Narrative Mechanisms: Conditions of Narrative Influence

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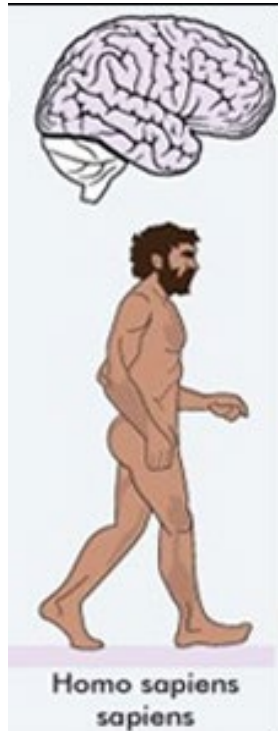NSF National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

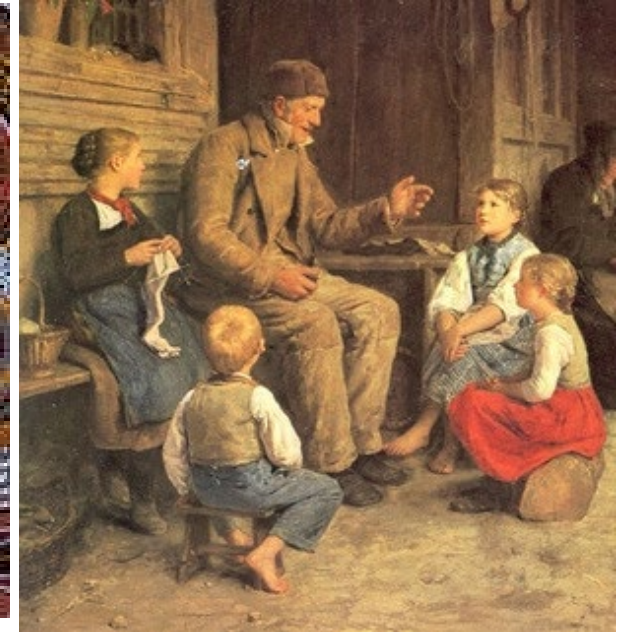# Why narratives matter

- ## Homo sapiens
  - Wise human; knowing person.

Homo sapiens sapiens

- ## Homo narrans
  - Story telling and story listening humans.

TIAS question

How can narratives stimulate engagement, learning, & action?

- individual

- collective

Communication process (simplified)
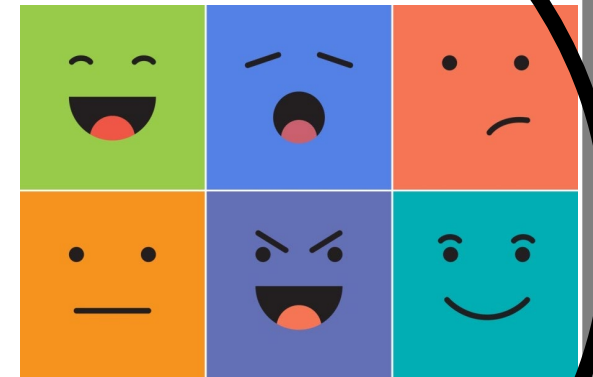
| Priors | Filter | Tell or Hear Stories | Affective Response |

Narrative transportation

A process by which the audience is absorbed into a story such that they are lifted out of their realities and actually *feel* the story experience.

Narrative mechanisms

Scientists model social, natural, and physical phenomena by identifying how specific mechanisms function to produce these phenomena. If persuasion is the phenomenon, what are the mechanisms in a narrative that are persuasive?

A look at three narrative mechanisms

- Characters (narrative structure)

- Images

- Frames (narrative strategy)

1. Characters: the vehicle for transportation

Definition
Problem framing
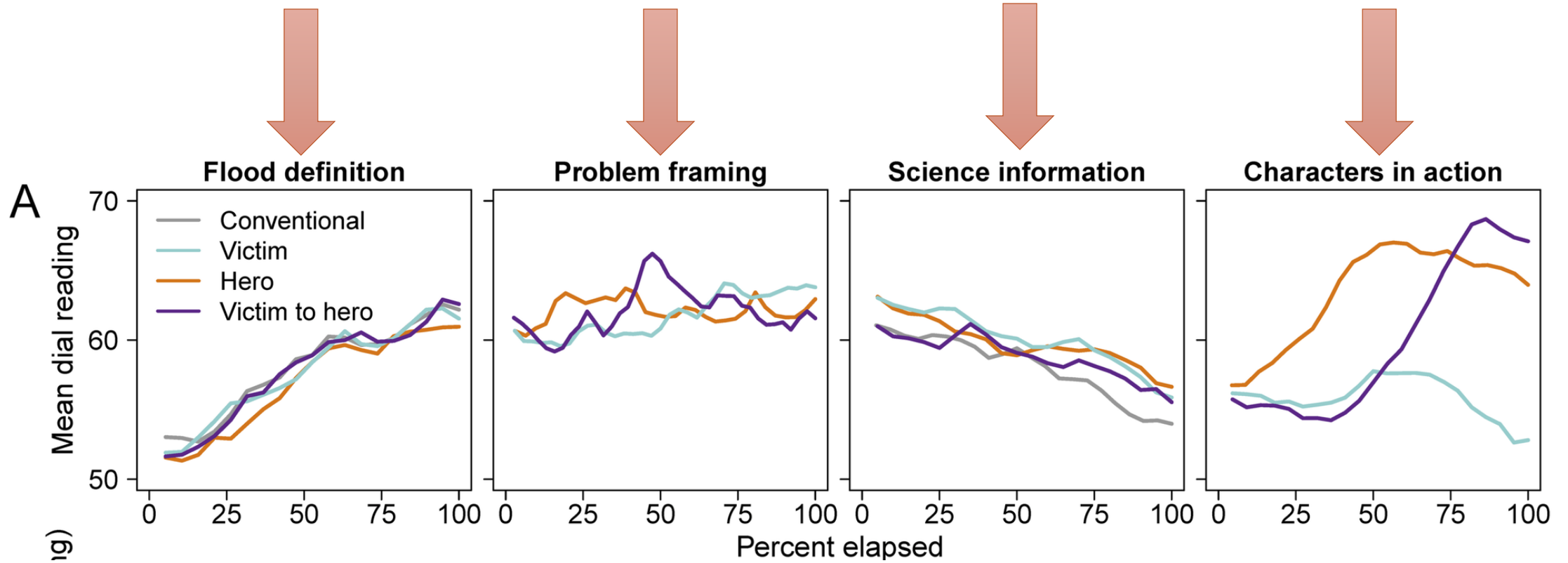Science
Characters in action

Flooding occurs when water flows over land that is usually dry. Flooding can result from rain, snowmelt, and high flows in waterways. Flooding can also result from waterways being blocked by debris or ice and from infrastructure failures. Many homeowners and businesses along the Yellowstone River are concerned with having to pay a lot of money for insurance based on the latest federal flood map. Yet, in Montana, good neighbors like you help when Yellowstone floodwaters rise. While many feel protected by the local dike, your house or your friend's house and the economy of local business could be vulnerable, as even the best-engineered solutions may not work. Under extreme flood conditions, the river could over-top, leaving properties damaged and companies hit with expensive repair costs. A flood large enough to qualify as a 100-year flood has a 1% chance of happening in any single year. Yet the chance of flooding also adds up over time. For example, a 100-year flood has a 26-percent chance of occurring in any 30-year period. Without preparation, your town could be lost, as it faces difficult and sad times. Working together with your local emergency responders, you can think about and begin to implement individual and community strategies before a disaster occurs.

1. Characters: the vehicle for transportation

Flood definition Problem framing Science information Characters in action

A

Mean dial reading

Conventional
Victim
Hero
Victim to hero

70
60
50

0 25 50 75 100   0 25 50 75 100   0 25 50 75 100   0 25 50 75 100

Percent elapsed
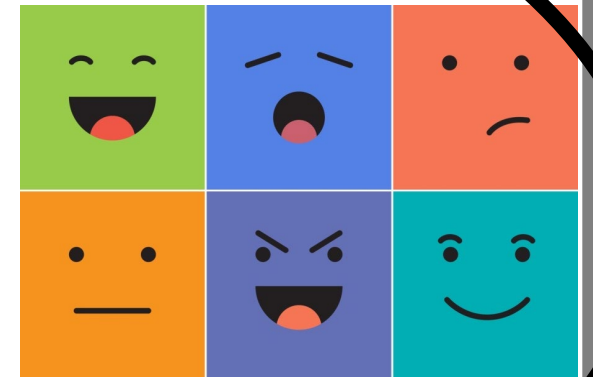
Communication process (simplified)
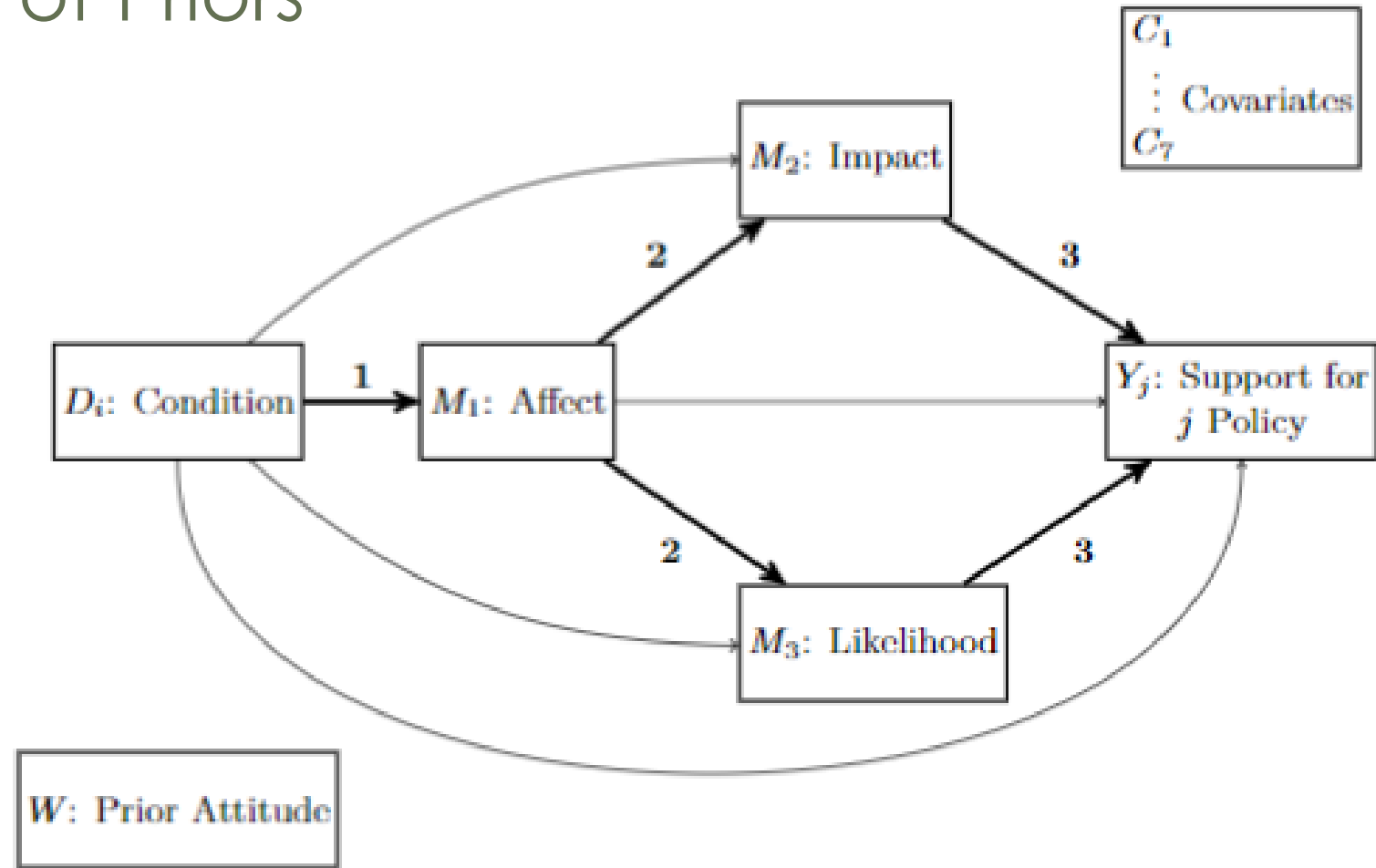

| Priors | Filter | Tell or Hear Stories | Affective Response |

The Role of Priors

2. The Power of Images

How measure "priors"?

"Please rate how you feel about flying foxes/bats on a feeling thermometer using a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable you feel toward bats. The lower the number, the colder or less favorable you feel. You can pick any number between 0 and 100."

The respondent was then instructed to click on a scale to indicate their selection or drag the slider to select their answer

Bats! They are innocent victims, these endangered flying mammals! Because of deforestation, they are losing their native habitat and forced to live closer to people. Flying foxes are then harassed with loud noise and smoke to get them to leave. They are hated for being who they are but have nowhere else to go! I wish they were protected. Why can't we save these poor bats?

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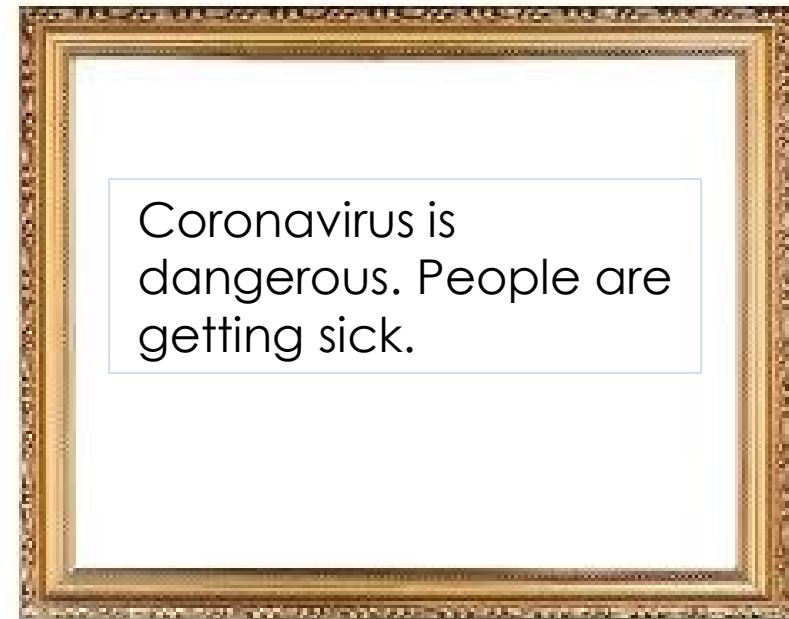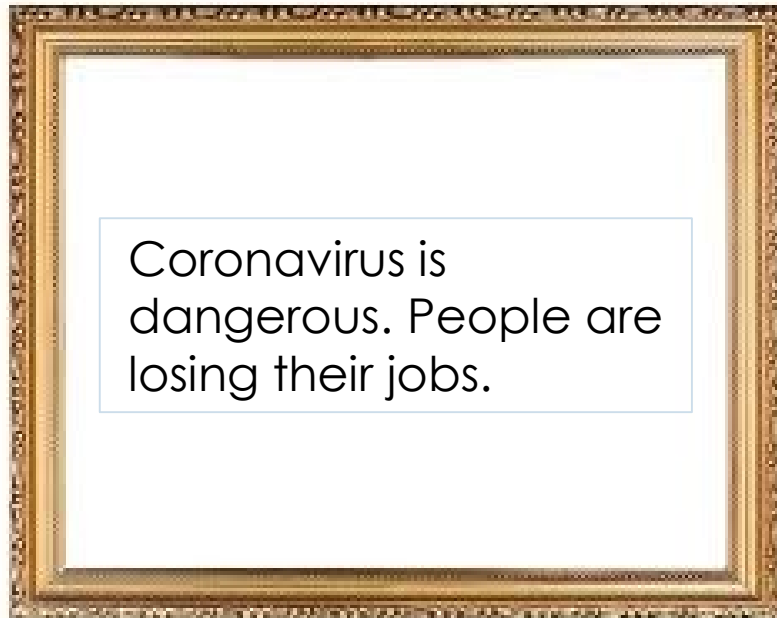
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Press Enter to post.

Fig. S6. Victim narrative condition with image

2. The power of images

- When priors are neutral
  - Images increase affect
  - Less perceptible effect on risk perceptions (impact and likelihood)
  - Narratives paired with images increased likelihood of engaging in action (mediated through affect)
- When priors are strong
  - Images dampen affect when receiving incongruent narrative; images increase affect when receiving congruent narrative
  - Images dampen (incongruent narrative)and increase risk perceptions (congruent narrative)
  - Narratives paired with images increased likelihood of engaging in action (mediated through risk perception)

3. Frames

- Frames define the problem.

  - Coronavirus = health issue

Coronavirus is dangerous. People are getting sick.

Coronavirus is dangerous. People are losing their jobs.

  - Coronavirus = economic issue

How can narratives stimulate engagement, learning, and action?

- Individual and collective levels
- Characters matter in narrative transportation
- Use of images with narratives increases engagement
- Priors may be influenced through narratives
- Framing important
- What else?
  - Venue
  - Causal mechanisms
  - Plot

Thank you!

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