.

### NEW APPLICATIONS OF TRADITIONAL NPF CONCEPTS

As described in the Introduction of this volume, narrative components are comprised of both narrative form and narrative content. The structure or form of a narrative is populated by narrative elements such as characters and plot. Narrative elements are the bread and butter of NPF scholarship, with characters being most reliably and consistently used in NPF studies. Narrative content are belief systems that anchor policy narratives as well as strategies used to assemble the narrative elements that, for example, create causal mechanisms and array the scope of conflict. In this volume, authors have advanced the science of the NPF by using traditional NPF concepts in new combinations, thereby unpacking the more complex dynamic workings of policy narratives in the policy process.

Wolton, Crow, and Heikkila (Chapter 3) innovate by investigating the relationship between narrative elements. NPF scholars have spent years validating NPF concepts in isolation, and Wolton et al., move the NPF forward by looking at the more complex structure of policy narratives through the connection of character arrays to policy solutions. Similarly, for years there has been interest in how narratives play into coalitional behavior (McBeth, Shanahan, and Jones, 2005; Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth, 2011; Kusko, 2013). Gupta et al., (Chapter 2) advances this line of inquiry by using discourse network analysis on policy actors' use of characters in tweets to empirically discover coalitions and systematically characterize and compare narrative structures through examining networks of narrative elements to identify narrative themes and cleavages within a coalition. In sum, because narrative form is often composed of multiple categories of narrative elements (characters, plots, settings, solutions), examining the interaction or relationship among and between narrative elements in the construction of policy narratives will continue to contribute to the use of NPF in understanding policy processes and policy change.

### INTRODUCTION OF NEW NPF CONCEPTS

The NPF is a framework continually shaped by the findings of the NPF community. As such, new ideas arise in our NPF community that are proffered for empirical testing. In this volume, two author teams posit new narrative components for the NPF. Smith-Walters, Fritz, and O'Doherty (Chapter 7) discovered a new narrative strategy, named the solidarity shift, that captures the prevalence of victims. The angel and devil shifts focus on the use of heroes and villains; the authors' work adds a new and missing narrative strategy. Additionally, the results of

Lybecker, McBeth, and Sargent's experimental study (Chapter 4) moved the authors to advocate for narrator as a critical narrative element that the NPF should include, alongside characters, setting, plot, and moral. The NPF has historically acknowledged the narrator as important, but these authors elevate this concept as an empirical one in testing for narrative persuasion.

Colville and Merry (Chapter 6) also introduce a new idea for the NPF, that of individual citizens as producers of their own narratives surrounding policy issues, adding a new perspective to micro-level work that tends to focus on individuals as the consumer of policy narratives. While Peterson (2018) introduced narrative attention as a new concept for an outcome variable for the NPF, she and her research team (Chapter 5) continue to explore this innovative idea that adds a new narrative pathway of influence for the policy process, alongside the more traditional examinations of persuasion. In sum, we are very excited and encouraged by these new NPF concepts. We hope NPF scholars will examine the operationalization of these new ideas and re-test them across varying policy contexts to establish concept validity and reliability.

### **STEPS TOWARD "BIG NARRATIVE DATA" ANALYSES**

The increasing volume of narrative data (e.g., Twitter) has inspired a small but burgeoning group of NPF researchers to turn to automated coding schemes. Wolton et al., (Chapter 3) auto-coded over 5,700 media articles for narrative characters and policy solutions, by frame, to demonstrate the relationship between narrative elements and frames. Importantly, these authors were mindful of ensuring that NPF theory guided coding development and the automated coding of text, as opposed to the tool of computational analysis techniques driving the questions. We expect these types of 'big' data methods will become more frequent as the next generation of NPF scholars bring their technical expertise to bear on NPF research questions.

### **NEW APPLICATIONS FOR THE NPF**

In our previous edited NPF book (Jones, Shanahan, and McBeth, 2014), we first tackled the normative and ethical implications of studying narrative. We argued that the benefits of educating individuals about narrative outweighed the potential costs of other individuals or groups using the knowledge about narrative to engage in manipulation. Since the publication of that book, narrative has only grown in importance as the world has become more and more polarized to a point where some are questioning whether liberal democracy can survive the challenges of authoritarianism, nationalism, and populism. Addressing the normative implications of the NPF, Jones and McBeth (2020) argue that the NPF can play an important role in preserving democracy and democratic institutions. Jones and McBeth (2020, 14) write:

In making our case two not so radical normative premises serve as a foundation for the arguments presented in this article. First, we preference science and evidence over falsehoods. Second, democratic institutions and norms matter. Consequently, relativism is a problem for both science and democracy and we believe the NPF can help researchers do something about that. From these two premises we further argue that the NPF can be leveraged to diagnose the problem and perhaps even provide prescriptions for the relativism threat to our scientific and democratic institutions (2020, 14).

Indeed, Baldoli and Radaelli (Chapter 8) embrace a normative application of the NPF in constructing counter-narratives to the populist account of European integration. The authors focus on using narrative elements to build a nonviolent narrative alternative and engage in a lengthy discussion of constructive and destructive applications of the NPF. We expect--and hope--that others will continue to explore the normative implication of the NPF. In doing so, we ask researchers to continue to grapple with the ethical considerations inherent with such endeavors.

Wolters, Jones, and Duvall (Chapter 9) use the NPF as a way to organize and understand the noisy and vast climate change framing literature. Challenging the more classic, thematic approach to literature reviews as having the potential to portray an inaccurate picture of meanings and findings, the authors suggest the NPF as a way to systematically integrate findings over time to find a more holistic understanding of the climate change framing literature. Similar to examining public consumption documents in a policy debate, the authors suggest examining literature by narrative elements-- setting, characters, plots, and moral.

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

This book was mainly written during a global pandemic. Chapter authors and editors conducted their research, wrote their chapters, met deadlines and did revisions while sheltering in place, taking care of children at home, worrying about their own and their family's health, and often wondering what the future would hold for all of us. The book was ultimately delayed by the pandemic, but we believe that the NPF studies included in this book represent cutting edge research into narratives and their role in the policy process. We thank our authors for their patience and their contributions and look forward to seeing how this edited book influences the continued development of the Narrative Policy Framework.

Authors in this volume have opened doors for future NPF research, from more complex analyses that better reflect narrative and policy complexities to the introduction of new concepts to the use of advanced methods to some normative applications. We hope that you are inspired by their work and apply some of these ideas to what captures your imagination. The policy topics in this volume were varied—nuclear energy, hydraulic fracturing, climate change, COVID-19, Medicare, sanctuary cities, and European integration—but hardly exhaustive. We hope to see a continued expansion of policy issues in NPF scholarship, from varying governance regimes to different policy domains (e.g., health). This volume also represents the varied sources of narrative data—media, tweets, testimonials, etc. As information sources and venues change, we expect new narrative data to emerge for researchers, such as visual communications. Finally, we hope that by providing a text that is open access that the ideas and work in this volume can reach researchers, students, and practitioners who experience barriers to current literature. Our aim is to make the NPF accessible broadly and advance our understanding of the role of narratives in policy processes around the world.

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