Strategic Storytelling:
Framing for More Effective Advocacy

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Alliance for Early Success Partner Summit
Omaha NE

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Examples of Our Work

• Harvard University Center on the Developing Child – how to translate the science of early childhood brain and biological development to inform sound policy

• AECF/KIDS COUNT Network – how to make the most powerful case for children’s issues

• National Human Services Assembly – how to build support for a range of social services and reframe the conversation about supporting healthy development across the lifespan

• American Public Health Association – how to talk about environmental health work and addressing environmental health disparities across communities

• Jacksonville Partnership for Child Health – cross-sector, inter-agency network working to build support for child mental health as a key to reducing disparities in child outcomes
Three guiding questions about strategic framing:

1. Why does framing matter?
2. Why is strategic framing so difficult?
3. What does framing look like in practice?
Why does framing matter?
...Because understanding is frame-dependent

The way you communicate shapes what people think and do

Because understanding is frame-dependent, the way you communicate shapes what people think and do.

N=6,000

The graph shows the support for evidence-based addiction policies in relation to control. The x-axis represents different attributes: Interdependence, Ingenuity, and Empathy. The y-axis represents policy support relative to control, ranging from -6 to 6.

- **Interdependence** has the highest support, with a value close to 6.
- **Ingenuity** shows moderate support, closer to 3.
- **Empathy** has the lowest support, close to -4.
...Because frames can unite fields and amplify effects

Climate and Health
Sanitation
Built Environments
Toxicology
Water Safety
Public Understanding
...Because frames can unite fields and amplify effects

Effectively Framed Core Story

Sticky Easily Shared

Climate and Health
Sanitation
Built Environments
Toxicology
Water Safety

EFFECTIVE FRAMING

Changed Public Understanding; Demand for Better Policies/Funding
...Because frames can make change

changes in communication

changes in discourse

changes in thinking

changes in policy
Changes in Communication

TOXIC STRESS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

2014 FRANKLIN COUNTY CHILDREN’S REPORT
How Toxic Stress Threatens Success
Changes in Discourse

The New York Times

The Opinion Pages

Opinionator

Protecting Children From Toxic Stress

By DAVID BORNSTEIN  OCTOBER 30, 2013 11:55 AM
Changes in Thinking

2002

Only 42% understood that infants can communicate before they learn to speak

Public unsure whether babies’ cries were ‘conscious manipulation’ or expressions of genuine need

2011

96% understood that infants can communicate before they learn to speak

85% understood that for infants, cries and signals indicate a genuine need for adult attention
CALIFORNIA SENATE PASSES RESOLUTION ASKING GOV TO LOOK AT INTERVENTION POLICIES TO ALLEVIATE "TOXIC STRESS" IN CHILDREN

Changes in Policy

CALIFORNIA

Changes in Policy

American Academy of Pediatrics

Technical Report
The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress

Abstract
Advances in fields of inquiry as diverse as neuroscience, molecular biology, genomics, developmental psychology, epidemiology, sociology, and economics are establishing an important paradigm shift in our un-

AFMC Primer on Biopsychosocial Approach to Addiction

The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada
Why is effective framing so difficult?
...Because You Have a Problem
Improving the CJ system is about supporting individuals and meeting needs so that people can better decisions.

You Say... They Think

Yes! And the best way to affect these decisions is to make punishment more severe across the board so people will think twice before deciding to break the law! One strike and you’re out...

Persistent stress can lead to mental health problems in children and have long term negative effects on developmental outcomes.

Sure, all people deserve respect, but if you’re one of those people who chose to break the law, why should you get the same rights as those of us who follow it?

Our current system denies immigrants their basic rights and makes them vulnerable to worker exploitation.
You Say...They Think

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CULTURE!

Sure, all people deserve respect, but if you’re one of those people who chose to break the law, why should you get the same rights as those of us who follow it?

Expert

Public
It’s NOT about Correcting Mistakes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Facts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The flu isn’t a serious disease.</td>
<td>Influenza (flu) is a serious disease of the nose, throat, and lungs, and it can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu. Most who die are 65 years and older. But small children less than 2 years old are as likely as those over 65 to have to go to the hospital because of the flu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The flu shot can cause the flu.</td>
<td>The flu shot cannot cause the flu. Some people get a little soreness or redness where they get the shot. It goes away in a day or two. Serious problems from the flu shot are very rare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The flu shot does not work.</td>
<td>Most of the time the flu shot will prevent the flu. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the flu shot has ranged from 70% to 90% when there is a good match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine. Getting the vaccine is your best protection against this disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The side effects are worse than the flu.</td>
<td>The worst side effect you’re likely to get from a shot is a sore arm. The nasal mist flu vaccine might cause nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat and cough. The risk of a severe allergic reaction is less than 1 in 4 million.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only older people need a flu vaccine.</td>
<td>Adults and children with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and kidney disease need to get a flu shot. Doctors also recommend children 6 months and older get a flu shot every year until their 5th birthday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You must get the flu vaccine before December.</td>
<td>Flu vaccine can be given before or during the flu season. The best time to get vaccinated is October or November. But you can get vaccinated in December or later.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- People misremembered the myths as true.
- Got worse over time.
- Attributed false information to the CDC.
It’s NOT (Just) About Resonance

26,000 primary age kids were admitted to hospital last year because of tooth decay caused by sugar.

#SugarRush

- judy swafford @judykarol · Sep 3
  and neglectful parents forgot that part.

- Love Lassi @LoveLassi1 · Sep 3
  @jamieoliver #SugarRush educate educate educate - cook home made food, drink water, take responsibility for your children’s health

- linda mackenzie @lindamackenzie5 · Sep 3
  @jamieoliver its impossible to omit sugar from kids diets! Fresh juice or not. What can we do?? I don’t take sugar as I hate sweet things.

- Lesley MacGregor @scoobs1969 · Sep 3
  @jamieoliver I refuse to give my son drinks which contain aspartame and sweeteners in them x

- Brushbaby @brushbabytweet · Sep 4
  @scoobs1969 & we can help with the toothbrushing! Take a look: brushbaby.co.uk

- Lisa Downes @downesrule · Sep 4
  @jamieoliver well done but good luck.. i've worked in special care dental services for 27 years we have over a year waiting list. Good luck
Opinions as Expectations

“People approach the world not as naïve, blank-slate receptacles who take in stimuli …in some independent and objective way, but rather as experienced and sophisticated veterans of perception who have stored their prior experiences as an organized mass. This prior experience then takes the form of expectations about the world, and in the vast majority of cases, the world, being a systematic place, confirms these expectations, saving the individual the trouble of figuring things out anew all the time.”

An example from our research on communicating with the public about early childhood development
Everyone is born with it— it’s in all of us
Use it or lose it

**WILLPOWER**
- No challenge or adversity is too great
- Effort explains individual differences
- Resilience is yours if you want it

**FAMILY BUBBLE**
- Parental behavior explains individual differences

**What’s in the swamp of...**

**Developmental Outcomes and Resilience**

**Resilience= Innate Substance**
- Everyone is born with it— it’s in all of us
- Use it or lose it

**Context Matters**
- Employment demands shape parental behaviors

**Black Box / Osmosis**
- ???
- Kids just develop by absorption

**Damage Done Is Damage Done**
SWAMP DROP!
Every child has the capability to learn how to become stronger from the inside out. Some boys and girls do need extra assistance though; they may be highly sensitive, lean toward the more negative, or "I can't do it" side of life, as well as get "stuck" in situations and feel that this is the worst ever. For example, like failing a math test. As a child's wise partner and guide, you have the incredibly important role to give them a "big picture" perspective, support them in ways that work for them in particular and realize that resilience, like confidence and inner strength, is merely a skill they need to learn to master.
What default models might this message trigger?

Resiliency, the ability to accept and overcome challenging or adverse circumstances, is a fundamental and natural characteristic which is essential to healthy development. Resiliency can be nurtured and supported by caring adults who take a strength-based approach to foster and empower a child’s efforts to cope with hardships.

In addition to helping a child develop self esteem and confidence, resiliency, along with other positive attributes and strengths, protects children from the risk factors in their environment. It has been shown that developing these protective factors is equally as important as eliminating or minimizing the risk factors. At times there can be an overemphasis on problem behavior, risk factors and pathology. This can divert the energy of caregivers from the development of a more strengths-based focus on fostering resilience and other protective factors.
Framing tools that help get messages through the Swamp

**CONTEXT** establishes the nature of the problem as either a public “issue” that concerns us all, or a private “trouble” affecting only those individuals experiencing the problem.

**VALUES**, or goals, to remind people of what’s at stake or a principle they hold that is connected to the issue.

**METAPHORS**, to place issues in people’s everyday action scenario, enhance their understanding of processes and mechanisms and increase agency.

**EXAMPLES**, to show process, anchor explanation and assist with recall and transmission.

**NARRATIVE**, to override people’s default patterns of expectation about a complex, abstract issue by substituting the expectations of a well known narrative structure.
Values:
enduring beliefs, which **orient** individuals’ attitudes and behavior (perceptual lenses)

- Shared Fate/Common Good
- Pragmatism
- Prevention
Support for ECD Policies

- Prosperity
- Ingenuity
- Prevention
- Vulnerability

* indicates significant support.
Prosperity

Your issue matters because:
it will contribute to collective, shared good fortune, both economic and social.

Strategic way to redirect public perceptions away from . . .

- Consumerism
- Family Bubble
- Individualism

Stronger frame effects than...

- “Children!” as Value
- Individual achievement or gain
- Self-sufficiency
- “Crisis!” as Value
 Millions of disadvantaged children in the U.S. do not have access to the resources they need to develop well—leaving them vulnerable to a life of hardship, poor health, and troubled relationships. Their diminished life prospects affect all of us. That’s why we need to invest in high-quality early childhood development programs and resources for low-income children.

Our nation’s future prosperity depends on the social and economic strength of all of our communities. That includes our future citizens’ ability to participate in the world as citizens, workers, and community leaders. An important means of securing our country’s collective future is investing in early childhood development programs now, in order to ensure that children in all of our communities have the resources they need to develop well.
"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."
Explanatory Metaphors: Carefully crafted, tested analogies

Brain Architecture

Brain Development ≈ Building/Architecture
A positive outcome is like a scale tipped to one side. It can be influenced by counterbalancing weights and adjusting the balance point.
Think of development as a scale--positive factors get put on one side and negative factors on the other--and the way that the scale tips is like the outcomes of development.
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• The scale can be counterbalanced such that good outcomes can still happen even when there is a lot of heavy “stuff” stacked on the negative side
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For every child, the fulcrum starts in a different place, which influences how the scale works and makes some scales easier to counterbalance than others.
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• For every child, the fulcrum starts in a different place, which influences how the scale works and makes some scales easier to counterbalance than others
• The fulcrum’s not set--it can slide based on experiences over time
Highly Effective in Inoculating Against...

Willpower:
scales don’t tip themselves

Family Bubble:
too much space to fill

Stress Does the Body Good:
negative weight never tips the scale positive

Determinism:
scales are dynamic
We can think of children’s development as a scale with a positive and a negative side. For a child to develop well, the scale needs to tip positively. To do that, we need to offload negative factors like neglect or poverty and stack positive ones like access to healthcare and supportive relationships. Building resiliency, or the ability to thrive even when faced with hardship, is like being able to move the fulcrum of the scale in order to make it easier to tip positive. That requires addressing both sides of the scale, not only the negative. Over time, the cumulative weight of positive factors in a child’s life makes it easier to tip the balance positively.
Imagine you’ve just met a local official at a “whine and cheese” reception, and she’s asked you about your efforts to support early childhood development. How could you use the Value *Shared Prosperity* or the Metaphor *Resilience Scale* to offer a brief explanation of why your work matters and how it contributes to improving child outcomes?

Spend three minutes crafting a sentence or two -- be sure to give the Value or Metaphor some “room to breathe.” When you have a draft, share it with the person next to you and discuss:

What words or phrases in your partner’s introduction reinforce the frame element she or he chose?
AVOID

It’s for the kids
This problem is entrenched
These data speak for themselves -- look how bad this is!
This is a problem for population x
Vulnerable child
PROBLEM! PROBLEM! PROBLEM!
solution?

ADVANCE

It’s for us all
Change is feasible, possible, practical
Because of our shared values, these data suggest we have a problem to solve
We all need a solution to this problem
Sensitive periods
problem
SOLUTION! SOLUTION! SOLUTION!
What does framing look like?
Three-year, multi-method, multi-funder research project

Experts’ Core Story
The Public’s Story
Advocate Communications
Social Norms & Possibilities
Which Reframes Work? (Values, Data, Metaphors)
Regular engagement with advocacy community

Documents > 500

\( n = 10,000 \) average Americans

6 Strategic Reports
What's in the swamp of . . .

Public Safety and Criminal Justice

Causes of Crime
Rational actor
"Rotten eggs"
Parents

Government
Responsible
Corrupt, wasteful

The System
Police
Corrupt individuals
The system works just fine

Race
Historical progress
Separate fates
Minorities violate self-makingness

Fairness
Uniform: sentencing needs to be consistent
Due process influenced by money and power
Contextual: punishment takes context into account

Context and Circumstances
Violence threshold
Context matters

Solutions
Fatalism
Affect decision calculus: ↑ surveillance, ↑ punishment
Find the dirty cops and get them out of the system
Framing problem: the criminal justice field’s stories leave the public to fill in too many cognitive holes

Causal Explanations

Child Development: 5%
Community Factors: 5%
Individual Factors: 4%
NO CAUSE MENTIONED: 86%
Framing problem: too many stories in the field makes identifying priorities difficult

- Cost-effici.
- Juvenile Just.
- Prisoner Serv.
- Fam. & Child. Support Svc
- Mass Incar.
- Victims’ Rights
- Racial Disparities
- Community Factors
- Sentencing Reform
- Violent Crime
- Immigration
- Death Penalty
- Non-violent Crime
- Class
- Police Misconduct
- Prosecutorial Misconduct
Framing solution: unify the field with a shared narrative

Effectively Framed
Core Story

Sticky
Easily Shared

Race Disparities
Death Penalty
Diversions and Alternatives
Juvenile Justice
System Accountability

Changed Public Understanding; Demand for Better Policies/Programs
A systems story helps the public focus on improving policies

**PRAGMATISM**
*Moves thinking away from:*
- Fatalism
- Individualism
- System works fine
- “Politics as usual”

**JUSTICE GEARS**
*Moves thinking away from:*
- Fairness = uniformity
- Essentialism
- Fatalism
- Moral judgment

**JUSTICE MAZE**
*Moves thinking away from:*
- “Rational actor” thinking
- Fatalism
- Individualism
- Moral judgment
A multistep dissemination campaign moves the story into the public sphere

FrameWorks research briefings, trainings, and toolkits build the field’s communications capacity

Please join FrameWorks Institute and the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School for a theory-to-practice working session:

Framing a Public Safety Reform Agenda: Applying Research-Based Strategies

Friday, May 2, 2014, 9:00 am - 4:30pm
University of California, Los Angeles
Advocates recognize that our tools and approach address their communications challenges.

“A multistep dissemination campaign moves the story into the public sphere.”

“This is the missing gap in our reform work!”

“FrameWorks gave us the approach we needed to get our juvenile reform through. It works!”

“Terrific mix of theory, robust findings, and practical application.”
Across issue areas, organizations adopt the reframed story

A multistep dissemination campaign moves the story into the public sphere

“Our justice system currently operates like a complex maze, with too many entry points and too few exits. As a result, many people enter jail—and stay in pretrial detention—unnecessarily, which increases their chances of getting stuck in the maze . . .”

“Reinvesting funds saved from a smaller criminal justice system into effective educational interventions for young people at risk of dropping out . . . is an achievable and practical next step . . .”

“District attorneys and sheriffs – both local, elected officials – hold the power to help California shift gears on criminal justice . . .”

“For 30 years, a ‘tough on crime’ mentality has held sway among lawmakers in every state and nationally, leaving in its wake an increasingly complex maze of punishment . . .”

“The current criminal justice system is not helping us get to where we need to be . . . we need to create better paths for people in our society . . .”
As the field coheres around shared frames, this master narrative enters public discourse through:

• Research reports

As the field coheres around shared frames, this master narrative enters public discourse through:

- Research reports
- Advocacy communications

ACLU of California’s outreach messaging

It’s time to shift gears on criminal justice

REGISTER TO VOTE BY MAY 19

Introducing 3DaysCount!

A campaign to apply commonsense solutions to pretrial justice challenges, making our country safer and ensuring the best possible outcomes for all.

Click to learn more

The Pretrial Justice Institute’s campaign to end cash bail
As the field coheres around shared frames, this master narrative enters public discourse

Through:

• Research reports
• Advocacy communications
• Coalition-based messaging

SACRAMENTO, CA — The Senate today, May 28, 2014, advanced the California Fair Sentencing Act (SB 1010), authored by Senator Holly Mitchell (D-Los Angeles), demonstrating that the state is ready for a smarter approach. After decades of being stuck in the prison gear, California is ready to move toward approaches that are effective, cost-effective and fairer.
As the field coheres around shared frames, this master narrative enters public discourse

Through:

- Research reports
- Advocacy communications
- Coalition-based messaging
- Legislative testimony

Our legal system . . . effectively channels people of color, notably African Americans, into a maze of incarceration and punishment that diminishes the life chances of individuals and devastates communities. We at the Institute have been focused on these issues since our inception ten years ago . . .

Charles Hamilton Houston Institute on Race and Justice at Harvard University, Testimony for the Joint Committee on the Judiciary On Solitary Confinement Reform, October 2015
As the field coheres around shared frames, this master narrative enters public discourse

Through:

- Research reports
- Advocacy communications
- Coalition-based messaging
- Legislative testimony
- Social media channels

National Research Council, 2015, incarceration rates

One Small Thing, 2015, women in the system
As the field coheres around shared frames, this master narrative enters public discourse

Through:

• Research reports
• Advocacy communications
• Coalition-based messaging
• Legislative testimony
• Social media channels
• News and opinion

“Mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses . . . and harsher sentences for juveniles created dead ends and false exits. . . . Even those who did manage to find a way out faced restrictions in housing, health care, employment and financial aid, limiting their chances to succeed on the outside, and pushing them back into the maze.”

The Boston Globe

This system is not only wasteful and deeply harmful, it is also woefully outdated. It is as if we have been riding on an old bike with balloon tires and one speed even though we have far more sophisticated vehicles at our disposal.
The coal burned to make electricity and the fuel burned by cars, buses and planes releases a huge amount of CO2 into the atmosphere. This CO2 creates a blanket around the earth. What do you think happens when the world is surrounded by a thick blanket? It becomes warmer!

“Nice Weather We’re Having” (2015)

From NASA to naptime, strategic framing is building public understanding of climate change

A blanket around the Earth

http://climate.nasa.gov/causes/
Thank you for your time!
“A talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change.”

-- Richard Rorty