

Narrative Approaches to Conflict Analysis

Conf 695

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Office Hours: Monday 2:00-4:00

I. Introduction

We are the stories we tell. If we follow the theoretical assumptions of social constructionism, identity, relationships, institutions, as well as history itself, are created in interactions, over time. These interactions themselves are enactments of meaning frameworks, meaning structures, organized as narratives. These narratives in turn, structure the dynamics of conflicts, as well as the dynamics of conflict resolution.

Understanding the narrative structures of meaning and narrative dynamics is critical to the analysis of conflict processes. This course is intended to provide participants with the analytic tools needed to conduct narrative analysis of conflicts, including those pertinent to research method and research design. As narrative approaches to conflict analysis are varied and a function of the multiple theoretical traditions which are available for narrative analysis, this course will function as a review of these theoretical traditions.

These traditions, mirroring the three dominant traditions in social science, include structural, functional and poststructural approaches to narrative analysis. The structural tradition of narrative analysis offers a framework for understanding narrative structures, including plots, character roles and themes. Analysis of narrative *structures* seeks to account for the component parts of narrative; this is particularly pertinent to understanding the features of conflict narratives. Attention to narrative *processes* begins with an analysis of how narratives function; research studies that attend to the functional analysis of narrative often are focused on the performance of narrative in specific cultural or situational contexts. Finally, the poststructural approach to narrative analysis moves toward a critical functional analysis of how power operates in specific contexts. Often these studies attend to processes how specific identities are contested and marginalized by dominant narratives. Studies of conflicts in this tradition contribute descriptions of how domination functions and suggests approaches to conflict resolution which address access the politics of narrative processes. This course offers a review of the theory and research on narrative, in these three domains, and works to connect these approaches to narrative analysis to research on conflicts.

Additionally, this course will offer students an opportunity to conduct research on conflict narratives. We will, as a group, conduct research on the immigration conflict in Manassas Virginia; as a class, we will design research projects, from the three domains of narrative theory, (structural, functional and poststructural), collect data,

and conduct analysis. At the end of the course, we will hold a conference where the results of the studies will be presented on May 1st.

Course Requirements:

In addition to the reading assignments for each class, and there is considerable reading, students will be expected to participate actively in a portion of the immigration research project. The course itself will provide the context in which the research design is formulated, and the research subjects/participants identified. All students will have an opportunity to collect data, via interviews, or texts, and participate in data analysis. Each student will be responsible for a paper on the findings from their research, and its implications for conflict analysis. As all students will be participating in a research project associated to the instructor's research, all students will be required to complete Human Subject training program required for all persons who work with human subjects.¹

<http://www.gmu.edu/research/ORSP/HumanTraining.html>

The following are the dates for completion of the research project:

- a) Research design (by the class, as a group): **Feb 23**²
 - a. There will be multiple research questions from which students can select.
 - b. By this deadline, students will identify the question, or the portion of the a set of questions which they would like to address.
- b) Designation of data collection, per student; **March 2**
 - a. Each student will designate the nature of the data they seek to collect, as a function of the question selected.
- c) Data Collection: by **April 13**
- d) Data Analysis: Final papers: **May 11**
 - a. Papers will be presented at a conference, at the end of a semester, on a date to be negotiated by the course participants, (likely May 1).

Participation in the course is critical; students are expected to complete the reading before each class, and contribute to discussions.

Grading

Students will be graded on the basis of both classroom participation, as well as the final research paper. Additionally, students will be required to meet the deadlines for the research project, as per the schedule above.

Participation: 25%

Final Paper: 75%

¹ Note: This is required since you will be collecting data that either you want to use in your research at a later date, or I will want to use, as part of my research project on immigration.

² By this date, students must have completed the HSRB on line training.

Honor Code Policy

Each student is expected to familiarize themselves with the Honor Code at George Mason. While collaboration on research design and the analysis of data is critical to this course, individual papers will be solely authored. Plagiarism of any kind will lead to an accusation to the Honor Committee at Mason. I will reserve the right to utilize software to assess student papers, to determine if there are portions that have been plagiarized from the internet.

Blackboard

This course will utilize Blackboard to both house documents pertinent to the course, as well as provide a site for discussion and collaboration. Students will be expected to have access to this site. Instructions for access will be shared on the first day of class.

Required Texts:

1. Bruner, J. (1990) *Acts of Meaning*, Harvard University Press: Boston, MA.
2. Modhaddam, F., Harre, R., Lee, N. (Eds.) (2008). *Global Conflict Resolution Through Positioning Analysis*. Springer: New York, New York.
3. Elliott, J. (2005). *Using Narrative in Social Research*. Sage: Los Angeles, CA.
4. Lara, M. (2007). *Narrating Evil*. Columbia University Press: New York.

Recommended:

1. Grubium, J. & Holstein, J. (2009). *Analyzing Narrative Reality*. Sage: Los Angeles, CA.

Topics:³

Introduction to Narrative

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| January 26 | Overview: The Narrative “Turn” Reflexivity and Narrative Analysis |
| February 2 | 1. Meaning and Narrative Bruner: <i>Acts of Meaning</i> (pp1-138) Bruner: “The Narrative Construction of Reality” 2. Immigration Conflict Flores: “Constructing Rhetorical Borders” Newton: “The Language of Immigration Control” |

Structural Approaches

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| February 9 | Structural Approaches to Narrative Research 1. Elliott: pp. 35-115 2. Shkedi: “ Narrative Survey” |
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³ Note: All reading assignments are due for the date at which they are listed, not the subsequent date.

- February 16** Structural Traditions in Narrative Analysis
1. Labov & Waletzky: “Narrative Analysis”
 2. Labov: “Some Further Steps in Narrative Analysis”
 3. Mishler: “Models of Narrative Analysis”
- February 23** Modeling Narrative
1. Taket: “Exploring the Use of Narrative as an Operational Research Method”
 2. Buthe: “Taking Temporality Seriously”
 3. Maines: “Information Pools and Radicalized Narrative Structures
 4. Mateas and Sengers: “Narrative Intelligence”
- Optional:**
1. Bauer et al: “Narrative Identity and Eudaimonic Well-Being”
- Functional Approaches**
- March 2** Positioning
1. Moghaddam et al: *Global Conflict* pp. 1-277
- March 16** Counter narratives
1. Bamberg: “Positioning with Davie Hogan”
 2. Shenhav: “Once Upon a Time There was a Nation”
 3. Harre & van Langenhove: “Varieties of Positioning”
 4. Entman: “Framing US Coverage of International News”
 5. Roe & Eeten: “Three--Not Two—Major Environmental Counternarratives to Globalization”
- March 23** Narrative and the Production of Identity
1. Porat: “Its Not Written Here, but This is What Happened”
 2. Archakis and Tzanne: “Narrative Positioning and the Construction of Situated Identities”
 3. Mueller: “Understanding Script-based Stories using Commonsense Reasoning”
 4. Graves: “Theorizing Collective Identity”
- March 30** Narrative Approaches to Mediation
1. Winslade: “Mediation with a Focus on Discursive Positioning”
 2. Hardy: “Mediation and Genre”
 3. Senehi: Constructive Storytelling”

Collective Stories

1. Mayer: "Narrative and Collective Action"
2. Hanninen: "A Model of Narrative Circulation"

Poststructural Approaches

- April 6** Narrative and Judgement
Lara: *Narrating Evil*
pp.1-114
- April 13** Narrative and Judgement (Cont'd)
Lara: pp.117-177
- April 20** Narrating the Other
1. Benhabib: From *Situating the Self*: "The Generalized and the Concrete Other"
 2. Raissiguier: "Narrating Transnational Subjects"
 3. Drexler: "History and liability in Ache"
- April 27** Interpellation and Narrative
1. Law: "On the Subject of the Object"
 2. Steinmetz: "Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives in Working Class Formation"
 3. Hajer: from *The Politics of Environmental Discourse*: "Discourse Analysis"
- May 4** Narrative Marginalization
1. Ahmed: "Afganistan's Reconstruction, Five Years Later"
 2. Coombes and Morgan: "Narrative Form and the Morality of Psychology's Gendering Stories"
 3. Sims: "Between the Millstones"
- May 11** Conclusion/Wrap