
The Narrative Policy Framework

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“Narratives are the lifeblood of politics”—this appears to be our refrain. Politicians, political strategists, and media reporters understand intuitively that how a story is rendered is as important to policy success and political longevity as are which actions are undertaken. For example, the former Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi, in his interview with the *Washington Post*, argued that the European Union should change the narrative from austerity to hope: “The problem is not the immigrants. The problem is the lack of reaction of Europe. The [European Union] is without vision. We need a strategy for the next year and the next decade. I think we have to change the narrative” (Weymouth 2016).² Renzi positions narrative construction as a powerful tool that can shape people’s realities and emotions. The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) is a theory of the policy process³ whose central question turns an empirical eye on the truth claim of the power of narrative: Do narratives play an important role in the policy process?

The NPF starts with the assertion that the power of policy narratives is something worth understanding. The basic reasons for doing so are twofold. First, policy debates are *necessarily* fought on the terrain of narratives, constituted by both formal institutional venues (e.g., floor debates and testimonies in the House or lower chambers) and informal venues (e.g., media, interest group websites, Twitter, YouTube, blogs). Both serve to reflect and shape the contours, elevations, and chasms of the narrative terrain. Second, narratives are often asserted to affect the policy process at different points—policy decisions, implementation, regulation, evaluation, and so forth. Thus, the NPF contends that understanding the role of narratives is critical to understanding the policy process, on various terrains and at multiple junctures within said process.

The NPF is hardly the first to conceptualize the import of narrative. As a close cousin of narrative, rhetoric has long been studied with famous orators like Franklin Roosevelt or Winston Churchill or more infamous ones like Adolf Hitler. In addition, the study of narrative is found in many disciplines, including psychology (e.g., Green and Brock 2005; Brock, Strange, and Green 2002), marketing (e.g., van den Hende et al. 2012; Escalas 2004; Mattila 2000), and health care (e.g., Hinyard and Kreuter 2007). Within public policy, postpositivist scholars (e.g., Fischer 2003; Roe 1994) have also provided important insights into policy narratives. To date, however, systematic approaches to the understanding of the role of policy narratives in the public policy process are limited but emergent. The goal of this chapter is to detail the NPF in an effort to provide a means by which policy researchers in a variety of contexts can advance scientific discoveries surrounding our central research question.

Although the NPF was not named until 2010 (i.e., Jones and McBeth 2010), the work that led to the framework began in the years following the publication of the first edition of this volume in 1999. This collection of policy theories was criticized for its exclusion of postpositivism (see the March 2000 symposium issue in *Journal of European Public Policy*) in favor of more positivist-oriented policy theories such as Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999, 117–166) and Institutional Analysis and Development (Ostrom 1999, 35–71). By 2000, two camps emerged over what constitutes legitimate public policy theory: postpositivists, who understand policy as contextualized through narratives and social constructions and more positivist-oriented theorists (Sabatier 2000, 137),⁴ whose approach is based on clear concepts and propositions, causal drivers, prediction, and falsification. The NPF was developed in response to these debates, ultimately conceiving of the framework as a “bridge” (Shanahan et al. 2013, 455) between divergent policy process approaches by holding that narratives *both* socially construct reality and can be measured empirically.⁵ In 2013, Smith and Larimer questioned whether the NPF would be successful with “essentially post-positivist theory and rational methods” (Smith and Larimer 2013, 234). By 2015, they answer their own question with a resounding yes—“This array of estimation techniques and methodologies used by NPF scholars should be commended, not scorned” (Smith and Larimer 2015, 87).

Now the NPF is a framework being widely tested, continually improved, and applied in a growing variety of policy contexts to advance knowledge of the policy process. For example, NPF concepts are becoming more precisely specified (e.g., Merry 2016 on expanding character types; Schlauffer 2016 and Smith-Walter et al. 2016 on use of evidence). Additionally, the validation and use of digital media have revealed massive repositories of narrative data (e.g., Merry 2015 on Twitter; Gupta, Ripberger, and Wehde 2016 on Twitter). Innovative methodologies (e.g., Weible et al. 2016 on the use of social network analysis; O’Bryan, Dunlop, and Radaelli 2014 on the use of comparative methods;

Gray and Jones 2016 on the use of interpretive methods) have also expanded the ways in which the NPF contributes to understanding the policy process.

Application of the NPF outside the United States (e.g., Gupta, Ripberger, and Collins 2014; Jones, Fløttum, and Gjerstad, forthcoming; Lawton and Rudd 2014) reveals the transportability of the NPF to diverse political systems and contextually nuanced policy domains. The NPF is also being applied to understand a greater array of public policies within US and international contexts (e.g., Ertas 2015 on US education policy; Leong 2015 on water policy in Jakarta; Radaelli and Dunlop 2013 on the European Union; Merry 2015 on US gun policy; Gupta et al. 2016 on US nuclear energy policy; Crow et al. 2016 on US environmental policy). In sum, the latest pulse of NPF scholarship has improved NPF concepts, expanded data sources, employed new methodologies, transported the NPF to non-US contexts, and widened policy issues of interest—all with an eye toward enhancing how the NPF contributes to building knowledge of the role of narratives in the policy process.

In this chapter, we begin by detailing the NPF through a discussion of form and content of policy narratives. The core NPF assumptions are then described. The bulk of the rest of the chapter is devoted to describing NPF concepts, hypotheses, and extant research, demarcated by level of analysis (micro-, meso-, and, to some extent, macro-), with further discussion on the linkages of levels of analysis. We address four new directions in NPF research, which includes comparative public policy approaches, use of evidence, validation of digital media as a source of narrative data, and a new proposition regarding policy narrative learning in the context of policy change.

THE NPF: FORM AND CONTENT OF POLICY NARRATIVES

Narrative scholars frequently describe narratives in terms of their content and form. *Form* refers to the structure of narratives, and *content* refers to the policy context and subject matter. Contrary to postpositivism, where most of narrative public policy scholarship has held that both form and content are unique, the NPF embraces a structuralist⁶ interpretation of narrative, asserting that policy narratives have precise narrative elements (form) that can be generalized across space and time to different policy contexts (see Jones and McBeth 2010; Jones, McBeth, and Shanahan 2014). Furthermore, whereas postpositivists assert that all narrative content is unique (e.g., Fischer 2003), the NPF addresses this problem of narrative relativity by empirically studying content in terms of strategy and belief systems. We detail these arguments below.

Form: Defining a Policy Narrative

Narrative elements constitute the structure of a narrative. Informed by narratology, the NPF focuses on four policy narrative core elements:

1. *Setting*: Policy narratives always have something to do with policy problems and are situated in specific policy contexts. As such, the setting of a policy narrative consists of policy phenomena such as legal and constitutional parameters, geography, evidence, economic conditions, norms, or other features that some nontrivial amount of policy actors agree or assert are consequential within a particular policy area. Like a stage setting for a theatrical play, the props (e.g., laws, evidence, geography) are often taken for granted, but—at times—also may become contested or the focal point of the policy narrative.
2. *Characters*: Policy narratives must have at least one character. As with any good story, there may be victims who are harmed, villains who do the harm, and heroes who provide or promise to provide relief from the harm and presume to solve the problem (Ney 2006; Stone 2012; Verweij et al. 2006). Recent NPF studies have explored different and more nuanced character types, such as “beneficiaries” of a policy outcome (Weible et al. 2016), “allies” and “opponents” (Merry 2016), and “entrepreneurs” and “charismatic experts” (Lawton and Rudd 2014).
3. *Plot*: The plot situates the characters and their relationship in time and space. The plot provides the arc of action where events interact with actions of the characters and the setting, sometimes arranged in a beginning, middle, and end sequence (Abell 2004; Roe 1994; Somers 1992). Although the NPF has leaned on operationalizing Stone’s (2012) narrative plot lines, we recognize that there are likely other theoretically grounded ways to define plots.
4. *Moral of the story*: In a policy narrative, policy solutions are the moral or normative action incarnate. The moral of the story gives purpose to the characters’ actions and motives. As such, in the NPF, the moral of the story is often equivalent to the policy solution (Stone 2012; Ney and Thompson 2000; Verweij et al. 2006).

To date, NPF scholarship has maintained a definition of a policy narrative as featuring at least one character and containing some public policy referent (Shanahan et al. 2013, 457). We acknowledge that other policy scholars (e.g., Shenhav 2015) define narrative with different parameters. Although we do not *prima facie* reject alternative definitions, should an alternative definition be invoked, scholars must be clear about which definition they adhere to and why. Additionally, if the definition were to fall under the umbrella of the NPF, it must also provide additional theoretical *and* empirical traction (within the parameters of the NPF assumptions, of course).

Content: Policy Beliefs and Strategies

Policy debates exist in rich and unique policy contexts. For example, the debate over the installation of windmills off the coast of Nantucket is contextually different from the debate over the installation of windmills in Judith Gap, Montana. The stakeholders are different. The landscapes are different. With the NPF, however, the variation in narrative content can be systematically studied through narrative strategies and the belief systems invoked within different policy narratives. For example, *narrative strategies* used in different policy contexts reveal that proponents of the windmills in both Nantucket and Judith Gap are likely to make claims that the costs of the status quo (no windmills) are diffused, whereby all American citizens suffer from a lack of energy independence from foreign energy. Opponents, on the other hand, are likely to make claims that the benefits of the status quo are concentrated on those whose pristine views of the landscape are sullied by the placement of the windmills. Similarly, examining these narratives through *policy beliefs* about federalism may reveal that those opposing the windmills consistently hold that a policy decision to site windmills affects local people and should reside with local officials; conversely, those supporting windmill installation are more likely to hold that the decision affects the nation more generally and thus decision-making authority should be more appropriately held at the federal level. Importantly, the NPF's approach to content allows researchers the tools needed to examine unique policy contexts while still aspiring toward generalizable findings.

Policy Narrative Strategies

Narrative strategies are used in an attempt to influence the policy process. Although there may be additional narrative strategies operationalized in the future, current NPF scholarship has focused on the following three strategies: scope of conflict, causal mechanisms, and the devil-angel shift.

1. *Scope of conflict*: Influenced by E. E. Schattschneider (1960) and more recently by Pralle (2006), NPF scholars have studied the strategic construction of policy narratives to either expand or contain policy issues (e.g., Crow and Lawlor 2016; Gupta et al. 2014; McBeth, Shanahan, et al. 2010; Shanahan et al. 2013). In short, when authors portray themselves as losing on an issue, they engage in narrative strategies that aim to expand the scope of conflict (e.g., diffusing costs and concentrating benefits). Conversely, when authors portray themselves as winning, they engage in narrative strategies that contain an issue to the status quo (e.g., concentrating costs and diffusing benefits; see McBeth et al. 2007).

2. *Causal mechanisms*: Causal mechanisms strategically arrange narrative elements to assign responsibility and blame for a policy problem.⁷ These responsibility and blame ascriptions can be thought of as explanations of why and how one or more particular factors (e.g., income disparities and lack of education) lead to another (e.g., political unrest) in public policy (see Delahais and Toulemonde 2012 for use of logic models to indicate causal effect). To date, NPF causal mechanisms have been based on Stone (2012), who defines four causal theories: intentional, inadvertent, accidental, and mechanical.
3. *Devil-angel shift*: Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen (2009, 132–133) describe the devil shift in this way: “The devil shift predicts that actors will exaggerate the malicious motives, behaviors, and influence of opponents” (also see Sabatier, Hunter, and McLaughlin 1987). The angel shift, on the other hand, occurs when groups or policy actors emphasize their ability to solve a problem and deemphasize villains (Shanahan et al. 2013). The NPF measures the devil-angel shift as the extent to which the narrator identifies the opposing narrators as villains in comparison to how much the narrator identifies him- or herself as a hero.

Policy Beliefs

The NPF identifies operational measures of policy beliefs through narrative elements such as characters (e.g., Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway 2011; Shanahan et al. 2013) and other symbolic, metaphorical, or contextual means by which collective understandings of the policy subsystem (and the processes and objects therein) are generated. Importantly, the identification of policy beliefs must be theoretically grounded, for example, in cultural theory (Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky 1990), human-nature relationship (Muir-Pinchot debate), political ideology (Lakoff 2002), or political identity (Bernstein and Taylor 2013).

CORE NPF ASSUMPTIONS

At the core of every major school of thought, framework, or scientific approach, there is a set of core assumptions. Below are the NPF’s core assumptions.

- I. *Social constructions matter in public policy*: Although 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 varies in terms of how humans perceive them. *Social construction* in this context refers to the variable meanings that

individuals or groups 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, normative axioms) and thus is not random.
- III. *Policy narratives have generalizable structural elements*: The NPF takes a structuralist stance on narrative, where narratives are defined as having specific generalizable structures such as plots and characters that can be identified in multiple narrative contexts.
- IV. *Policy narratives operate simultaneously at three levels*: For purposes of analyses, the NPF divides policy narratives into three interacting categories: microlevel (individual level), mesolevel (group and coalitional level), and macrolevel (cultural and institutional level). Policy narratives are assumed to operate simultaneously at all three levels.
- V. *Homo narrans model of the individual*: Narrative is assumed to play a central role in how individuals process information, communicate, and reason.

Three of the NPF's assumptions are derived from longstanding academic approaches (I, II, and III); one is simply assumed for practical reasons (IV); one is rooted in developing empirical research (V); and all of the assumptions combined form the foundation for the NPF's approach to the study of public policy.

THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

The NPF assumes that policy narratives operate simultaneously at three levels of analysis (see assumption IV above). These demarcations are drawn largely for purposes of determining scope and offering direction related to the units of analyses in which the researcher is interested. At the microlevel the researcher is concerned with the individual and how individuals both inform and are informed by policy narratives. At the mesolevel, the researcher is focused on the policy narratives that policy actors who compose groups and advocacy coalitions deploy over time within a policy subsystem. Finally, at the macrolevel the researcher is interested in how policy narratives embedded in cultures and institutions shape public policy. Table 5.1 summarizes the three levels of analysis.

MICROLEVEL NPF: *HOMO NARRANS*

To be classified as a policy framework, the NPF must clearly specify its model of the individual (Schlager 1999, 2007). *Homo narrans*, the model of the

TABLE 5.1 NPF's Three Levels of Analysis

	Micro	Meso	Macro
Unit of Analysis	Individual	Policy actors (e.g., groups, coalitions, organizations) in the policy subsystem	Institutions, culture
Core NPF Variables	Policy narrative Setting Characters Plot Moral	Policy narrative Setting Characters Plot Moral	Policy narrative Setting Characters Plot Moral
Imported Theories	Belief Systems Canonicity and Breach (In)congruence Narrative Transportation Narrator trust	Belief systems Devil-angel shift Heresthetics Instrumental learning Scope of conflict	Meta-narrative Institutional theory Cultural theory Social learning
Methods and Analysis	Experiments Interviews Focus groups Survey instruments Participant observation Statistical analyses (cluster analysis, latent trait analysis, etc.)	Content analysis Network analysis Game theory Statistical analyses (cluster analysis, latent trait analysis, etc.)	Historical-institutionalism Process tracing American political development Counterfactual analysis
Potential Data	Survey data Transcripts Observed behavioral data	Written texts Speeches Videos Tweets and other digital media	Archives Secondary sources Original artifacts

individual invoked by the NPF, identifies ten postulates derived from existing and well-established research findings and theories in a host of academic fields. The *homo narrans* model is best understood as an evolving psychological model of the individual that acknowledges and tests the primacy of affect and narration in human decision-making and cognitive processes.

Foundation of *Homo Narrans*

Taken in total, these are the ten postulates that form the foundation of *homo narrans* (assumption V identified in the previous section).

1. *Boundedly rational*: Drawing on the classic work of Herbert Simon (e.g., Simon 1947), the NPF understands individuals to make decisions under conditions of limited time and limited information. Under such conditions, individuals satisfice or, more simply, settle for a satisfying alternative.
2. *Heuristics*: Given bounded rationality, individuals rely on information shortcuts to process information and to facilitate decision making. These shortcuts, known as heuristics, are many but are rooted in phenomena such as what information is available at the time, past experience, expertise and training, and biological biases (see Jones 2001, 71–75; Kahneman 2011, 109–255).
3. *Primacy of affect*: As political scientist Bryan Jones (2001, 73–74) observes, emotions play a critical role in focusing attention (see Peterson and Jones 2016) in human cognition by “highlighting what is important and setting priorities.” In this context, emotion—termed “affect” in academic parlance—is the positive to negative value that an individual ascribes to stimuli. Recent research supports Jones’s observation, finding that this positive to negative value assignment (which can be neutral) takes place some 100–250 milliseconds prior to cognition (Lodge and Taber 2005, 2007, 16; Morris et al. 2003). In short, emotions precede reason and direct attention.
4. *Two kinds of cognition*: According to psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011), cognition (or, simply, “thinking”) can be characterized as operating simultaneously, but not equally, within two systems. The first system, System 1, refers to unconscious, involuntary, and automatic thought processes that we are either born with (e.g., noticing sudden movement in your peripheral vision) or learn through prolonged practice (e.g., $2 + 2$; see Kahneman 2011, 20–23). The overwhelming majority of human cognition is handled by System 1, which serves to inform or alert System 2 via affective cues (e.g., fear, anger). Like System 1, System 2 cognition is also always active but has been evolutionary primed to run in a low-effort mode to conserve energy unless called upon. When engaged, System 2 focuses attention on cognitively cumbersome tasks that are beyond the capacity of System 1. These operations are varied but could include solving a complex math equation, following cooking directions, or attempting to determine whether somebody is telling the truth. Importantly, individuals cannot perform multiple System 2 operations simultaneously; rather, these cognitive tasks must be conducted serially. Although System 2 can recondition System 1 through updating, System 1 is stubbornly resistant to change and also serves as the default mode of human cognition.

5. *Hot cognition*: In public policy, all social and political concepts and objects can be understood as affect laden (Lodge and Taber 2005; Morris et al. 2003) or, at least, potentially so. If a concept or object is unfamiliar, individuals will perform a “search” in order to assign affect to the new concept or object in terms of their existing understanding of the world. When concepts or mental impressions of objects are cognitively activated or situated in the individual’s existing understanding of the world, so too are their System 1 affective attachments (see Redlawsk 2002, 1023).
6. *Confirmation and disconfirmation bias*: Individuals engage in confirmation bias, where they treat congruent evidence that agrees with their priors (beliefs, knowledge, etc.) as stronger than incongruent evidence (Taber and Lodge 2006), and process congruent stimuli more quickly than incongruent stimuli (Lodge and Taber 2005); likewise, individuals also engage in disconfirmation bias, where evidence that is incongruent with an individual’s priors is counterargued (Taber and Lodge 2006) and takes longer to process than evidence that is congruent (Lodge and Taber 2005).
7. *Selective exposure*: Individuals select sources and information that are congruent with what they already believe (Kunda 1990, 495; Taber and Lodge 2006). A practical example of this behavior is found in the fact that conservatives in the United States like to watch Fox News while liberals prefer to watch MSNBC (Stroud 2008).
8. *Identity-protective cognition*: Selective exposure, confirmation bias, and disconfirmation bias are conditioned by knowledge and prior beliefs and are used by individuals in a way that protects their prior identity, or who they already understand themselves to be (e.g., Kahan et al. 2007). Those with the strongest prior attitudes, especially those with higher levels of knowledge and political sophistication, employ what they know to protect their priors (Taber and Lodge 2006).
9. *Primacy of groups and networks*: Individuals do not process information in a vacuum; rather, the social, professional, familial, and cultural networks and groups in which they find themselves immersed play a vital role in helping individuals assign affect to social and political concepts and objects (e.g., Kahan and Braman 2006; Kurzban 2010). In short, people look to their trusted relationships and associations to help them make sense of the world.
10. *Narrative cognition*: Psychologist Donald E. Polkinghorne (1988, 11) writes that narrative is the primary means by which human beings make sense of and situate themselves in the world, and in doing so narrative renders human existence meaningful. Exogenous (external) to the individual and in terms of our prior nine postulates, it is posited that narratives are the primary communication device

within and across groups and networks; internal to the individual (endogenous), narratives are also the preferred means for organizing thoughts, memories, affect, and other cognitions (Berinsky and Kinder 2006; Jones and Song 2014). Thus, in academic terms, narrative is the preferred heuristic employed by all for the purposes of making sense of the world because it provides essential linkages between System 1 and System 2 cognition. In plain language, people tell and remember stories.

Proceeding from the *homo narrans* model of the individual, the NPF makes the empirically testable conjecture that narrative likely plays an important role in public policy.

Microlevel NPF Applications

Table 5.2 lists several microlevel NPF hypotheses detailed by Jones and McBeth (2010, 343–344) and Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway (2011) related to canonicity and breach, narrative transportation, congruence and incongruence, narrator trust, and the power of characters. Research testing these hypotheses has been primarily concerned with how policy narratives affect individual-level preferences, perceptions of risk, and opinion related to specific public policy areas. The dominant methodologies at this level of analysis have been experimental.

Micro Hypotheses 1 and 3: Narrative breach and congruence and incongruence. Several NPF studies (e.g., Ertas 2015; Shanahan et al. 2014) have leveraged hypotheses 1 and 3 to assess narrative persuasiveness as two countervailing conditions: when the narrative runs counter to (breach or incongruence) or supports (congruence) a person's expectations, preferences, or beliefs. Generally speaking, this body of experimental research finds that breaching narratives move individuals away from priors and toward the preferences and beliefs within the narrative; similarly, congruent narratives intensify an individual's policy stances and beliefs. Shanahan et al. (2014) and Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway (2011) found congruent policy narratives to significantly strengthen policy preferences and beliefs; these scholars and Ertas (2015) also found breaching policy narratives to significantly influence opinion.

Many studies have explored congruence specifically. Jones and Song (2014) found that respondents exposed to climate change narratives in experimental treatments were more likely to cognitively mirror the organization of the narrative presented to them if the narrative was culturally congruent with the respondent's prior cultural type. Employing the macrobelief of American individuality, Niederdeppe, Roh, and Shapiro (2015) found increased empathy toward the narrative's character and policy support when individual

TABLE 5.2 Microlevel NPF Hypotheses and Relevant Studies

Hypothesis	Exact Wording and Source	Extant Research
H₁: <i>Breach</i>	On the basis of an individual's expectations, as a narrative's level of breach increases, the more likely an individual exposed to the narrative will be persuaded (Jones and McBeth 2010).	Ertas 2015 Shanahan et al. 2014 Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway 2011
H₂: <i>Narrative transportation</i>	As narrative transportation increases, the more likely an individual exposed to that narrative is to be persuaded (Jones and McBeth 2010).	Jones 2014a
H₃: <i>Congruence and incongruence</i> (of beliefs or worldviews)	As perception of congruence (of belief systems) increases, the more likely an individual is to be persuaded by the narrative (Jones and McBeth 2010).	Ertas 2015 Husmann 2015 Niederdeppe, Roh, and Shapiro 2015 Shanahan et al. 2014 Jones and Song 2014 Lybecker, McBeth, and Kusko 2013 McBeth, Lybecker, and Stoutenborough 2016 Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway 2011 McBeth, Lybecker, and Garner 2010
H₄: <i>Narrator trust</i>	As narrator trust increases, the more likely an individual is to be persuaded by the narrative (Jones and McBeth 2010).	Ertas 2015
H₅: <i>The power of characters</i>	The portrayal of policy narrative characters (heroes, victims, and villains) has higher levels of influence on opinion and preferences of individuals than scientific or technical information (Shanahan et al. 2011b).	Jones 2010 Jones 2014b Jones, Fløttum, and Gjerstad, forthcoming

responsibility (congruent with the macrobelief) was included in the narrative; conversely, when it was not included, the authors found decreased empathy and policy support. Using a survey methodology, McBeth, Lybecker, and Garner (2010) and Lybecker, McBeth, and Kusko (2013) and McBeth, Lybecker, and Husmann (2014) found that individuals and practitioners preferred stories about recycling that were congruent with their beliefs about citizenship. Husmann (2015) found that liberal and Democrat participants (as well as women participants) were more likely to support government intervention benefiting obese children if exposed to ideologically congruent obesity policy narratives (consistent with Lakoff 2002). Similarly, testing Lakoff's (2002) conservative and liberal parenting metaphors, Clemons, McBeth, and Kusko (2012) found that individuals' view of parenting was only partially congruent with their choice of obesity policy stories.

However, recent research (Lybecker, McBeth, and Stoutenborough 2016; McBeth et al. 2016) has found that breaching and congruency are not necessarily mutually exclusive. These NPF scholars found that characters can effectively breach policy preferences by positioning congruent characters—those who align with one's individual identity—with an opposing (breaching) policy preference. For example, consider a person who has a deep philosophical commitment to libertarian notions of freedom. This individual is also a business person and thus has certain expectations about how business is talked about; narrative theory refers to such conventions of thinking as canonicity (Herman 2002, 2003). Canonical language for a business person usually invokes markets, competition, and certain characters where environmentalists are often cast as villains. This person will also have canonical understandings of the narratives espoused by enemies (like the environmentalist) that paint the business community as the villain. Now suppose this same person encounters an environmentalist narrative that casts business as a hero, invokes markets to protect the environment, and paints competition as the social engine that makes all of this happen. Such a narrative would be congruent in a worldview sense for this hypothetical person but breaching in terms of the individual's expectations about the environmentalist narrative.

In all, these studies largely support hypotheses H_1 and H_3 . However, given the nuanced differences between congruence and incongruence, canonicity and breach, we have modified H_3 to specifically apply to beliefs and worldviews. Additional research is needed to further understand the conditions under which narrative breach and congruence affect beliefs, preferences, and more.

Micro Hypothesis 2: Narrative transportation. Narrative transportation “is related to a narrative's ability to mentally transport the reader into the world created by the narrative” (Jones 2014a, 648; also see Green and Brock 2005). A book, movie, or even campaign speech is often determined to be good by the extent to which the reader/viewer/listener can imagine him-/herself surrounded

by the scene and embroiled in the plot alongside the characters. Jones (2014a) conducted an experiment and found that the more a person is able to picture a story (in this case, about climate change), the more positively that person responds to the hero of the story, which in turn leads to a higher willingness to accept arguments and solutions argued for in the policy narrative.

Micro Hypothesis 4: Narrator trust. Ertas (2015) conducted a microlevel study regarding charter schools and found that narrator trust increased shifts in policy preferences toward the preferred policy presented in the narrative, but that this occurred to a greater extent when there was also congruence.

Micro Hypothesis 5: The power of characters. Characters have been found to play an important role in shaping individual preferences. Jones (2010, 2014b) has found that the hero character is a primary driver of narrative persuasion. Conducting an experimental study examining the role of cultural narratives in shaping policy preferences related to climate change, Jones found that respondents tended to have more positive affect for hero characters than for other characters, regardless of their priors. Moreover, as positive affect for the hero character increased, so too did the respondents' willingness to accept the assumptions imbedded in the narrative and the argued-for policy solutions. In this case, this meant that the more respondents liked the hero, the more likely they were to believe climate change was real and that it posed a threat both to them as individuals and to society more generally, the more they were willing to take action to stop climate change, and the more likely they were to support the policy solution within the policy narrative. Similar results were found by Jones, Fløttum, and Gjerstad (forthcoming) when examining the impact of climate change policy narratives on Norwegian citizens.

Some microlevel work deviates from the hypotheses outlined in Table 5.2. For example, Jorgensen, Song, and Jones (forthcoming) use a survey experimental design to test the influence of causal mechanisms within policy narratives addressing US campaign finance reform. Their study found that mechanical causal mechanisms were more persuasive with participants who have high levels of political knowledge. On the other hand, Shanahan et al. (2014) found that intentional causal mechanisms have some short-term effectiveness in influencing public opinion in favor of the narrator. Gray and Jones (2016) step outside of the NPF's hypothesis orientation using qualitative interviews to describe stories of expression and equality told by elites about campaign finance reform policy in the United States. The authors argue that although the study is descriptive it points to the NPF's as of yet untapped ability to empower citizens by describing competing policy narratives in complex policy areas in a way that both is easy for citizens to understand and uses a methodology they themselves could easily employ.

Notably, unlike other policy process frameworks and theories, the NPF is a framework that promotes research intended to refine its model of the individual (like comparative agenda setting [see Jones 2001] and policy learning [see the discussion of microfoundations in Kamkhaji and Radaelli 2016]). Our reasons for doing microfoundational analysis are straightforward. If we are to understand how, when, and why policy narratives shape public policy at the larger meso- and macroscales, we need an accurate and refined understanding of how narrative works at an individual level in order to make valid assumptions at larger scales of analyses.

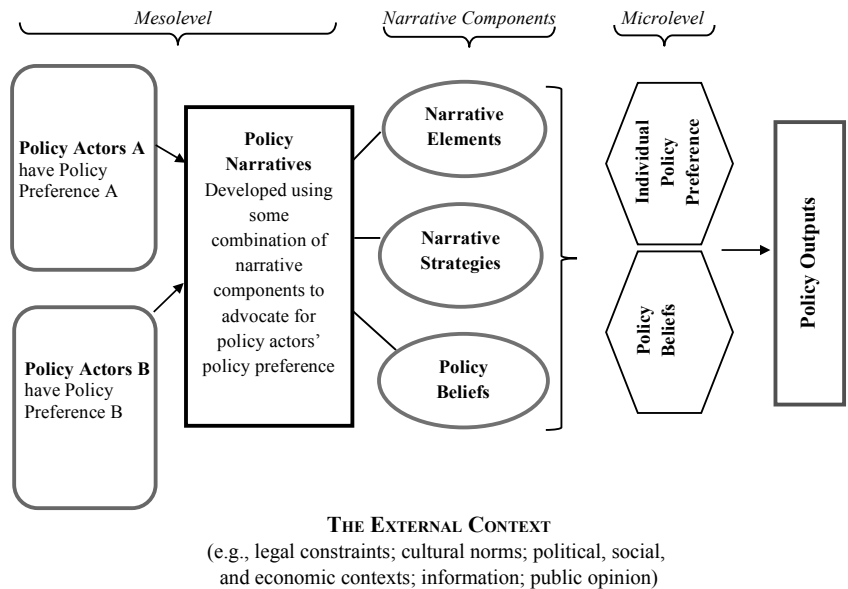
MESOLEVEL NPF: AGORA NARRANS

In ancient Greece, the agora was the physical and public space where citizens took action to achieve, reflect upon, and implement a policy goal, principally through reasoned and impassioned narratives. A plethora of policy process research today focuses on our modern-day agora, known as the policy subsystem. Building from the *homo narrans* foundation, NPF mesolevel research focuses on the role of policy narratives in the agora. Thus, *agora narrans* is NPF's mesolevel examination of the strategic construction and communication of policy narratives by policy actors⁸ organized in a variety of ways: charismatic individuals, groups, constellations of actors, coalitions, and so on. The discussion that follows details the mesoconceptual model, defines mesolevel concepts, and concludes with hypotheses and a discussion of extant mesolevel applications.

Conceptual Model of the Mesolevel NPF

Understanding how narratives function in a policy subsystem, we turn to a seminal work regarding how systems work. As described by von Bertalanffy (1968), systems are composed of objects that are organized and related to one another while being shaped or affected by external feedbacks. How do these ideas inspire how NPF conceptualizes mesolevel? First, objects in systems theory are the component parts of a system or the variables of interest. For the NPF, the "objects" of primary interest within subsystems are policy narratives. However, additional objects in policy subsystems are also relevant, including but not limited to standard public policy process variables such as resources, issue saliency, institutions, and the policy actors themselves. Second, objects in systems theory are not haphazardly organized but rather function in some coordinated or strategic fashion; for the NPF, policy narratives are constructed by policy actors, who are organized in any number of ways (e.g., a charismatic individual, a group, a coalition). Third, relationships between objects in a system constitute the dynamic nature of the system; in the study of policy, this is generally referred to as the policy process. We look to existing policy process

FIGURE 5.1 Model of Policy Narratives at the Mesolevel of the Narrative Policy Framework



theory and findings to shape expectations about how policy subsystem objects interact; however, the NPF adds to this existing understanding by theorizing expectations regarding the role of narrative. These theorized expectations are manifest in the mesolevel NPF hypotheses. Finally, systems have boundaries, meaning that the system exists in an external environment or context that may influence the subsystem. Figure 5.1 illustrates the NPF's conceptualization of how policy narratives function at the mesolevel of analysis and is further explained below.

At the mesolevel, policy actors may derive from institutions or organizations (e.g., a member of the media or the British Parliament), play different roles (e.g., citizen or political leader), and organize in networks (e.g., advocacy coalitions, interest groups, organizations). These policy actors, however arranged and derived, develop or adopt policy narratives to reflect their policy preferences. Competing policy actors have divergent policy preferences, which are expressed in policy narratives. These competing policy narratives utilize some combination of narrative components, and the mesolevel NPF contribution comes in the analysis of how the generators of these policy narratives use these components. For example, whereas both entities employ characters, Policy Actors A may use the federal government as a hero while Policy Actors B may use private industry as a hero. Similarly, Policy Actors A may use the narrative strategy of diffusing costs to consumers and concentrating benefits

to CEOs; Policy Actors B may use the narrative strategy of diffusing costs to taxpayers and concentrating benefits to a federal agency. With regard to policy beliefs, for example, the NPF provides guidance on how to operationalize narrative components to test changes in policy beliefs over time, both within and between policy actors. Taken together, narrative components are the building blocks of policy narratives and are strategically constructed by policy actors in the policy subsystem to affect policy preferences to achieve favorable policy outputs, whether they are decisions, implementation activities, or evaluations.

As indicated in the introduction of the microlevel discussion, the mesolevel of analysis cannot (and should not) be decoupled conceptually from the microlevel of analysis. The *agora narrans* centers on dynamics both within and between policy actors' policy narratives as well as the association with narratives and policy outputs. In sum, the *agora narrans* in the NPF brings to the fore the role of narratives in the subsystem(s) and, hence, the policy process as well. The discussion that follows defines mesolevel concepts and concludes with hypotheses and a discussion of extant mesolevel applications.

Policy subsystems. As with many policy process theories, NPF scholarship studies public policymaking within and across policy subsystems. Public policy issues within policy subsystems are either dominated by one constellation of policy actors or contested by many. Policy subsystems consist of a variety of actors (e.g., elected officials, interest groups, experts, judicial actors, media) who vie to control a policy issue. For example, the NPF has studied contentious policy subsystems of hydraulic fracking in Colorado (Heikkila et al. 2014), drug policies in Australia (Fitzgerald 2013), forest policy in Finland (Peltomaa, Hilden, and Huttunen 2016), Greater Yellowstone wildlife management (e.g., McBeth, Shanahan, et al. 2010), and Massachusetts wind energy policy (Shanahan et al. 2013).

Although a focus on individual policy subsystems is the norm for policy process approaches and current NPF scholarship, evolving research suggests that examining multiple subsystems (Jones and Jenkins-Smith 2009) or policy regimes (May and Jochim 2013) could strengthen our understanding of the policy process. At least two recent NPF studies have moved in this direction. Crow and Berggren (2014) examine policy narratives across four cases of environmental policymaking in Colorado, and O'Bryan et al. (2014) conduct the first NPF comparative public policy study. Given the known linkages between subsystems and the likely case that narratives play a role in such linkages, we suspect future NPF scholarship will similarly trend toward theory and method that make such examinations possible.

The NPF and policy actors in the subsystem. The NPF has historically employed coalitions as the way to understand the organization of policy actors; the NPF now recognizes that not all policy debates emerge from coalitions alone.

Some debates occur between interest groups and organizations (e.g., environmental and energy companies); sometimes an interest group is so powerful (e.g., the National Rifle Association) that it is the dominant voice; some authoritarian political leaders alone control the narrative (e.g., Gaddafi in Libya). Thus, the NPF seeks a more comprehensive view of the generators of narratives in the policy process while maintaining that approaches to understanding coalition formation and behavior remain an important way to understand policy actor behavior.

Jenkins-Smith, St. Clair, and Woods (1991) summarize two of the lines of research on coalition formation and change. The first can be termed the *instrumental* approach, and it focuses on Harold Lasswell's ([1936] 1990) classic instrumental definition of politics: "who gets what, when, and how," and sees policy actor interests as a primary driver of coalitional formation and change (Jenkins-Smith, St. Clair, and Woods 1991, 853n2). The second "line of research holds that members of advocacy coalitions adhere to hierarchically structured 'belief systems,' in which the most basic beliefs (e.g., fundamental ontological and normative axioms) constrain more specific or operational beliefs and policy positions" (852). The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) is the dominant policy process theory that promotes the belief system approach to coalitional formation and change (e.g., Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Sabatier and Weible 2007; Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen 2009), but as we have already discussed—and will detail below—beliefs and policy narratives are often intertwined.

The NPF accepts that both understandings of coalition formation and change are likely to play a role in public policy. Regarding belief systems and coalition formation and change, the NPF has expended considerable efforts on this front. Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth (2011, 546–547), for example, focus specifically on synergies between the ACF and NPF, providing policy narrative measurement strategies that operationalize belief stability, strength, and cohesion (but also see Shanahan et al. 2013). Similarly, the media are observed to participate in coalitions, with embedded policy beliefs and preferred policy preferences (Choi 2016; McBeth et al. 2013; Shanahan et al. 2008). Regarding instrumental coalition formation and change, the NPF hypothesizes (Jones and McBeth 2010, 346) that members of coalitions use the perception of costs and benefits to heresthetically (e.g., Riker 1986) expand or contain coalition membership in their favor. The instrumental approach to coalition formation and change, and how it relates to policy narratives, still remains an underexamined aspect of mesolevel NPF.

Mesolevel Applications

Several hypotheses at the mesolevel have been developed to test relationships with key dependent variables. Table 5.3 summarizes previously specified NPF

TABLE 5.3 NPF Mesolevel Hypotheses and Origins

Hypothesis	Exact Wording and Source	Extant Literature
H ₁ Narrative Strategy	Policy actors who are portraying themselves as losing on a policy issue will use narrative elements to expand the policy issue to increase the size of their coalition (Jones and McBeth 2010).	McBeth et al. 2007 Shanahan et al. 2013 Gupta, Ripberger, and Collins 2014
H ₂ Narrative Strategy	Policy actors who are portraying themselves as winning on a policy issue will use narrative elements to contain the policy issue to maintain the coalitional status quo (Jones and McBeth 2010).	McBeth et al. 2007 Shanahan et al. 2013 Gupta et al. 2014
H ₃ Narrative Strategy	Policy actors will heresthetically employ policy narratives to manipulate the composition of political coalitions for their strategic benefit (Jones and McBeth 2010).	None
H ₄ Narrative Strategy	The devil shift: higher incidence of the devil shift in policy subsystems is associated with policy intractability (Shanahan et al. 2013).	Shanahan et al. 2013 Crow and Berggren 2014 Heikkila et al. 2014 Leong 2015 Merry 2015
H ₅ Policy Beliefs	Coalition glue and policy outcomes: advocacy coalitions with policy narratives that contain higher levels of coalitional glue (coalition stability, strength, and intracoalition cohesion) will more likely influence policy outcomes (Shanahan et al. 2013; Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011).	Kusko 2013 McBeth et al. 2010
H ₆ Policy Learning	Variation in policy narrative elements helps explain policy learning (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011).	None
H ₇ Coalition Membership	The media are a contributor (a policy actor) in policy debates (Shanahan et al. 2008).	Shanahan et al. 2008 Peltomaa, Hilden, and Huttunen 2016 Crow and Lawlor 2016

continues

TABLE 5.3 NPF Mesolevel Hypotheses and Origins *continued*

Hypothesis	Exact Wording and Source	Extant Literature
H₈ Role of Media Actors within Subsystems	Media acting as conduits of policy information will show stability of policy narratives across media outlets, whereas media acting as contributors to policy debates will show a greater degree of variation in narrative structure and framing across media outlets (Crow and Lawlor 2016).	None
H₉ Role of Narrative Elements in Policy Communication	Policy actors* using rhetorical narrative strategies (character-driven plots, melodramatic narratives, stories of decline, metaphors, etc.) to a greater degree are more likely to prevail in policy debates than those using technical or scientific communication (Crow and Lawlor 2016).	McBeth et al. 2012 Crow and Berggren 2014
H₁₀ Role of Framing	Policy actors using thematic framing of policy problems are more likely to sway public opinion in favor of their articulated problem and solution than policy actors that employ episodic frames or other human interest frames, leading to higher success passing their proposed solutions (Crow and Lawlor 2016).	Shanahan et al. 2008
H₁₁ Role of Story Frames	Policy actors using story frames consistent with specific audience beliefs, but varying across media platforms, will influence policy outcomes toward their policy preference (Crow and Lawlor 2016).	None

* The original hypotheses posited by Crow and Lawlor (2016) use the term *coalitions*; we have replaced *coalitions* with *policy actors* to reflect the NPF's accommodation of the variety of ways actors organize (e.g., interest groups, organizations, coalitions).

hypotheses and their origins. The dominant methodology at the mesolevel has been content analysis. Some hypotheses are well-worn (H₁, H₂, H₄, H₅, H₇), some remain untested (H₃, H₆), some dropped (those on endogenous and exogenous public opinion), and some are new propositions (H₈, H₉, H₁₀, H₁₁).

Meso Hypothesis 1: Issue expansion as a narrative strategy. McBeth et al. (2007) used E. E. Schattschneider (1960) to argue that when groups perceive themselves as losing, they construct a policy narrative to expand the issue. Groups do this by diffusing costs and concentrating benefits of the opposing policy. For example, a losing narrative contains many victims who pay the “cost” of the opposing policy, whereas the elite few (typically villains) benefit. McBeth et al. (2007) found that this strategy occurred in their study of interest group conflict in Greater Yellowstone. In a study of wind energy off the coast of Cape Cod, Shanahan et al. (2013) found that the losing coalition (anti-wind coalition) concentrated benefits and diffused costs 88 percent of the time, compared to 46 percent of the time for the winning coalition (pro-wind coalition). Similarly, in the case of siting a nuclear power plant in India, Gupta, Ripberger, and Collins (2014) found the losing coalition attempted to expand the scope of conflict by predominantly focusing on the many who would be affected by the power plant.

Meso Hypothesis 2: Issue containment as a narrative strategy. Again using Schattschneider (1960), McBeth et al. (2007) empirically demonstrate that winning groups construct narratives to contain a policy issue by using political strategies of concentrating costs and diffusing benefits when discussing their policy preference. The idea behind this strategy is that winning groups want to maintain their minimal winning coalition and either maintain the status quo or control the policy outcome within the existing political context. This narrative strategy is empirically tested in McBeth et al. (2007), Shanahan et al. (2013), and Gupta, Ripberger, and Collins (2014).

Meso Hypothesis 4: Devil-angel shift. A few studies have examined the devil and angel shifts. In the study of the installation of windmills off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts (Shanahan et al. 2013), there was a narrative arc in the winning coalition from devil shift to angel shift. Similarly, Schlauffer (2016) found the winning coalition in the Swiss school policy debates to employ the angel shift at statistically higher rates than the losing coalition did. However, some studies (i.e., Heikkila et al. 2014 and Crow and Berggren 2014) found no statistical association between winning and losing groups and the use of this strategy in their policy debates. Merry (2015) found that when averaging individual tweets, overall, both the Brady Campaign and the National Rifle Association (NRA) leaned toward the angel shift; another (Leong 2015) found the winning coalition to use the devil shift. A cousin to the devil-angel shift is found in intentional (where the villain is engaging in willful nefarious action) and inadvertent (no one is at fault) causal mechanisms (McBeth et al. 2012). This narrative strategy remains of interest to NPF scholars, because results of this strategy’s use and effect are inconsistent.

Meso Hypothesis 5: Coalitional glue and policy beliefs. NPF scholarship has consistently found statistically significant differences between opposing interest groups and coalition use of policy beliefs (e.g., McBeth, Shanahan, and Jones 2005; Shanahan et al. 2013; McBeth, Lybecker, and Garner 2010). These same measures (i.e., coalition stability, strength, and cohesion over time) can also be used to assess intra- and intercoalition behavior and dynamics (Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011, 546–548). For example, Shanahan et al. (2013) found that intracoalition diversity of policy beliefs may be a way to expand coalition membership. Work by Kusko (2013) in her study of 1980s US foreign policy toward El Salvador demonstrated, using content analysis of policy narratives, that the religious right coalition in the United States had greater stability, strength, and cohesion and that this might have accounted for the coalition’s greater policy success compared to that of a more progressive religious coalition. Shanahan et al. (2013) content-analyzed policy narratives of policy actors involved in a wind energy controversy in Massachusetts. The research demonstrated the two coalitions had high levels of cohesion on two of three policy beliefs. Finally, McBeth, Shanahan, et al. (2010) showed that the wildlife activist group Buffalo Field Campaign was consistent in two of its three identified policy beliefs over a ten-year period.

Meso Hypothesis 7: Coalition membership. Shanahan et al. (2008) explore the role of the media as conduit of policy stakeholders or as a contributor in policy debates. This study helped determine that media do contribute to policy debates. Given the ability of media to disseminate messages to a wide audience, this finding has been important in identifying an important policy actor and set of policy narrative data in policy subsystems. Subsequent studies have confirmed this hypothesis (Peltomaa, Hilden, and Huttunen 2016; Crow and Lawlor 2016).

Meso Hypothesis 9: Role of narrative elements in policy communication. Crow and Lawlor (2016) have recently added this hypothesis to the set of mesolevel hypotheses. McBeth et al. (2012) previously referred to the collective use of narrative elements as “narrativity.” Using more traditional narrative data from public consumption documents, these authors, along with Crow and Berggren (2014), found an association with narrativity and policy success. However, this hypothesis remains untested with digital media such as Twitter.

Meso Hypothesis 10: Role of framing. Iyengar (1990) and Iyengar and Simon (1997) are the originators of the concepts of episodic (specific) and thematic (general) framing in the media. Crow and Lawlor (2016) have articulated a new hypothesis predicting the greater effectiveness of the use of thematic framing in the policy process. Shanahan et al. (2008) are early explorers of the use of these

framing techniques in media narratives, finding that both national and local media outlets employed thematic frames in their narrative (as measured by the casting of the victim), but local coverage used thematic framing at a statistically higher rate than the national media did.

MACROLEVEL NPF: GRAND NARRATIVES

Macrolevel narratives are “communal, historical narratives that are expansive enough to explain a variety of human events across time and place” (Danforth 2016, 584). These grand policy narratives create socially constructed realities that manifest as institutions, society, and cultural norms. Macrolevel policy narratives are relatively stable (e.g., “progress is good”) when compared to those at the microlevel and mesolevel, with mesolevel policy debates occurring within the larger macrolevel narratives (“let the market dictate progress” vs. “government needs to regulate to ensure progress”). However, macrolevel narratives can, and do, change over time and space, resulting in marked institutional and cultural shifts (e.g., knowledge comes from the divine to knowledge comes from observations). These macrolevel narratives nonetheless are composed of narrative elements, beliefs, and strategies. They may be found in historical events (education policy change post–World War II to open education for all; Veslkova and Beblavy 2014), historic debates (Decision of 1789; Cook 2014), and cultural orientations (cultural frames and institutional spaces; Ney 2014).

As indicated in Table 5.1, as a framework, the NPF conceptualizes macrolevel analyses through imported theories. For example, Lyotard’s (1984) meta-narrative is a story that functions to explain events, constructing meaning of events or ideas through shared cultural knowledge. Scott’s (1995, 2008) institutional theory identifies means by which institutional structures (e.g., rules, procedures) provide the sideboards for accepted social norms and behaviors. Cultural theory (Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky 1990) identifies four distinctive ways of life that can be leveraged to understand and research the relationship between macrolevel cultural and policy narratives (Ney 2014). Finally, analyzing a “relevant counterfactual” (Lukes 1974, 2005, 44–48) policy narrative allows researchers to home in on what policy narratives *did not* develop. Such research has the benefits of both revealing minority macropolicy narratives and illuminating preferences, values, and policy outputs that are simply not on the agenda (see Peterson and Jones 2016). Though we are not at all suggesting that researchers should limit macrolevel approaches to the theories we list here, these theoretical perspectives may serve as initial grounding that can facilitate macrolevel research addressing questions such as how such narratives are created, diffused, accepted, changed, and debunked over time and space.

LINKING MICRO-, MESO-, AND MACROLEVELS

Although each level of analysis provides rich areas for NPF research, there is a growing interest in understanding the connectedness between the macro-meso-micro levels. Interestingly, a road map as to how this might be accomplished can be found in one of the narrative studies that provided the impetus for the NPF. Published in *Policy Sciences* in 2004, “Public Opinion for Sale” (McBeth and Shanahan 2004) addresses the development of “wicked problems” in environmental policy subsystems where groups are unable to reframe disputes to work toward resolution.⁹ Whereas the 2004 article invokes the term *frames*, the NPF now tells us that what the authors really spoke to were the active policy narratives at all three levels of analysis. To avoid confusion, we use the term *policy narrative* in our discussion below, but, to be clear, the original 2004 article does not.

McBeth and Shanahan (2004, 319–320) argue that with intractable policy issues, “there is a general lack of theory addressing macro-level driving forces in the political system that influence how [policy narratives] develop among policy actors and the public at large.” If viewed retroactively through the NPF’s lens on the policy process, McBeth and Shanahan were attempting to identify the macrolevel narrative driving mesolevel coalitional politics. The macrolevel condition identified in their study as driving the policy process was consumerism. The authors argue that consumerism permeates not only American economic habits but also political habits as well. Potentially linking this consumerist macrolevel with mesolevel actors and coalitions, the authors tap the notion of “backwards loops” (Clemons and McBeth 2001) in political systems, where policy marketers (interest groups, the media, and elected officials) actively construct policy narratives and market them to the public. Providing a road map for how the macrolevel interacts with the mesolevel and how the mesolevel, in turn, interacts with the microlevel, the article goes on to demonstrate how policy marketers “sell public opinion” and how this marketing contributes to intractability. The authors conclude “public policy problems are defined by policy marketers not citizens” and “the ensuing policy solutions are related more to ephemeral lifestyle choices than they are to rational debate and political interests” (McBeth and Shanahan 2004, 328).

Exemplifying all three levels of analysis, the 2004 McBeth and Shanahan article provides a way to link the three levels of analysis in the NPF. Importantly, it also draws our attention to the central role of the policy marketer in shaping that opinion. As such, the policy marketer is potentially a critical link between micro- and mesolevel research. The 2010 variant of the NPF theorizes that the microlevel model of the individual is most relevant in terms of how policy narratives shape public opinion. However, Jones and McBeth (2010, 345) also note public opinion is likely to have limited and conditional effects on public policy.

Given that the majority of microlevel NPF scholarship has focused on the effect of policy narratives on public opinion (see Table 5.2), the NPF may be expending considerable energy to explain a relatively small slice of the variation in public policy processes, designs, and outcomes. Crow (2012) and Gray and Jones (2016), however, offer a potential link between the microlevel and mesolevel that may allow NPF researchers to extract more out of the microlevel than just studies of public opinion.

Crow (2012) suggests researchers examine how elite actors process and convey policy narratives. Such approaches could tap the NPF's *homo narrans* model of the individual to better understand mesolevel phenomena such as the behavior of policy marketers and other elites. In theory, a microlevel analysis is only required to focus on the individual as the unit of analysis and could rightfully pursue questions related to other actors in the policy process, not just the public. Correspondingly, the NPF at the mesolevel is concerned not only with group narratives but also with the use and interpretation of policy narratives by key *individual* elite players within a particular coalition and, more specifically, with how that use shapes coalition composition. This is an intriguing underdeveloped facet of NPF mesolevel research that presents opportunities to link microlevel findings related to narrative persuasion and cognition with mesolevel coalitional politics.

At least one study has already moved along this arc. Using qualitative semistructured interviews, Gray and Jones (2016) examine the policy narratives disseminated by elite actors in the campaign finance policy subsystem. Although mostly a descriptive study, this analysis of elite actors reveals several NPF-relevant concepts, including belief systems and narrative elements. Importantly, it also reminds us that although the NPF is empirical it is not necessarily quantitative. In fact, in some cases—maybe even the most important cases—the NPF needs to be qualitative and rely on traditional qualitative tools such as the interview, focus groups, and participant observation.

Finally, the NPF has also made some minor inroads in terms of validating findings from the microlevel at the mesolevel, albeit indirectly. Jones's work (2010, 2014a, 2014b) at the microlevel reveals that heroes were the driving force behind preferences and perceptions of risk related to climate change. The more individuals liked a hero in a story about climate change, the more likely they were to believe climate change was real, a threat, and the more willing they were to take action (Jones 2010, 2014b; Jones et al., forthcoming). Similarly, Shananhan et al. (2013), conducting a mesolevel content analysis of wind farm policy in Massachusetts, find that the winning coalition focused on hero-based stories and less on villains.

Finding the interconnections between the three levels of NPF analysis and working out contradictions are ongoing processes, ones that will benefit the NPF's attempt to scientifically study the role of policy narratives in the public policy process.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE NPF

Four substantive new directions have opened up for the NPF. The first is the prospect of NPF comparative analyses, with policy issue and theoretical concept comparisons across countries becoming a rich new direction of research. A second avenue is recent work that focuses on a deeper exploration of the use of evidence in NPF analyses. A third path follows the emergence of digital media as valid narrative data. Finally, we posit a new NPF hypothesis on policy change grounded in policy narrative learning. We discuss these in detail below.

Comparative Analysis

Comparative approaches tend to fall into two categories: country comparisons (e.g., case study comparing countries) and concept comparisons (e.g., comparison of policy process theory constructs in different contexts) (Orvis and Drogus 2014). Application of comparative public policy is nascent in NPF scholarship, but the central research question of NPF remains relevant when applied to a comparative context: What is the role of narratives in the policy process *in different regime contexts*? Whether scholarly pursuits focus on a country comparison of policies with policy narratives as the data for analysis or a comparison of the use of narrative elements and strategies in different policy contexts (such as comparing narratives across sectors in a single country or across levels of governance), NPF is a viable framework for comparative analysis.

Cross-country comparisons focus on understanding differences and similarities across regimes (Orvis and Drogus 2014). This comparative NPF approach is a growing field (Exadaklyos and Radaelli [2012] suggest it to researchers working on the politics of the European Union) and relevant for both diffusion-oriented research (e.g., how different countries respond to policy narrative inspired by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, European Union, or World Bank) and policy area research (e.g., how two structurally similar political systems differ in their narratives of a similar policy problem). At least one NPF study has conducted systematic cross-country comparison. O'Bryan, Dunlop, and Radaelli (2014) compare narratives on the Arab Spring of 2011–2012 as found in the hearings of the UK House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs. They deploy qualitative methodology to compare narrative structure, narrative learning, and narrative strategies in the two institutions across the Atlantic.

Given that the NPF is a relatively new and arguably developing theory of the policy process, a proliferation of internationally situated scholarly studies focus on the development and refinement of NPF concepts (narrative elements and strategies), with insights into the case itself being secondary to the theoretical

advancement. As such, concept comparisons focused on understanding diversity in the policy process (Gupta 2012; e.g., what is the role of policy narratives in the policy process in different countries?) are a ripe but uncharted area of research. For example, with the policy setting being India, Weible et al. (2016) suggest a set of minimal conditions to unambiguously determine the presence of a narrative, adding to the NPF concepts from network analysis (the ego-alter dyad) and identifying “beneficiaries” as a distinct type of actor. Turning to within-country comparisons, Schlauffer (2016) examines policy debates at the level of the Swiss cantons, advancing NPF’s previous use of evidence in narratives by discovering how evidence is refracted and manipulated in narratives of different coalitions.

This leads to empirically testable hypotheses on coalitions and evidence utilization in public controversies. In the United Kingdom, Lawton and Rudd (2014) identified an additional set of characters (entrepreneurs and charismatic experts) at the connection between the production of scientific evidence and policy decisions. Their work (and Schlauffer 2016) opens the door to a more intense dialogue between the NPF and the field of knowledge utilization. The case of nuclear power plant siting choices in India (Gupta, Ripberger, and Collins 2014) illuminates how narratives expand or contain the scope of conflict, thus providing NPF authors with propositions that can be tested again in other settings. In the case of the European Commission, the bureaucratic arm of the European Union, evidence and expertise are discursively portrayed in regulatory impact assessments, with the aim of defining roles, identity, and ultimately legitimacy of a bureaucracy in crisis. This points to connections with the wider field of bureaucratic behavior and the construction of reputation (Radaelli and Dunlop 2013). Importantly, the NPF seems well suited to comparative research (Linchbach and Zuckerman 2009) because the transportability of NPF concepts into other contexts and settings is by now established. Although the groundwork for the NPF has been laid in a variety of contexts, true concept comparative analyses using the NPF remain a ripe area of research. But we need more cross-country comparisons, comparisons of sectors within a single country, and narratives in the same policy sector across different countries.

Comparative studies are predominantly case studies, and as such lend themselves to what the NPF refers to as the mesolevel of analysis. For example, comparing policy actors’ narratives in different country contexts can shed light on the policy process for crosscutting policy issues such as climate change or immigration. Comparing narratives at different time periods may shed light on the role of narratives in time-sensitive episodes of policy change. One can argue that narratives evolve at a differential pace in the politics stream, the policy stream, and the problem stream of the Multiple Streams Framework (Kingdon 2003). However, NPF has well-developed microlevel propositions that, applied to comparative studies, could bring on a relatively underdeveloped genre of

microlevel comparative experimental studies. For example, comparing the effects of particularly constructed narratives on individuals in different countries could be meaningful in understanding macrolevel policy debates.

In sum, systematic comparisons of the role of narratives in different policy process contexts at different levels of analysis contribute to specific understandings of that context and more importantly to a generalized understanding of narratives in the policy process.

Evidence in Narratives

In the age of evidence-based decision making (Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative 2014), it is no surprise that many NPF studies include an examination of evidence (e.g., science and information statements) in policy narratives (for a comprehensive review of NPF studies and evidence, see Schlaufer 2016 and Smith-Walter et al. 2016). For example, Crow and Berggren (2014) examine the strategic use of science to support a narrative's policy preference. Gupta et al. (2014) find that winning groups use science in a way that demonstrates certainty in the status quo, whereas losing groups use science to show uncertainty about unwanted public policy. Nonnarrative science statements (i.e., no characters or policy preference) have been used as a control condition in experiments to test the effect of narrative on opinion (e.g., Jones 2014a; Shanahan et al. 2014). These studies have demonstrated the strategic use of science in policy narratives.

In their study of gun policy narratives disseminated by the NRA and the Brady Campaign, Smith-Walter et al. (2016) make an important advancement to the NPF's study of evidence by theoretically anchoring additional fine-scale categories of evidence within policy narratives: scientific studies, statistics, polls, *ipso dictum*, and legal. In a study of Swiss school policy debates, Schlaufer (2016) also advances the NPF's use of evidence in policy narratives by finding that evidence cannot be separated from the use of narrative elements such as setting, moral of the story, characters, and plot. Schlaufer (2016) challenges the NPF's tendency to treat evidence as an isolated narrative element and suggests focusing on the integration of evidence with other narrative elements to understand narrative effect. "Does the integration of evidence within different parts of a narrative make stories more or less convincing?" (Schlaufer 2016, 19). Whereas NPF studies focusing on evidence are proliferating, general conclusions about evidence within the NPF remain tentative.

Digital Media as Policy Narrative Data

NPF studies commonly derive policy narrative data from "public consumption documents"—the policy narratives disseminated by policy actors through newsletters, speeches, editorials, and sometimes media accounts (McBeth,

Shanahan, and Jones 2005). The proliferation of digital media and the relative ease at which these data can be collected have resulted in several mesolevel NPF studies that expressly explore whether policy narratives exist in these digital venues (e.g., YouTube, Twitter, blogs). Merry (2015) uses the NPF to study how the Brady Campaign and the NRA use social media to construct policy narratives. Using a nearly five-year time frame, Merry collected a total of 9,918 tweets from the two groups and used them in an innovative methodological way to effectively build a narrative. She examined tweets over a day or a week, finding this assessment of tweets leads to “more detailed narratives,” and suggests that this is “a better reflection of the way individuals receive and process information from social media” (Merry 2016, 16). Her data indicated that the Brady Campaign focused on victims of gun violence and employed more evidence than the NRA did (11). In another study using tweets, Gupta et al. (2016) use the NPF to study narrative elements and strategies in debates on Twitter over nuclear energy. Furthermore, the NPF has been combined with the theory of Schneider and Ingram (1993) to the study of YouTube videos (e.g., Lybecker et al. 2015). Additional social media outlets such as Facebook and Reddit seem likely candidates for future NPF studies.

Policy Change in the NPF: Policy Narrative Learning

As a public policy theory, the NPF has focused most successfully on understanding how policy processes function according to narrative effects and proliferation at the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels. But what about the policy outcomes that result from these processes? Many policy scholars point to policy learning as a way to understand policy change. Certainly, policy learning has long been argued to play an important role in the policy process (see Radaelli and Dunlop 2013; Hall, 1993; Hecl 1974; Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993; Heikkila and Gerlak 2013). For the NPF, “policy narrative learning” may be a way to begin linking policy processes to policy change.

Policy narrative learning occurs with the adoption of or convergence on a new narrative configuration (e.g., Roe’s 1994 reflexivity or Schon and Rein’s 1994 frame reflection). For example, one might argue that in the United States, states that have overturned their statutory bans on gay marriage have experienced policy narrative learning as the pro-gay marriage and anti-gay marriage narratives changed from combating each other as villains to sharing a common victim—that of sons, daughters, parents, friends, and relatives. There is at least some evidence that narratives can play a more powerful role influencing individual opinion compared with nonnarrative science statements (e.g., Hinyard and Kreuter 2007; Shanahan et al. 2014), and thus changes in underlying narratives may prompt policy learning (what we call policy narrative learning here) and hence policy change. To emphasize narrative learning as a potential driver of policy change we have removed the phrase “policy change and policy

outcomes” from mesolevel H_6 and offer a new NPF hypothesis focusing on policy change:

H_1 : *Policy narrative learning*: Sustained reconfigurations of narrative components within dominant policy narratives lead to policy change.

Unpacking and measuring the architecture and process involved with policy narrative learning and reliably linking such learning to policy change are not trivial endeavors.

CONCLUSION: IN THE END, THERE IS A NEW BEGINNING

The NPF seeks to answer questions about the role of policy narratives in the policy process. The NPF offers empirical measures of policy narratives (i.e., narrative elements and narrative strategies), which allows for hypothesis testing and perhaps prediction at some point in the future. Importantly, the NPF does not levy judgment on or seek to uncover the veracity of any specific policy narrative but rather operationalizes policy narratives in an empirical sense—capturing policy realities or what exists in the world as it is presented by people—and attempts to determine the effect.

In the last few years, we have seen a surge of policy process scholars take the lead on several new fronts for the NPF. NPF scholars have tested NPF hypotheses in different policy contexts (e.g., international, across substantive policy areas), critiqued and improved the NPF’s theoretical scaffolding, expanded data sources, employed different methodologies, linked levels of analysis, and conveyed practical applications. Such new explorations of the NPF represent an engaged and growing community of scholars working to take aim at the NPF’s central research question in innovative ways.

Although the NPF was developed and continues to flourish within the public policy process literature, the NPF is likely to be transportable to questions that cross interdisciplinary boundaries as well. For example, the NPF could be used to tackle some political science questions (e.g., narratives and campaigns; narratives and representation; narratives and institutional identity), some policy analysis questions (e.g., narratives and costs-benefits), and some governance questions (e.g., narratives and legitimacy claims; narratives and public opinion). The potential of the NPF to be applied in other areas of inquiry in policy and political science is ripe for fruitful collaborations and discoveries.

Having been developed over the better part of a decade, the NPF is reaching its teenage years. As such, we expect that we may come upon some disagreements among NPF scholars as we test and retest hypotheses, explore new directions in the science of the NPF, and investigate the portability of the NPF to other disciplines. But, like all scientific endeavors, work on the NPF is iterative; we must be patient. And, above all, we must be clear enough to move forward with the continued development of the NPF.

NOTES

1. Author ordering is the result of high intracoalition policy narrative cohesion. All authors contributed equally.

2. Indeed, the European Commission has a whole website dedicated to the “New Narrative for Europe”: http://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/new-narrative/index_en.htm.

3. Descriptions of NPF assumptions, conceptual definitions, three levels of analysis, and hypotheses also appear in Jones and McBeth (2010), Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth (2011), McBeth, Jones, and Shanahan (2014), Jones, McBeth, and Shanahan (2014), and Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth (2015). In the interest of consistency and clarity, the content across these publications has been kept as similar as possible, and in some cases where precision is essential the text is exactly the same. However, for the same purposes of precision and clarity, this chapter also explicitly updates the NPF and thus represents the most current theorizing of the NPF.

4. Since Jones and McBeth (2010), the NPF has used the terms *postpositivist* and *positivist*. This can be a confusing dichotomy because various contrasts are employed in other social sciences (e.g., Guba and Lincoln 1994 add critical theory and constructivism to the positivist and postpositivist discussion) and even in public policy (e.g., Smith and Larimer 2013 employ a rationalist and postpositivist distinction) to address issues of ontology and epistemology. Although we acknowledge public policy could leverage any number of categorical distinctions for these types of discussions (e.g., Moses and Knutsen’s 2012 distinctions of constructivism and naturalism), we slightly amend the NPF’s initial “positivist” nomenclature to “more positivist-oriented,” as Sabatier (2000, 137) himself claimed that the ACF was not classically positivist, acknowledging the “normative elements” in policy processes. For a detailed discussion of the NPF’s ontological and epistemological orientation, please see Jones and Radaelli (2015).

5. For a detailed account of the history of the NPF, see McBeth, Jones, and Shanahan (2014) in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 3rd edition, pp. 226–227 and McBeth (2014) in *The Science of Stories*, pp. xiii–xviii.

6. There has been some confusion on how the NPF invokes the term *structuralist*. By *structuralist*, we are referring to the structural approach to literary studies and *not* the structural approach depicted in classic social science discussions of structure and agency. See Jones and McBeth (2010), pp. 331–333 for a discussion of structuralism’s relationship with the NPF.

7. Note that the NPF originally conceived of causal mechanisms as a narrative element (i.e., Shanahan, Jones, and McBeth 2011 and Shanahan et al. 2013) but later reclassified causal mechanisms as a narrative strategy (Shanahan et al. 2014).

8. Previous mesolevel NPF theorizing exclusively employed *coalitions* as the unit of analysis. It is important to note that we now intentionally account for a wider variety of ways in which policy actors organize at the mesolevel. Thus, our reference to *policy actors* is intended to represent these various organizational configurations in the agora.

9. The use of the term *framing* demonstrates that in the early formative years of the NPF, the researchers were not yet fully cognizant of the differences between framing and policy narratives. Several reviewers over the years have also questioned whether policy narratives and policy framing were different. We argue that they are, but we also realize that internal inconsistencies within the NPF might have contributed to this misunderstanding.

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