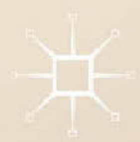
The Science of Stories

Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework in Public Policy Analysis

Edited by
Michael D. Jones, Elizabeth A. Shanahan, & Mark K. McBeth



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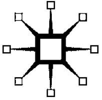

THE SCIENCE OF STORIES
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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014 ISBN 978–1–137–37012–9

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First published in 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

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ISBN 978–1–349–47521–6 ISBN 978–1–137–48586–1(eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137485861

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The science of stories : applications of the narrative policy framework
in public policy analysis / edited by Michael D. Jones, Elizabeth
A. Shanahan, Mark K. McBeth.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978–1–137–37012–9 (alk. paper)
1. Policy sciences. 2. Public administration. I. Jones,
Michael D., 1973– II. Shanahan, Elizabeth A. III. McBeth,
Mark K.
H97.S39 2014
320.601′4—dc23 2014024472

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Integra Software Services

First edition: December 2014

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To

The Jones Clan: Jennifer, Tristen, Makalie, Nathan, Sadie, and Eleanor

For always pointing to true North

Jim and Judy Shanahan

For your stories that inspired your children, your students, and your community

For the McBeth family, Lisa, Mom, Dad, and Sandy

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Preface: The Portneuf School of Narrative

Mark K. McBeth

In the 1990s, talk of "narrative" was everywhere in academia as post-positivism and postmodernism crept into policy theory and policy analysis. Marie Danziger's 1995 article in the *Policy Studies Journal*, "Policy Analysis Postmodernized" and Deborah Stone's *Policy Paradox* (1998) were the most influential in terms of the development of what would become the narrative policy framework (NPF). Faculty and graduate students at Idaho State University's (ISU) Department of Political Science were not immune to the considerable charms of post-positivism and postmodernism. Politics, subjectivity, multiple-meanings, and ambiguity are at the very heart of Political Science and to faculty and graduate students who thought these concepts matter, the works of Danziger and Stone were particularly welcome. At ISU, political science faculty such as Rick Foster (a classic political realist) who taught the centrality of politics over rationality in policy formation and Ralph Maughan (a student of Murray Edleman) used to argue that politics was about not only symbolism, but was also about telling good stories. Jim Aho, an ISU sociologist, influenced an entire generation of ISU graduate students with his work in phenomenology and social construction. Ron Hatzenbuehler, a ISU historian, encouraged those working in narrative at ISU to use a traditional social science approach. Finally, political theorist Wayne Gabardi introduced ISU faculty and students (particularly a young Mike Jones) to postmodernism. It was within this context that my own interest in narrative arose.

Among this initial group of ISU students and alumni were Randy Clemons, now Dean of the Social Sciences at Mercyhurst University. Randy's wife Laura Lewis was taking a social policy class at the University of Pittsburgh in the 1990s where she was introduced to Deborah Stone's *Policy Paradox*. Laura's endorsement of the book was partially responsible for the second edition (1998) becoming a staple in ISU's Political Science Department in the late 1990s. The postmodern and post-positivist buzz in the department facilitated an environment where

graduate students like Joe Morris eventually used Stone's ideas in his dissertation (Morris 2000) to analyze narratives in the Yellowstone National Park bison policy controversy; moreover, it wasn't uncommon to overhear heated debates and intense conversations about narrative emanating from the Political Science Library, particularly among graduate students Joe Morris, Henry Evans, Seth Kellam, Maria Weeg and then undergraduate student Michael Jones (now at Oregon State University). A few years later, Liz Shanahan (now at Montana State University) joined the mix, bringing with her a literary background in postmodernism from her undergraduate thesis work at Dartmouth where she read Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan (aussi bien en francias!). I was fortunate enough to work with all of these graduate students in both research and teaching. From this culture, the bison controversy provided the first published work on narrative out of the department with the very postmodernish, "Postmodern Policy Analysis in the Premodern West: Problem Definition in the Yellowstone Bison Case" (McBeth and Clemons 1999) published in *Administrative Theory and Praxis* (ATP) in 1999. Jokingly, around the department those days, the emerging interest in narrative was referred to as the "Portneuf School of Narrative," named after the unfortunately concreted and degraded river that runs through the otherwise attractive community of Pocatello, Idaho.

While ATP liked this postmodern narrative piece, decisions to take narrative into public policy journals led to poor reviews and expressions of outright hostility toward postmodernism and post-postivism. Reviewers reprimanded our approach to policy narratives for failing to meet mainstream methodological standards. After a couple of years of generally nasty reviews and wheel spinning, then new ISU graduate students Shanahan and Jones decided that they were interested in breathing life back into the seemingly stalled or stalling narrative project at ISU. Given her initial interest in postmodernism and social construction, Shanahan seemed an unlikely choice to champion moving the study of policy narratives into a more methodologically rigorous direction. But, because Shanahan was fearful that an intellectual house built solely on the foundation on postmodernism would leave her unemployed, she added graduate statistics courses to her program and together we brought a quantitative, systematic approach to our study of narratives. At the same time, Jones was a neophyte first year graduate student with seemingly postmodern and post-positivist aspirations (sitting through his first methods course with me was about as much fun as a day at the dentist). Yet, he too became the unlikely champion of a social science study of policy narratives. These two then graduate students volunteered to conduct content analysis of documents collected from two interest groups—the Greater Yellowstone Coalition and the Blue Ribbon Coalition—as part of an effort to resurrect two years of failed work.

The publication of the first edition of Paul Sabatier's edited book, *Theories of the Policy Process* was published in 1999 and the book became critical in the development of what would become the NPF. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) was by then a popular and influential policy process theory, and it was decided among the narrative group at ISU that policy narratives could be

used as part of the ACF. My copy of the book still has the red pen markings in it where I decided how policy narratives could be used in different elements of the ACF. Using the two aforementioned interest groups, Shanahan and Jones helped develop a codebook that would use policy narratives to code for policy beliefs. Shanahan and Jones worked diligently with me on this effort through 2002. The manuscript (McBeth, et al. 2005) that resulted from this, "The Science of Storytelling: Measuring Policy Beliefs in Greater Yellowstone" (Jones gets credit for the brilliant title) was submitted to the interdisciplinary journal *Society and Natural Resources*, where it went through three difficult reviews before finally appearing in print in 2005. One of the anonymous reviewers noted that the article had larger theoretical aspirations than perhaps the co-authors had realized. The reviewer suggested that this was one of the first attempts to incorporate policy narratives into the ACF and that Sabatier himself might be interested in the paper. The reviewer also suggested that the co-authors look at Sabatier's critics and his responses in European journals. It turns out that *Theories of the Policy Process*, now considered a seminal collection of policy theories, was then criticized (particularly in the *Journal of European Public Policy*) for its exclusion of post-positivism (Dudley 2000; Parsons 2000). These criticisms and Sabatier's responses (e.g., Sabatier 2000; Sabatier and Schlager 2000) were instrumental in the development of what would become the NPF.

Jones graduated with an MA in political science from ISU in 2004 and was admitted to the PhD program at the University of Oklahoma. The publication of an article, "Public Opinion for Sale" (McBeth and Shanahan 2004) represented the first work in narrative after Jones left the band to pursue his PhD in Oklahoma. While he was gone, Shanahan continued to work with me along with then new ISU graduate students Ruth Arnell (now at BYU-Idaho) and Paul Hathaway (now at Jacksonville State University). Following the Science of Storytelling, we continued to harbor the intellectual compass of Sabatier's "clear enough to be wrong," and published "The Intersection of Narrative Policy Analysis and Policy Change Theory" (McBeth et al. 2007) in the *Policy Studies Journal*. This article demonstrated how policy narratives could be used to understand political strategies as part of the ACF and also "Punctuated Equilibrium" (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Mike Jones by then had met Hank Jenkins-Smith, then editor of PSJ and professor at Oklahoma University (OU), and Jones wanted to work with Jenkins-Smith on a dissertation topic that involved policy narratives. When Jones pitched his idea, Jenkins-Smith retorted that "there are a lot of PhDs tending bar." Jones was persistent, however, and he continued to pursue work on policy narratives at OU while Shanahan took a tenure-track teaching position at Montana State University. The two worked independently for some time, with Shanahan looking at how interest groups and the media use policy narratives in the context of public policy process theory (see Shanahan et al. 2008 for an example) and Jones specializing in how to measure the influence of policy narratives on individuals (see his dissertation, Jones 2010). The genesis of the micro and meso levels later specified in the naming of the NPF (i.e., Jones and McBeth 2010) originated in these years with Jones leading the way in the

use of experimental methods to measure the impact of narratives on individuals and Shanahan spearheading how interest groups and the media used narratives to shape policy.

The publication of the "Narrative Policy Framework: Clear Enough to Be Wrong" (Jones and McBeth 2010) in the *Policy Studies Journal* put the NPF (both literally and figuratively) on the public policy map and was a crucial turning point in the development of the framework. Jones' work at Oklahoma had pushed the study of narrative in a sophisticated direction with levels of analysis and hypotheses within these levels, epistemological discussions, and a full placing of the NPF within the larger study of narrative in public policy. Peter de Leon and Chris Weible, as co-editors of the PSJ at that time played significant roles by giving this ambitious article a spot in the journal. Despite his initial response, through repeated discussions and helpful critiques, Hank Jenkins-Smith helped significantly in the development of the initial NPF, especially the macro, meso, and micro level distinctions. The article is today, according to *Publish and Perish*, the most cited article in the 2010 volume of PSJ.

By 2010, while Jones was starting on a post-doc at Harvard and had fully rejoined the band, Shanahan was invited to represent the research group at a conference at the University of California, Davis sponsored by Paul Sabatier on the future of the ACF. Here, Shanahan presented a paper (co-authored with Jones and McBeth) on how the NPF could be used with the ACF. Her presentation drew the attention of such policy notables as Paul Sabatier, Mark Lubell, and Daniel Nohrstedt. This paper and presentation led to inclusion of the NPF in a 2011 special seminar on the ACF in the *Policy Studies Journal* (Shanahan et al. 2011a). Shanahan and Jones were then invited to the Midwest Political Science Association meetings in Chicago where they presented the NPF on a panel of new theories of the policy process and in subsequent years have co-chaired NPF panels at this conference and the International Conference of Public Policy. Finally, in 2013, an NPF article (Shanahan et al. 2013) was included in a special "new theories" symposium in PSJ (again with the continued support of Chris Weible).

Other ISU graduate students remained involved in in NPF research. These include, MPA graduates such as Linda Tigert, Lynette Sampson, and most recently, Maria Husmann, doctoral graduates such as Elizabeth Kusko (William Peace University) and current doctoral students like Kacee Garner. Montana State University graduate students involved in NPF research include Molly Anderson, Lisa Hammer, Ross Lane, and Stephanie Adams. Virginia Tech graduate students include Holly Peterson (soon to be at Oregon State University), Aaron Smith-Walter, and Ashley Reynolds. A newer ISU political science faculty member, Donna Lybecker, has furthered the tradition in the department by working with myself and graduate students and using the NPF to study environmental issues such as recycling, river ecosystems (including the Portneuf River), and even trans-national issues like the US–Mexico border. In the last few years, the NPF has increasingly moved beyond the initial network of scholars. The NPF is being used in articles, monographs, theses, and dissertations throughout the United States and globally and is being discussed in policy texts (e.g., Smith and Larimer

2013). The NPF also now has its own chapter in the third edition of Sabatier and Weible's *Theories of the Policy Process* (2014). This edited book, *The Science of Stories: Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework*, represents the first attempt to bring international scholars together to explore the NPF and its application to policy process theory. From its humble beginnings, along the symmetrical banks of the Portneuf River, the NPF is now an "open source" framework that is being used internationally, and we hope that others will join us in the systematic and empirical study of policy narratives and the policy process.

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the following for their influence and unwavering support of our research careers and the NPF specifically: Outside of Mark and Liz, who have my eternal appreciation and respect, Mike would like to acknowledge Hank Jenkins-Smith and Carol Silva for their support, guidance, mentoring, and friendship throughout graduate school, the post-doc, and the early trials of assistant professor-ship. He would also like to thank close friends and colleagues William Curtis Ellis, Ronald Keith Gaddie, Natalie Jackson-Biffle, Paul Jorgensen, Matt Nowlin, and the rest of the CASR Rodmockers of the University of Oklahoma, who all heard more than their fair share about policy narratives, listened (somewhat) patiently, offered their thoughts, and, at many critical junctures, helped walk the NPF back from a ledge. And, finally, he would also like to acknowledge Trent Reznor and his "Terrible Lie" for inspiring him to want to outline the shadows on the cave wall to begin with. Liz would like to acknowledge Mark McBeth for early inspiration and guidance in encouraging the development of her intellectual identity on the as-yet unknown concept of policy narrative. She is also grateful to her colleagues in Departmental of Political Science at Montana State University for sitting through roughly hewed presentations of the NPF, asking pointed questions, and thinking through linkages of NPF in further applications. Finally, Liz's greatest inspiration came from her parents, Jim and Judy Shanahan, her original political storytellers. Mark would like to acknowledge Rick Foster, Randy Clemons, Donna Lybecker, and Kandi Turley-Ames for their continued support and friendship over many years. He would also like to thank Wayne Gabardi and Sean Anderson who as department chairs consistently supported narrative research even when studying policy narratives was not a cool thing to do. Mark also thanks Paul Hathaway, Joe Morris, Ruth Arnell, Maria Husmann, Kacee Garner, Beth Kusko, Lynette Sampson, Linda Tigert, and Barbara Rose who were all instrumental in developing and implementing policy narrative research at ISU. Finally, he gives a huge thanks to Mike and Liz.

Of course, all three of us would like to thank one another for the hard work and dedication that went into this volume. Most importantly, however, we would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to the authors who contributed to this volume. Without their hard work—and patience with the editorial team—this volume would not have been possible.

CHAPTER 1

Introducing the Narrative Policy Framework

Michael D. Jones, Mark K. McBeth, and Elizabeth A. Shanahan

Introduction

You will stir up little controversy by asserting that human beings are storytelling animals. We all have at least a rough accounting of what a story is. Stories progress from beginnings, through middles, and have endings. They are composed of characters. There is a plot situating the story and characters in time and space, where events interact with the actions of the characters and the world around them to make the story worthy of telling in the first place. We have all told stories. We have all listened to stories. Indeed, even our thoughts and emotions seem bound by the structure of story. It is not surprising then that whole academic disciplines have been devoted to the study of story and that whole careers have been largely dedicated to a single story or a single storyteller such as William Shakespeare or Mark Twain. We are thus, in a sense, *homo narrans,* and there is something about story—or narrative—that feels uniquely human. Consider this: pause for a moment and try to imagine communication without story . . . .

We expect that during your pause such a speculation was hard to fathom. If stories are so constitutive of human existence that we could easily consider them distinct aspects of the human condition and so fundamental that we cannot easily imagine communication without them, then it follows that stories are, at the very least, important. And if stories are important for us as individuals, then it also probably follows that stories must play an important role for groups and the collective actions in which these groups engage, such as those present in the processes, outcomes, implementation, and designs of public policy. It is

from this seemingly banal premise that the narrative policy framework (NPF) was born. Let's briefly consider some possible examples of the role of stories in public policy.

A short yet devastatingly powerful story resides in the famous letter Apostle Paul wrote to the Christian Church of Rome (Romans 1:24–32). The story goes something like this: many in Rome had turned away from God to worship ". . . the creature more than the creator." In their love of the earthly creature, men and women had succumbed to "vile affections" that "burned in their lust" for their same sex and were "worthy of death." The staying power of this story is seen through its citation by present-day anti-gay stakeholders, such as the Westboro Baptist Church, that use this biblical story to motivate its members to mobilize against homosexuals by engaging in activities such as protests at the funerals of recently deceased American service personnel. Thus, it is fairly easy to conclude that the reach of Apostle Paul's narrative is great, reverberating through history to shape and impact the lives of millions of homosexuals through public policies and the actions of their implementers. Bear in mind, not a single shred of scientific evidence exists that would indicate homosexuals have turned away from a deity of any sort; yet the persecution of homosexuals via sanctioned public policy continues. This is an example of the power of narrative. Scanning the policy topography, it is not hard to find similarly compelling examples.

In 1949, Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Shefield published psychological studies assessing the power of World War II educational and propaganda films. Examining films such as the *Battle for Britain*, the researchers concluded that the narratives within these films may very well have been powerful enough to have influenced the "almost superhuman efforts of the British people and the Royal Air Force . . . to {never} give up even in the face of apparently hopeless odds" (Hovland et al. 1949, p. 24, cited in Green and Brock 2005, p. 121). More recently, Oreskes and Conway (2010) spin a much less optimistic tale than Hovland and his colleagues. Using historic examples of how scientific doubt was manufactured to shape public opinion about acid rain, the dangers of smoking, and the ozone hole, Orsekes and Conway chronicle the strategic use of narrative and other forms of communication to similarly manufacture doubt about climate change. While the linkages between narrative and policy outcomes is tenuous in the Hovland et al. (1949) and Oreskes and Conway (2010) examples, research findings across a collection of academic disciplines are making it possible to begin to make such connections in a scientifically verifiable manner. The NPF incorporates these findings to do just that.

Research findings that speak to the importance of narrative in public policy can be found across many academic disciplines. Marketing research shows that narrative advertising techniques are more persuasive than other techniques such as price point advertising (e.g., Mattila 2000). Furthermore, findings in communication (e.g., Morgan et al. 2009) and psychology (e.g., Green and Brock 2005) show that the more a person becomes immersed in a story the more persuasive the story. Findings in political science also show that individuals use narrative structures to cognitively organize new information (Berinsky and Kinder 2006).

Neuroscience, which has increasingly become involved in the study of narrative, has a large collection of studies showing the importance of narrative for individual autobiographical memory, self-conceptions, its role in establishing reasoning for individual actions (see Walker 2012), and has also made considerable progress in mapping the areas of the brain responsible for narrative processing (see Mar 2004). While literary scholars (see Herman 2009) have pioneered the theories used to study narrative, the recent trend in most academic disciplines is toward increased methodological sophistication and more generalizable findings, all of which have begun to provide for a scientific understanding of narrative and its role in human understanding and behaviors. Until 2010, when NPF was formally named, the academic discipline of public policy was an outlier in terms of this trend.

To be clear, a considerable amount of scholarship was produced in the 1990s that examined the role of narrative in shaping public policy. During this time, narrative theorizing was pioneered by scholars such as Emery Roe (1994), Deborah Stone (1989), Frank Fischer and J. Forrester (1993), and Maarten Hajer (1995). However, this brand of narrative scholarship—termed in the policy field "post-positive"—was primarily interpretative in the sense that it was highly descriptive, generally rejected scientific standards of hypothesis testing and falsifiability, and thus lacked the clarity to be replicated and allow for generalization. Mainstream policy scholarship by and large rejected this interpretative approach, which created a de facto division in the field that left the mainstream abandoning narrative to the post-positivists. This line in the sand is clearly illuminated with the publication of Paul Sabatier's edited book *Theories of the Policy Process* in 1999, which specifically excluded work in social construction and narrative. When challenged about the exclusion of social construction and narrative from the edited volume (e.g., Radaelli 2000), Sabatier crystallized the emerging division in public policy with a stern admonishment, stating that he had no interest in popularizing an approach to public policy that could not be "clear enough to be wrong" (2000, p. 137). Sabatier was right in the sense that post-positive scholarship wasn't clear enough to be wrong; but the post-positivists were right about one thing: narrative matters and the science supporting their interpretative descriptions is ubiquitous just about everywhere but public policy. NPF was born out of these events and, at the most basic level, NPF is an attempt to apply objective methodological approaches (i.e., science) to subjective social reality (i.e., policy narratives). In other words, like the post-positivists, we think narrative seems to matter for public policy; however, unlike the post-positivists, we think the best way to discern how, when, and why, is through the use of the scientific method.

NPF's Ontology and Epistemology

The debate between mainstream public policy scholarship and the post-positivists is not new. In fact, these foundational disagreements present in the public policy literature are found elsewhere and date at least as far back as the Sophists and Socrates and are derivative of ancient arguments about the nature of reality and

how best we can understand that reality, or in philosophical terms, ontology and epistemology, respectively. Although perhaps a bit esoteric, there have been misrepresentations of NPF in the policy literature (e.g., Miller 2012); thus, for the sake of clarity, it is worthwhile to dedicate a few lines of text to spell out NPF's take on what reality is (ontology) and how we can come to understand that reality (epistemology) before we delve into the specifics of the framework itself.

Simply put, NPF applies an objective epistemology (i.e., science) to a subjective ontology (social reality) (Radaelli et al. 2012, p. 2). While we do believe there is a real world out there bound by natural laws such as gravity, we also align with a post-positivist perspective that all concepts are not created equal and thus vary in their stability. Although some concepts like gravity are rarely contested and taken as a given, other socially constructed concepts such as race, gender, environment, and the like are often the source of heated disputes. It is precisely these less stable concepts that form the core of any policy debate. NPF accepts that much of the policy reality we aim to understand has concepts (i.e., variables) that are moving targets, with meanings that at least subtly, if not overtly, change. Thus, we accept there is an objective world out there, but we also more fundamentally accept that when it comes to public policy, what that world *means* varies tremendously. Given what we know about narrative's role in cognition and communication, NPF offers the simple suggestion that if you want to understand that meaning, you need to understand the policy narratives relevant players use to make sense of their policy reality. NPF uses an objective epistemology, meaning that we use scientific methods to study the variation in socially constructed realities. We never claim to identify which narrative is right, only that we can systematically study the variation of policy narratives in such a way that is clear enough to be wrong and that said variation may eventually help us explain policy outcomes, processes, and designs. Or, as noted in Smith and Larimer (2013, p. 233), work on NPF demonstrates "how a post-positivist theoretical framework might be employed to generate hypotheses that can be empirically tested." In sum, NPF understands that narrative truths are socially constructed and that these policy realities may be systematically and empirically studied.

An Overview of the Narrative Policy Framework[1]

The Problem of Narrative Relativity

Narrative scholars have commonly drawn a distinction between narrative *form* and *content* (see Jones and McBeth 2010). Narrative form refers to the structure of a narrative, while narrative content refers to the objects contained therein. This distinction is useful for NPF's operationalization of narrative because it illuminates both the methodological and theoretical obstacles that NPF must address in its efforts to scientifically study policy narratives.

Perhaps beginning with Aristotle's *Poetics*, structuralist accounts of narrative speak to narrative form by asserting that there are distinct generalizable narrative components such as characters and plot that exist across different contexts (e.g.,

Genette 1983; Propp 1968; Saussure 1965). Post-structural accounts of narrative vehemently reject such propositions, asserting that each interpretation of a narrative is *sui generis* and thus unique to the interaction between the narrative and the individual determining its meaning (e.g., Derrida 1981). Both structural and post-structural accounts of narrative agree that the content of narrative is not generalizable. We term the post-structural take on form and both the post-structural and structural takes on narrative content as the problem of narrative relativity, which is essentially an assertion that due to unique context and individual interpretation, narratives cannot be studied scientifically. In public policy scholarship, narrative relativity has been a position of orthodoxy where the study of narratives is seen as simply incompatible with the scientific method (e.g., Dodge et al. 2005).

Given that narrative relativity is no small problem, NPF offers several operational strategies to mediate and possibly overcome the problem. First, and related to narrative form, NPF takes a specifically structural position, defining generalizable and context-independent narrative elements consisting of a setting, characters, a plot, and a moral of the story. Second, while we understand that narrative content is contextual in the sense that a narrative about climate change policy cannot be morphed into a narrative about gun control, we also expect that while meaning may be relative, it is not random. Specifically, we advocate the use of tried and tested belief system measures such as Cultural Theory (e.g., Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky 1990) and ideology to look for aggregate tendencies in assigning meaning to context-specific objects (i.e., people, symbols, evidence, etc.) by audiences and narrators as well as looking for strategies whereby actors strategically manipulate narrative content to shape policy. Both belief systems and strategies are discussed in more detail below.

The Form: Policy Narrative Elements

Taking a structural stance on narrative, NPF rejects the post-structural claim that narratives are completely relative by beginning from a clear and concise operationalization of policy narratives. These narrative elements are the distinctively narrative structures of a story that separate narrative from other message structures such as lists, chronologies, frames, discourses, or memes.[2] Our reading of the narrative and policy literatures strongly suggests that policy narratives have some combination of a *setting*, *characters* (heroes, victims, and villains), *plots*, and a *moral of the story* (policy solution). These narrative elements are our attempt to extract generalizable structures from the existing narrative literatures dispersed across many academic disciplines. However, we do not contend that we have mined the "truth" in terms of narrative structure. Rather, we see NPF's narrative elements as a solid baseline foundation from which initial empirical inquiries can be grounded. We suspect—rather, expect—that these initial structures will often underspecify narrative. That is, given all the narrative elements that have been identified across academic fields of inquiry (e.g., flashback, foreshadowing, deus ex machina, etc.), there are most certainly other elements that we have omitted.[3]

We expect NPF scholars to test the theoretical limitations of our four elements; we also expect that other elements will be found to play an important role in shaping policy processes and outcomes.

1. *Setting*: A policy narrative is directed toward addressing a specific policy problem and must situate that problem in a specific context. That context is the setting. Elements of the setting include but are not limited to taken-for-granted facts characterized by very low levels of disagreement, unquestioned (or at least unmovable) legal and constitutional parameters, characteristics of a specific geographic area such as nation-state boundaries, environmental characteristics, demographics, and other facts or rules that most parties agree on. In other words, the setting is the stage, and just like in most plays, people accept the stage as-is without too much thought. Research on NPF has dealt with such disparate policy issues as climate change (Jones 2013; 2014), wind energy in Massachusetts (Shanahan et al. 2013), environmental issues (Shanahan et al. 2008), US obesity policy (Husmann 2013), and US foreign policy toward El Salvador (Kusko 2013).
2. *Characters*: Policy narratives have distinct characters. Relying heavily on the work of Deborah Stone (2002) and Steven Ney (2006), NPF operationalizes characters as heroes (the potential fixer of a policy problem), villains (those who are causing the problem), and victims (those harmed by the problem). While it is common for characters to be individual humans, it is not necessary. In many cases characters are anthropomorphized abstractions or broad categories such as "the bison," the environment, liberty, or "the people." Several NPF studies have illuminated the role of characters within narratives in shaping individual policy opinions and preferences. For example, Jones (2013) uses an experimental design to demonstrate that the hero is the most important character in influencing citizen perceptions of climate change. Husmann (2013) has used NPF and Schneider and Ingram's policy design theory to demonstrate that policy narratives on obesity portraying individuals as either deserving or underserving lead individuals to prefer different policy incentives.
3. *Plot:* Usually having a beginning, middle, and end, policy narrative plots connect characters to one another and to the policy setting. Of course, plots can do this in a myriad of ways. Thus, NPF does not endorse a specific operationalization of plot but has had success using Deborah Stone's (e.g., 2002; 2012) story types. Stone's (2012, pp. 159–168) story types include the story of decline, stymied progress, and helplessness and control. Recent NPF studies have examined plots in policy narratives in YouTube videos (McBeth et al. 2012) and a study of wind energy in Massachusetts (Shanahan et al. 2013). The McBeth et al. study (2012) found that 46 percent of the group's YouTube videos had an identifiable plot or story type with a "helpless and control" story type being the most prevalent. Shanahan et al. (2013), in a study of the controversy over building wind turbines off

the coast of Cape Cod, found that the "control" plot and the "decline" plot were the most common in the wind energy policy dispute.

4. *Moral of the Story*: A policy narrative usually offers a policy solution in the form of a moral of the story. For example, a policy narrative about climate change might offer a solution such as nuclear energy; a policy narrative about gun violence might offer a solution such as an assault weapons ban; and, in some cases, the moral of the story is quite simply to maintain the status quo. However, it is possible that a communication would be considered a policy narrative without a solution. The goals of such policy narratives might include focusing on the uncertainty of a piece of evidence or a specification of a problem to which a solution is needed. Thus, some forms of communication have other elements of a policy narrative but no solutions. This is often found in highly contentious environmental issues. For instance, a 2012 study of the Buffalo Field Campaign (McBeth et al. 2012) found that the group promoted a solution in only 22 percent of their public consumption documents.

The most recent NPF scholarship asserts that a policy narrative will have a minimum of one character and a referent to the public policy of interest (e.g., problem, solution, evidence for, etc.) (see Shanahan et al. 2013 and McBeth et al. 2014, p. 229).

The Content of Policy Narratives

Belief Systems

We have argued that few who study narrative will disagree with the notion that narrative content is relative to the context of a particular story. Jones and Song (2014) illustrate this point in a recent NPF study noting that ". . . unless one possesses the alchemical equivalent in narratology of changing lead to gold, then a story about 1990s Kosovo cannot be turned into a story about climate change" (p. 449). When aspiring to study policy narratives scientifically, this facet of narrative relativity presents significant challenges to any attempt to produce externally valid narrative content measures. While we agree the meanings imbued in specific narrative objects vary, research in belief systems has found that variation in meaning can often be systematic—which means while meaning is relative, it is usually not random. Thus, one way to mediate this facet of the problem of narrative relativity is to ground understandings of content in established deductive belief system theories.

Belief system theories allow a way to bind the understanding of specific objects within a narrative so that the variations in interpretation become explainable, and at times may even become portable across contexts. For example, suppose your policy narrative of interest conjures an image of the Christian crucifix to symbolically move audiences toward a specific policy prescription (i.e., moral of the story). If we are to believe that all content is unique, then it becomes impossible to understand the meaning of that symbol beyond one-off inquiries into what the

crucifix meant for specific individuals. However, if one invokes a robust deductive belief system theory such as cognitive psychologist George Lakoff's work on ideology (e.g., Lakoff 2002), then it becomes possible to generalize about the meaning of content as it relates to certain types of individuals. Lakoff's theory of ideology relies upon familial metaphors to make sense of how individuals understand politics and policy, where conservatism is rooted in a strict-father model of the family and liberalism is rooted in a nurturing-parent model of the family. Such models manifest very different takes on Christianity, which likely shape the meaning of Christian symbols such as the crucifix. For the strict-father conservative, the crucifix symbolizes patriarchy, authority, obedience, and protection and love should one follow the rules (Lakoff 2002, p. 246). On the other hand, for the nurturing-parent liberal, the same crucifix symbolizes nurturance, grace, empathy, and love and protection to those that exhibit the same traits (Lakoff 2002, p. 255). Of course, meaning will still vary on an individual level, but contingent upon the strength of your deductive belief system theory of choice, some component of your studied population will vary in a systematic fashion (see, for example, Barker and Tinnick 2006) and allow inferences related to the population more generally. Such an approach does not negate the problem of content narrative relativity; it does, however, mitigate it. Moreover, such an approach allows for the potential comparison of the use and interpretation of objects within policy narratives—imbedded in a specific context—with similar policy narrative objects imbedded in a wholly different context, perhaps even in an entirely different policy area. Importantly, there are a host of readymade belief system theories out there that can be tapped for such purposes.[4]

Informed by ACF scholarship on the importance of shared policy beliefs as an advocacy coalition's glue (e.g., Weible 2005; Weible et al. 2009), the NPF identifies both an operational measure of policy beliefs through narrative elements as well as a measure of the intensity of policy beliefs within policy narratives. The NPF has historically measured policy beliefs through the use of policy narrative characters, consistently finding statistically significant differences between opposing coalition policy beliefs, and that policy beliefs are relatively stable over time (McBeth et al. 2005; McBeth et al. 2010a; Shanahan et al. 2013). McBeth et al. (2005) operationalized the important Greater Yellowstone policy belief of federalism (what level of government should solve problems) through an analysis of competing group's listing of allies in their policy narratives. In the same study, the relationship between humans and nature was operationalized through an analysis of the victim in competing group's policy narratives. Similarly, Shanahan et al. (2013) used different heroes and victims to operationalize three policy beliefs in the Cape Cod wind energy controversy.

Strategy

While a focus on deductive belief systems allows researchers to generalize about the meaning of specific policy narrative content, a focus on strategy allows researchers to generalize about the use of content within policy narratives, thus also creating a potential mediating stratagem for the problem of narrative

relativity. For our purposes, narrative strategies are understood broadly as the tactical portrayal and use of narrative elements to manipulate or otherwise control policy-related processes, involvement, and outcomes. By definition, such uses include the strategic manipulation of pre-identified NPF narrative elements such as components of the setting, characters, plots, and the moral of the story, but may also include other as of yet unspecified elements of the policy narrative. Based upon theories and approaches applied in various academic disciplines, the NPF has explored several narrative strategies including the use of narrative elements for mobilization and demobilization of support (McBeth et al. 2007), expansion and contraction of the scope of conflict (McBeth et al. 2007), heresthetics (Jones and McBeth 2010), and the devil–angel shift (Shanahan et al. 2013). Such strategies are posited to be used across policy narrative contexts and thus allow for a generalizable treatment of narrative content.

Importantly, policy narratives are strategic constructions of a policy reality promoted by policy actors that are seeking to win (or not lose) in public policy battles. Whereas, post-positivism tends to see policy narratives as relative, subject to interpretation, and thus not subject to empirical study, the NPF views policy narratives as consisting of generalizable strategic policy constructions with instrumental goals. We discuss hypotheses related to strategy in more detail in the following sections of this chapter dealing with levels of analysis.

Core NPF Assumptions

Philosophers of science have described research paradigms or programs as having core assumptions or axioms that allow for hypotheses to be developed and tested. These core assumptions, such as the individual utility maximization assumption in economics, form a basis to the scientific approach that if successfully challenged or otherwise discredited would present substantial problems for the research program for which they were asserted. While we do not contend that the NPF reaches the level of a scientific paradigm in a way that Thomas Kuhn understood it in his classic work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) or a research program as Imre Lakatos (e.g., 1974) understood the concept, we do hold that the NPF is a viable policy process framework and as such we must lay bare the assumptions that will undoubtedly underpin NPF research.

(i) *Social construction*: While it is true that there is a reality populated by objects and processes independent of human perceptions, it is also true that what those objects and processes mean vary in terms of how humans perceive them. Social construction in this context refers to the variable meanings that individuals or groups will assign to various objects or processes associated with public policy.

(ii) *Bounded relativity*: Social constructions of policy-related objects and processes vary to create different policy realities; however, this variation is bounded (e.g., by belief systems, ideologies, norms etc.) and thus is not random.