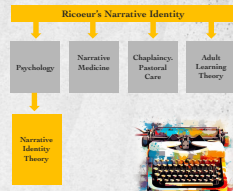


Narrative Identity Theory as a Framework for Interpreting Dyadic Encounters

1. Narrative Identity resonates across disciplines.

I encountered Paul Ricoeur's concept of "narrative identity" while studying narrative medicine, and I learned to imagine life as a "quest for narrative." Ricoeur's claim that stories find completion, not in their own texts but in their recipients, gave me a deeper sense of purpose as a healthcare chaplain and fresh respect for all caregiving dyads. I continued to research narrative identity and discovered Ricoeur's influence in four disciplines that guide me as I train future chaplains during their graduate studies: chaplaincy and pastoral care, adult learning theory, narrative medicine (of course), and psychology. Narrative identity theory (NIT), pioneered by Dan McAdams, started with Ricoeur's ideas and proliferated into a well-established psychological theory. The reflexive qualities of NIT allow students to examine their own internalized narratives while providing narrative-oriented care to others.



2. The components of Narrative Identity tell a story.

In NIT, a person's narrative identity is comprised of three parts: the memory of the past, the imagination of the future, and the amalgam of those two things in the present. Everyone has a narrative identity. We recollect the past and tell ourselves the story of the future without conscious attention. Appreciating these two narratives in the clinical dyad can lead to better support for patients and deeper self-understanding for caregivers.

Narrative Identity

Narrative identity is a person's internalized and evolving life story. The past and the future come together to create a coherent story about the present. Narrative identity is dynamic and narrative. We incorporate each day's experiences into our self-narrative.

The Imagined Future

Adults use the meaning of the reconstructed past to create a story of their future. The imagined story of future events informs the present creation of narrative identity.

The Reconstructed Past

Memory constitutes a key component of narrative identity. Remembering is hermeneutical, making meaning out of past events.



3. Narrative Identity Theory empowers the dyad.

Key claims from NIT inform the purpose and ethics of narrativity in the clinical dyad. The theory illuminates the power of the story-receiver, demonstrating that the exchange of story can have positive or negative outcomes.

The listening influences the telling.

When people reach out from "narrative wreckage" looking for story-receivers, they instantly sense how much burden of story-burden are willing to bear.

The exchange influences narrative identity for teller and listener.

As a story emerges within the dyad, the reconstructed past and imagined future inform a new iteration of narrative identity for both the story-teller and the story-receiver. As follows assess listeners, they may add, limit, or contest a story to match receivers' expectations.

Transformed meaning of self can emerge from the dyad.

Stories that include suffering have greater potential to impact narrative identity than light-hearted narratives. If the teller finds the listener willing to carry the weight of the story, the teller can experience some purpose in pain and greater flourishing in life.



4. The theory informs teaching and research.

NIT in Adult Education

As transformative learning theory has evolved, so scholars have incorporated Ricoeur's foundation of narrative identity and NIT's process of meaning-making into their research. When I integrate narrative concepts and methods while teaching future chaplains, I use the two theories' data-driven claims to:

- Provide a framework to discuss the power dynamics of narrative exchange in dyadic encounters.
- Validate the clinical contribution of student chaplains who sometimes describe their work as "just" listening and encourage them to value their own internalized narratives.
- Foster narrative reflection and meaning-making in clinical reporting and verbatim accounts of clinical encounters.

NIT Research Potential

Since you have read all the way to the end of this poster, perhaps you have ideas about incorporating NIT research or methods into your context. NIT scholars have operationalized psychometrically sound quantitative and qualitative assessment tools for the use of researchers who wish to build the corpus of NIT literature. Forum-reflexivity could:

- Investigate the coherence of internalized stories for student clinicians in multiple disciplines.
- Quantify the effect of narrativizing suffering and relating difficult experiences in compassionate story-receivers.
- Model narrative data propped through patients' stories of illness, hospitalization, and treatment.



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Thank you for visiting my poster. To talk about narrative identity-based research
or teaching, please email me: Eva.Bleeker@deaverseminary.edu



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