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**Title:** Narrative Fragmentation Activity

**Time:** 30-45 minutes

This activity is intended to help students learn the importance of theory evaluation while teaching Fisher's Narrative Paradigm and the effect of fragmentation. Fisher's (1984) Narrative Paradigm has become a fixture in many communication and rhetorical theory classrooms. Although his theory still resonates millennials are challenging our assumptions about narrative coherence. McGee (1990) offers that postmodernity has subjected our texts to fragmentation. This is demonstrated through soundbites within the 24-hour news cycle and more recently in our use of social media. McGee (1990) believes that rhetors make discourse from scraps and pieces of evidence. These scraps "fly by so quickly that by the time you grasp the problem at stake, you seem to be dealing with yesterday's news..." (McGee, 1999; p. 287). The activity presents groups of students a video that depicts one individual's posts from various social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter). The posts are assembled chronologically while the only information provided is by the site's original graphic user interface. Students are then asked to write a narrative of the user. The narratives are then shared and discussed with the entire class. This exercise demonstrates to students how their generation challenges our accepted understanding of coherent narratives through their use of social media. After completing the activity, students should be more conscious of how communication theorists continuously evaluate the relevance of their theories. This activity furthermore illustrates the fluid nature of communication and their agency over the future character of communicative practices (e.g., meme culture).

**Rationale:**

Every semester since I have been teaching communication theory, it has been difficult to convey the importance of theory evaluation to our students. Although this activity was not the result of meditation on this problem, it has electrified the proverbial lightbulb in the student's heads nonetheless. Originally intended to introduce the concept of textual fragmentation to freshman-level students, this activity challenges students to reflect on their own digital culture. Through discussion, this reflection is leveraged to bring the conversation back to Narrative Paradigm and how their experience with the activity challenges the assumptions of Fisher's theory. As an activity in an introductory communication course at a technical school, this helps students understand how communication theory is living outside of controlled environments and distinct from the industrial workshops and chemistry laboratories they have been habituated to. Through this activity, communication theory becomes part of the mundane and everyday.

**Learning outcomes:**

Students will be able to understand the concept of textual fragmentation as it is exemplified by social media usage. By being presented with social media content similar to their own experiences, students will begin to identify textual fragments in other mediums (e.g., news). The discussion portion of this exercise will enable students to identify with their classmate's similar

experiences. Furthermore, students will be provided with a relatable example of theory evaluation as they reflect on their uncanny ability to assemble narratives from textual fragments. Through discussion of the activity, students will see the similarities between their narratives and begin challenging Narrative Paradigm's assumption of narrative coherence.

**Student Preparation:** Have students read Fisher's article "Narration as Human Communication Paradigm" prior to class.

**Agenda:**

1. Play the video for the activity and have them\* write down what they believe the narrative is. Video: <https://vimeo.com/185741023>
2. Have students share the narrative with their classmates.
3. Discuss fragmentation and how it challenges the Fisher's narrative paradigm. Observe that their generation is challenging communication theory.

Note\* this activity works best in teams

**References:**

Fisher, Walter R. 1984. "Narration as Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument. *Communication Monographs* 51: 1-22.

McGee, Michael Calvin. 1990. "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture." *Western Journal of Speech and Communication*, 54: 274-289.