

**NationalJournalCommunicationsCouncil**

**Media  
University**

**AMU 401: Narrative Storytelling in the Digital Age**

# Finding the Human Hook in Your Organization's Story

January 30, 2015

# #SOTU: Storytelling of the Union

## Power of Stories Realized On the Largest of Political Stages

### A Story Well Told...

#### #SOTU2015

“...Seven years ago, Rebekah and Ben Erler of Minneapolis were newlyweds. She waited tables. He worked construction. Their first child, Jack, was on the way. They were young and in love in America, and it doesn’t get much better than that.

‘If only we had known,’ Rebekah wrote to me last spring, ‘what was about to happen to the housing and construction market.’

As the crisis worsened, Ben’s business dried up, so he took what jobs he could find, even if they kept him on the road for long stretches of time.

.....

‘We are a strong, tight-knit family who has made it through some very, hard times.’

America, Rebekah and Ben’s story is our story. They represent the millions who’ve worked hard and scrimped and sacrificed and retooled...”



### ...Galvanizes Recognition & Response

#### Both Positive



Storytelling with emotional appeal and damn good content = one hell of a speech. #SOTU



Several key points outlined, major concerns addressed, and some nice American storytelling. The 2015 #SOTU was solid as a rock.

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That speech told a story, brought it back to Rebekah at the end. Storytelling 101. #SOTU

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#### And Negative



I must say Obama’s speechwriter is masterful at the craft of storytelling, in this case fairy tales. #SOTU



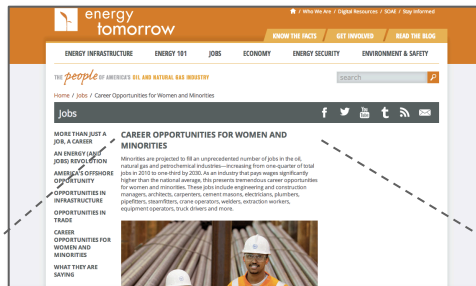
And yet again the power of the “one story” and storytelling regarding the “hardworking everyday American.” #SOTU #SOTU2015

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# Finding the Human Angle Can Prove Difficult

Policy Stories Typically Awash With Data

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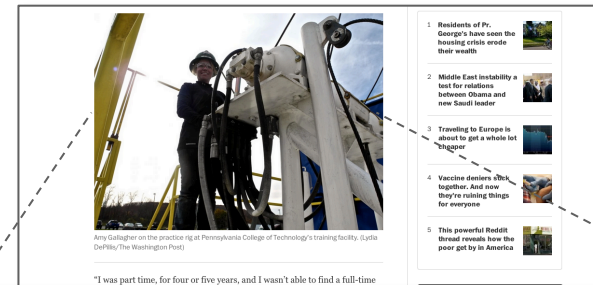
## Career Opportunities for Women and Minorities

*Minorities are projected to fill an unprecedented number of jobs in the oil, natural gas and petrochemical industries—increasing from one-quarter of total jobs in 2010 to one-third by 2030.*

### The “People of America’s Oil and Gas Industry...”

- Narrative highlights statistics about job growth and wage comparisons to other fields
- Visuals include stock photo and chart
- Quotes from industry experts offer no perspective from the employees

## The Washington Post



## What It's Like to Be the Only Woman in the Fracking Fields

*“I was part time, for four or five years, and I wasn’t able to find a full-time job. And it was frustrating, because I had a retail background, customer service. I was a benefits administrator, and I could not get an interview. It got to a point where I was like, ‘I’ve got to do something.’”*

### A Personal View of America’s Oil and Gas Industry

- Story is told in first-person, highlighting the character’s thoughts and memories
- Quotes aren’t entirely polished, allowing for a more authentic voice
- Images are candid and depict action

VS.

# Effective Policy Narratives Combine Detail and Data

Several Options for Putting a Human “Face” on an Issue

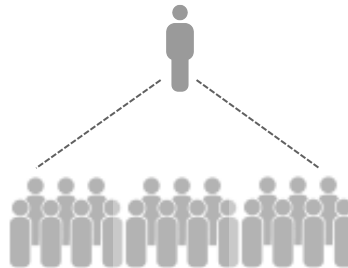
## The Story of One



- + Forges intense personal connection and motivation to act
- + Provides a simple narrative that is easier to produce and to follow

- Risks alienating more data-driven audiences

## The Story of One That Represents Many



## The Story of Many

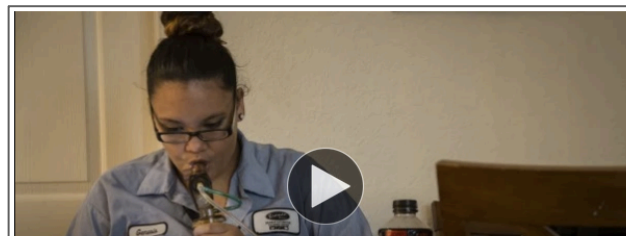


- + Allows for scale and use of data

- Diminishes ability to relate to issue at a personal level

- Creates paralysis by being too large a problem to solve

## Treating Chronic Illness with Cough Syrup: Life in the Coverage Gap (Washington Post)



### Detailing the Character

*Genesis Matos Rodriguez wakes at 6:30 a.m. and shuffles to the kitchen, where garlic ropes hang on beige walls. Air cleansers, her grandmother calls them. Her mom lays out Robitussin cough syrup and a glass of Alka-Seltzer, substitutes for the prescription pills they can no longer afford...*

### Providing the Context

*...She slipped into what policy analysts call the coverage gap. Three months before her 20th birthday, on an otherwise ordinary July day, the state declared Rodriguez independent and no longer eligible for Medicaid...Nearly 4 million Americans and 800,000 Floridians live in this limbo of patchwork health care: They are not eligible for Medicaid; they don't make enough money to afford ACA coverage.*