THESIS

NARRATIVE LISTENING TO THE NARRATIVE LISTENERS

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ABSTRACT

NARRATIVE LISTENING TO THE NARRATIVE LISTENERS

When we engage in narrative listening, the purposeful act of attending to another's story, we are ideally a part of an agreement that a co-construction of a person's understanding of their own narrative identity is underway (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; McAdams, 2013). However, the act of narrative listening, as it is practiced in the world, is not simply to understand someone's story. From the doctor's office to a car share with a stranger, the possible aims might be to better serve, heal, align, and even debate, the teller. My research pursues how vocational listeners have infused this skill into their lives, why, and by what effect.

In developing an understanding of narrative listening, I was part of a team that created a podcast series wherein the interviewer conducts a session with a person whose vocation depends on their narrative listening skills (healers, leaders, servers, etc.).

For this thesis, I collected data from the seasons we recorded and conducted a reflexive textual analysis of the interview transcripts. This analysis focused on uncovering the patterns and nuances in how narrative listeners engage with stories across two vocations: healers and leaders. Key aspects of the analysis included identifying the different intentions behind listening—such as empathy, curiosity, and goal-oriented listening. By examining the methods and effects of narrative listening, this research enhances our understanding of how stories are received and co-constructed. Ultimately, the findings from this study support the grounded development of narrative listening theory, a framework that can be applied to improve communication practices across a wide range of fields.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract II

Acknowledgements II

List of tables vii

List of figures viii

INTRODUCTION 1

Goal and Research Questions 2

LITERATURE REVIEW 5

Narrative Identity Theory 5
Listening Theory 10
Combining Listening and Narrative Identity Theories 16
Research Questions 17

METHODS 19

Methodological Framework 20
Themes and Concepts 21
Instruments and Variables 25
Data Collection 25
Podcast and Thesis Connection 32

ANALYTICAL APPROACH 35

Analytical Procedures 36

FINDINGS 39

Emotional Competence 39
Active Engagement 48
Holistic Interest 56

DISCUSSION 61

CONCLUSION 67

Future Implications 67
Limitations 68

ABSTRACT 70

APPENDICES 79

Appendix A: IRB Materials 79
Appendix B: Storylistening Teaching Figures 84
Appendix C: Interviewer/Interviewee Tables 85
Appendix D: Storylisteners Podcast Semi-Structured Interview Questions 87
Appendix E: Storylisteners Podcast Season 1 Links 88

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Season 1 Interviewees and Interviewers..... 29
Table 2. Season 2 Interviewees and Interviewers..... 31

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Narrative listening "branching" technique 27
Figure 2. Storylisteners podcast diagram. 28

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is based on the philosophy that our stories find their meaning when others receive them. To define what I mean by story reception in this context, I introduce the idea of narrative listening. Narrative listening is an emerging theory that states that people who listen *for* narrative engage in an active co-construction of the storyteller's identity. The way they engage with the story through response, body language, and presence, gets to the core of *who* someone is, not *what* they are (Humphrey, 2023). Narrative listening is concerned with the receiver of the story, the listener, in an identity co-construction interaction. This thesis seeks to understand what a narrative listener does to strengthen the interaction and further develop the narrator's story of their identity.

To share a narrative of my own, I'll explain how I came to this research. In 2018, I was an undergraduate at Colorado State University, where I worked on an independent study with Dr. Michael Humphrey. We put together the study because we were both interested in narrative. Under his instruction, I read Adriana Cavarero's book *Relating Narratives* (2000), where she talks about the importance of a receiver, someone who can co-construct the life story with the teller. She writes, "…[*W]ho* he is, is the result of the life story others tell him…to complete this thesis, however, we must add a qualification: it is *others* who tell him *his* story" (Cavarero, 2000, p 46). This philosophy argues that selfhood is relational, that we relate to others through sharing our story, being recognized through the telling, and by the listener's recounting of the story (Cavarero, 2000). This philosophy argues that to know who we are, we need the reciprocity of others and that we cannot be fully self-determined.

While exploring this concept, I conducted workshops with colleagues about being the receiver of a story, about listening. Paired up, one would tell the other a story from their life. They had approximately 5 minutes to talk, timed. The listener would then have another 5 minutes to write notes and collect their thoughts before they would re-tell the story to the original orator. This practice helped both parties learn how to listen attentively for emotion, tension, and details, which inspired many to improve their listening skills in their relationships. Through this initial research, we began to see the impact of having the story told back accurately, and the power it invested in the relationship.

I graduated from the Journalism and Media Communications department in 2020 and started a career as a podcast producer for shows that were signed with our agency. It was fulfilling work, but when the company went under, as many start-ups do, I needed a new direction. Dr. Humphrey and I reconnected, and he offered that I return to CSU to advance the work on narrative. He had continued to run with it, and now there was an intentional focus on the listener. He was creating a new theory, narrative listening, and wanted support.

To do this, we decided to create the Storylisteners Podcast. The podcast was a way to connect with brilliant narrative listeners around the United States. Basically, we wanted to listen to the listeners. This research aims to contribute to the growing knowledge surrounding the junction of these fields, with an emphasis on the listener.

Goal and Research Questions

This study combines two theories: listening theory and narrative identity theory. The combination of the two seeks to understand how listeners listen *for* narrative. Narrative identity theory touches lightly on the idea of a collaborative construction of a person's life story (McAdams, 2019), with a few outliers (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Cavarero, 2000)

arguing for a tangible construction that takes place in a life storytelling interaction. Listening theory is spread across the many fields to which it is applied. In communication studies, there has been an application of listening theory to narrative identity, as studied by Pasupathi (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012; Pasupathi et al., 2016; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009; Pasupathi & Rich, 2005), that studies the impact on the storyteller. However, this study aims to take this further, researching how narrative listeners listen for narrative, and what has happened in their lives to push their listening motivations in this direction.

This study builds upon the conceptual framework of narrative listening by focusing on the listener's active role in the co-construction and collaboration of someone's life story. By analyzing interviews with vocational listeners in healing and leadership fields, this research uncovers the behaviors and strategies these listeners use to engage with narratives and support identity formation, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between narrative identity and listening theories.

To do this, listening felt like the best place to begin. In the first year of this degree, I produced two seasons of the Storylisteners podcast, which play a generous role in this study.

The podcast had many purposes, but the most valuable asset to this thesis was the raw interviews conducted before we edited, narrated, and published them. Dr. Humphrey and I, along with undergraduates, interviewed 24 narrative listeners who were recommended to us by people in their lives. The listeners told us about their interactions, from therapists helping their patients rewire their minds with ketamine, to veterinarians sharing how they listen to body language in an appointment, or even how administrators at the front desk lean into a story in their 2-minute interactions. Narrative listening isn't only listening for the big stories, it's also finding the

narrative in the small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2002). This thesis is the analysis of a sampling of the interviews conducted.

The goal of the analysis is to understand how the narrative listeners listen for narrative in their interactions, and what led them to this skill. Conducting thematic and narrative analysis allowed me to listen to the data the interview subjects gave us through many lenses. To understand this topic further, I was lead by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do narrative listeners listen *for* narrative?

RQ2: How do narrative listeners facilitate the co-construction of narrative identity?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The basis of this thesis is to create supporting evidence for the emerging narrative listening theory. The theory is meant to be a link between narrative identity theory within the narrative life story field, and a theory of listening as healing within the listening field in communications. Thus, an examination of both domains is necessary.

Narrative listening theory is concerned with what the listener is hearing as well as the story and identity of the teller, like a memoir they're co-writing. Listening theory dedicates its attention to the impacts of listening on the teller, and strategies of how the listener can be effective in their attempts.

Narrative Identity Theory

Narrative Identity theory argues that each person has a life story that is maintained as their identity and there are many definitions of this theory. One researcher that I will refer to repeatedly in this thesis, Dan McAdams, defines it as "...an identity, illuminating the values of an individual life. The personal myth is not a legend or fairy tale, but a sacred story that embodies personal truth" (McAdams, 1993, p. 34). Other definitions include narrative identity as the way people make sense of the world (Crowley, 2003).

Narrative identity theory research is often enacted through textual analysis (Adler et al., 2017; Craig & Huber, 2007; Georgakopoulou, 2015) of narrative identity interviews that aim to understand the speaker's story of their life (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; Humphrey, 2023; McAdams, n.d.-b; Rogers, 2007).

In many contexts, narrative identity theory studies the larger life story, also known as the "big story" (Bamberg, 2006; Cavarero, 2000; McAdams, 1993, 2013). This narrative can involve

everything from early childhood to the present moment, encapsulating the teller's lived experiences. It is an internalized, evolving story that each person invents to rationalize the individual they are and that they are becoming (McAdams, 2019). It is seen as a way to connect behaviors and past actions into patterns that explain who we are and why we are, and it can provide self-knowledge (Harrelson, 2016). Memory is constantly shifting the facts of the past (Harrelson, 2016; Singer & Conway, 2014) to play into our autobiographical reasoning which attempts to predict our future actions to keep us the protagonist of our narrative identity story (McAdams, 2019). This supports us in reasoning our way into sensemaking our position in the world and events around us (McAdams, 1993, 2013, 2019). There are many ideas surrounding narrative identity, and for this study, I employ McAdams' overarching theory of the topic while supplementing with Georgakopoulou's paradigm of small stories to explain smaller interactions and Cavarero's (2000) proposition of identity co-construction which will tie in my application of listening theory.

McAdams (1993, 2013, 2019) argues that we are not capable of crafting our personal myths until at least adolescence. This is because before adolescence, we are learning to be *actors* and *agents*, recognizing our sense of self and that we are responsible for our actions (1993) before we're able to become *authors* and put ourselves into the perspective of the world through autobiographical memory. He asserts that achieving "self-authorship" requires the ability to apply autobiographical reasoning to one's memories (McAdams, 2013, p. 279). In other words, it is necessary to reach a developmental stage where one can integrate context and meaning into episodic memories to make inferences about identity and life purpose. When individuals link memories through reasoning, they create causal sequences that help them draw conclusions about themselves and construct a coherent sense of self.

During this transition into early adulthood, we begin to explore ideological frameworks that serve as the foundation for our life narratives. This period marks the first time we provide context and meaning to our personal myths (1993, p. 37). McAdams sees this search for ideological answers as a crucial step in forming a solid identity foundation that will support the development of a personal myth throughout adulthood. After this initial foundation is established, he argues people continue to write their personal myths through distinct life episodes. These episodes, which reflect significant changes in one's life, are not evenly spaced and may have long intervals of stability between them. The events that drive these episodes can vary, such as getting married, experiencing the death of a loved one, or encountering more subtle changes like the first appearance of gray hair or the end of a friendship. The significance of these events is subjective and varies according to the individual, making each personal myth unique to its creator.

However, there's also space for analyzing the smaller moments that create a miniature version of one's identity. For this, discourse analyst Alexandra Georgakopoulou has developed a theory of Small Stories, a new paradigm for studying narrative identity. Georgakopoulou says the approach is intended for studying everyday life stories and identities, instead of the big stories often referred to in life narrative work. The small stories paradigm emphasizes brief, everyday interactions that contribute to, but do not fully establish, a person's narrative identity. These interactions are shaped by both social and discourse identities (Georgakopoulou, 2002), but they do not, on their own, create the complete story of the teller's life.

> Short-range stories of landmark events…have often been taken as more or less unmediated and transparent representations of the participants' subjectivities and from there as reflected back on their identities" (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p.378).

She defines small stories' interest in narratives as,

> [M]undane situations in order to create (and perpetrate) a sense of who they are. Narratives are thus focused upon not as tools for reflecting on (chunks of) lives, but as constructive means that are functional in the creation of characters in space and time…(Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 378).

Here, she begins to tap into the idea that narratives are often not only the construction of the person who lived through the moments of their lives but also the person hearing them recount the events. Her research provides a framework for examining identity construction in everyday interactions, and the approach bridges the gap between fine-grained micro-analysis and broader macro levels of identity formation (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

Collaboration in Narrative Identity Theory

Drawing on this foundation of the theory, I pivot from ideas of self-authorship of narrative identity to include ideas of narrative co-construction as an element of the story's formation. Within narrative identity theory, the formation of the narrative identity story itself is often indicated as a collaborative process, even if it is not explicitly named as such (Cavarero, 2000; Georgakopoulou, 2015; Goffman, 1959; McAdams, 1993).

At the beginning of Georgakopoulou's small stories research, she studied the socializing patterns of groups of young women on a Greek island. The research had "a focus on local context, interaction, and meaning-making as a joint achievement of people negotiating" (The Alan Turing Institute, 2017). Because the paradigm states that small stories are created through interactions, they can only be understood as such. Georgakopoulou looks at the "participants' interactional roles (e.g., questioner–answerer, speaker, [over]hearer, recipient, etc.) in relation to the ongoing production and trajectory of talk" (Georgakopoulou, 2002, p. 428). This then informs how they co-create a distinct identity in the conversation with the other participants. The paradigm is based on the idea that identity is constructed through interactions within these brief narrative moments. Her work consistently emphasizes the necessity of co-construction for the

theory's validity (Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2020; Georgakopoulou, 2002, 2006, 2015, 2017). Within her framework, the co-construction of identity is always possible, even when these identities emerge from short, everyday exchanges.

However, the most outspoken about the idea of narrative identity co-construction is Adriana Cavarero. Cavarero argues that an individual requires another to know their life story before they can recognize it as their own (Cavarero, 2000). In her book *Relating Narratives* (2000), she argues knowing one's life story is essential for identity formation, but paradoxically, this story can only be fully known by others (Cavarero, 2000). She shares that there is a fundamental human desire to hear one's unique story, which relationally generates identity (Curtis, 2002). Cavarero illustrates this concept through the example of Odysseus, who only truly recognizes himself upon hearing his life story from another when he accidentally hears it told by a storyteller while he is a disguised dinner party guest (Cavarero, 2000; Jaros, 2009). Cavarero's theory of the 'narratable self' challenges traditional philosophical approaches by emphasizing the uniqueness of each person's story (Cavarero, 2000). This also means, according to Cavarero's ideas of co-construction through the reception of the story, that one's life story may change depending on who tells it back to us because each person who retells our story will hear it through the lens of their biases based on their life experiences.

In Curtis' (2002) critiques of Cavarero's ideas of needing another to know our story, they state that "there is a persistent indelicacy at the heart of Cavarero's work that lobs off central features of the political condition. Our stories are always ineliminably our own *and* profoundly entangled with those of others similarly situated" (Curtis, 2002, p. 854). Narrative identity theory falls in line with this, often remarking that one's life story is consistently changing based on one's experiences (Ghaempanah & Khapova, 2020; McAdams, 1993; Ricœur, 1991).

Alongside Cavarero and Georgakopoulou's ideas of collaboration, existing literature lightly touches on the role of co-construction, just not from the listener of the story. McAdams (1993) wrote, "Identity is something of a collaboration between the person and the social world. The two are together responsible for the life story" (McAdams, 1993, p. 95). Here, he talks about the way young adults navigate their personal commitments with social identity commitments, toeing the line between wild rebellion and blind conformity (1993, p. 94). Years later (2019), he mentions the possibility of narrative identity being co-constructed by significant others, societal institutions, and cultural norms as a signal of psychosocial maturity in mid-life. Nonetheless, he talks less about the listener in a specific interaction and refers more to larger society as the co-constructor.

The theory, at its core, focuses on the teller, placing agency on their ownership of their life story (Gschwandtner, 2016; Harrelson, 2016; Rapport & Wainwright, 2004; Singer & Conway, 2014). While narrative identity theory does not state against the involvement of the story's listener having an impact on the formation of the narrative, it likewise does not argue for the listener's impact. Since I am concerned with the receiver, the field of listening is critical to include.

Listening Theory

Listening theory, as suggested by the name, is a field of study that focuses on the receiver in a communication interaction. In a history of listening theory, Bodie et al. (2008) explain that in early listening research, scholars defined listening as a complex information-processing system, that looked at perception, response processing, and response selection. This helped clarify simple retention interactions but stopped at being able to explain the acquisition of information. From here, the model was updated to include more multidimensional facets of

listening. This included interpretations, storage, and recalling information. Finally, this made way to a more current definition of listening, which looks at discourse processing and focuses on how a person selects information, organizes and interprets the information based on their experiences, motivations, and cognitive strategies, and how they integrate the message and respond. This has been tested at large on written discourse and has helped investigators identify key components that are related to listening such as attention/perception, decoding/interpretation, working memory, long-term/schematic memory, and response preparation (Bodie et al., 2008).

Researchers have noted the need for theories that can be empirically tested and accompanied by reliable measures for assessing cognitive listening processes (Bodie, 2009; Janusik, 2007). To address these challenges, Wolvin (2010) introduced an engagement theory of listening, integrating physiological, psychological, sociological, and communicative perspectives. While it began as an educational listening theory, he has recommended it be applied in broader listening fields to explain the phenomenon of how listeners engage in conversation (Wolvin, 2010). However, listening remains less studied than message production within communication research (Macnamara, 2019; Wolvin, 2010). To fill this gap, researchers have suggested grounding listening theories in empirical evidence and evaluating them against specific criteria (Bodie, 2009; Wolvin, 2010).

The closest research to bridging the gap between listening in communication studies and narrative identity research is dialogic listening (Parks, 2019). Dialogic listening refers to a holistic view of the speaker, requiring the listener to “listen between the lines” to what the speaker may be conveying. This technique relies on a curiosity and care for the speaker and is often paired with an ethic of care (Parks, 2019; Gilligan, 1995). Parks (2019) writes about the

importance of dropping down to a level of listening to not only the words of the speaker, but the meaning of their larger life story.

> [W]hen we call to others to listen and they embody certain language choices and nonverbal behaviors, we must open ourselves to the meanings that we can share together and not cling dogmatically to our own cognitive constructs or preferred methods of invitation (Parks, 2019, p.10).

In addition to dialogic listening as the application of listening theory to this research, listening norms in the two fields studied, healing and leadership, were examined as well.

Listening Norms

Listening-as-healing norms. "Listening is likely the most ancient of healthcare skills" (Shipley, 2010. p.125). Telling our stories of trauma, crisis, or violence has been shown to be healing (McAdams, 2013; Pasupathi et al., 2016) and there are a few key skills that have been identified for healers and well-being (Berry, 1993; Czerny & Godat, 2021; Gilligan & Eddy, 2017; Hovey & Paul, 2007; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Pasupathi et al., 2016; Rogers, 2007; Shipley, 2010). In Shipley's (2010) literature analysis of the concept of listening, they found that successful listeners in the medical field emphasize empathy, engagement, and reflection. When broken down, these concepts help foster an empathetic connection with patients (Hovey & Paul, 2007; Shipley, 2010).

Empathy is critical to understanding the perceptions of another's lived experiences, as it can signal to the speaker that the listener is engaged and present in the interaction (Josselson, 2007; Shipley, 2010). Likewise, engagement can be shown through verbal and non-verbal responses to the message being conveyed (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). "This attribute of communication involves understanding the whole person and recognizing that each patient is a unique individual with different beliefs, lifestyles, and cultures" (Shipley, 2010). Hasty judgment, advice, or discounting of information can show poor listening skills (Berry, 1993;

Brownell, 2008), while strong listeners ensure they fully understand the speaker before engaging (Brownell, 1994). Reflection can be shown through summarization, feedback, paraphrasing, or restating (Brownell, 1990; Pasupathi et al., 2016; Shipley, 2010) to confirm whether the listener understood the message or misinterpreted the message.

Additionally, the literature suggests strong listeners in a healing industry can be assessed by their unobservable behavior (i.e., comprehension), observable behaviors (i.e., body language), and finally, the speakers' perceptions and evaluations of them (i.e., if they felt listened to) (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Shipley, 2010). Kluger and Itzchakov (2022) describe unobservable behaviors as the intention with which the listener attends to the speaker's message, and how well they succeed in adopting the speaker's cognitive and emotional framework. An example of this is listening with empathy. They describe observable behaviors as paraphrasing, reflecting values and feelings they hear, asking relevant questions, and asking for clarification when needed. Surprisingly enough, listening theory states that in many cases, reacting to the story in any way, positive or negative, generic or specific (Czerny & Godat, 2021), is more influential on the teller than if the listener does not acknowledge what has been said at all (Pasupathi & Rich, 2005). Following this, Kluger and Itzchakov suggest that the speaker's perception of the listener holds weight in the evaluation of the listener's skills. Speakers may combine the listener's behaviors and how they felt to form a holistic impression of the interaction (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).

But this brings up a critical point when we examine the role of the listener. There are very few life stories that are only positive memories (Pasupathi et al., 2016). The listener will likely be confronted with some difficult recounting or see the teller become triggered. When that happens, the theory urges listeners to remember that feelings of distress or grief that can emanate may be vital for their integration and growth (Josselson, 2007). Life events may be retold in

varying ways based on the context of their environment. Because of this, a level of reflexivity is necessary for the listener to adequately hold space for what's being shared with them. This can be done by creating an open space, sometimes referred to as a "safe space," where the listener understands their own internal biases and how those affect their interpretations of the story being told (Josselson, 2007; Pasupathi et al., 2016). Listeners can cultivate this space when they do reflexive work to understand how they interpret the stories of others by examining their biases and the power structures in place (Berry, 1993; Pasupathi et al., 2016; Rogers, 2007). "Above all, this interpersonal dynamic requires that we be good containers, that we can listen empathically but nonjudgmentally, feeling from within the participant's emotional space" (Josselson, 2007, p. 12).

The ethics of care paradigm also includes listening theory as a core tenet of their epistemology. The paradigm highly regards listening as an act of caring and a transformative ritual (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017). This claim is supported by Pasuthapi (2015), who argues that listening "is how we emerge as joint creations of our own and others' shaping" (Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015, p. 68).

Listening-as-leadership norms. Pivoting to listening in leadership, we can see how people's listening can take on different forms based on their intentions (Brownell, 1990, 1994; Czerny & Godat, 2021; Kluger & Zaidel, 2013). Research on leaders in the hospitality management field (Brownell, 1990, 1994, 2008) has contributed to a behavioral model of listening, HURIER, that I will use as a reference throughout my analysis. HURIER stands for 1) Hearing, 2) Understanding, 3) Remembering, 4) Interpreting, 5) Evaluating, and 6) Responding (Brownell, 2008).

The first step, hearing, refers to the act of focusing attention on the speaker and the messages they're trying to get across (Gilligan, 1995; Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015). From here, the next step is understanding, which is processing the layers of meaning that are conveyed in the message (Brownell, 2008; Czerny & Godat, 2021). Next is remembering, which is closely linked to studies on listening retention (Worthington & Bodie, 2017) and is mentioned in this study for its hospitality management implications of remembering guest information and employee needs (Brownell, 2008). Following the element of remembering is interpreting, which is used with a cultural lens in this study and has also been applied in feminist theory regarding listening as a part of the ethic of care paradigm (Gilligan, 1995). Brownell (2008) has applied this stage to diverse workforces and nonverbal exchanges as well. Interpreting is a combination of applying self-reflexivity (Berry, 1993) to a message that they're decoding at a surface level while considering meanings, intentions, and motives (Wolvin, 2010). Listeners can interpret both verbal and non-verbal messages from the teller in an interaction. After interpreting the message, leaders are expected to evaluate what they've listened to, exerting integrity and acting as gatekeepers to filter information (Brownell, 2008; Worthington & Bodie, 2017).

Subsequently, the final action successful leaders take when listening is responding. This step is a cumulation of those before, and what leaders choose to contribute when they reply can facilitate or shut down employee learning, dialogue, and sharing (Brownell, 2008; Worthington & Bodie, 2017). The response stage is a crucial element of the communication interaction, as it's the chance for the listener to provide feedback that shows they listened empathetically and interpreted the message accurately (Wolvin, 2010). This is additionally the stage where the speaker can judge the quality of their counterpart's listening skills (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).

The responding stage also falls in line with Cavarero's ideas of the co-construction of a narrative identity story (Cavarero, 2000). Once the listener has received the teller's story, it's how they relay it back to the speaker that will inform the collaboration of the story that's being constructed in the conversation.

Combining Listening and Narrative Identity Theories

Throughout each theory, there are a few overlaps like in the ideas of co-construction of narrative identity and the healing and empowering elements of having a story received by an attentive listener. Narrative listening theory aims to combine these, placing emphasis on the listening skills necessary for "listening the narrative out of someone" (Humphrey, 2023).

In narrative identity theory, the notion of co-construction is used in a few different facets, some naming it as a tangible interaction between two people (Cavarero, 2000; Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2020), while others see this collaboration as a larger phenomenon that takes place between the teller and the world around them (McAdams, 1993). However, in these studies, there's little research on the power of the second party in the interaction, the listener. In listening theory, researchers like Pasupathi (2016) have spent great amounts of time researching the impact of listening to traumatic stories. In their research, they found that narratives can change based on the situation in which they tell them, the person to whom they tell them, and the intersecting identities that are at play when they tell them (Pasupathi, 2016).

> Moreover, the very act of narrating changes the way the teller (and listener) subsequently understands the event (Pasupathi, 2001). Thus, narratives are always evolving, both process and product of ongoing interactions. There is no one "right" narrative that captures "what really happened" but always multiple narratives and these multiplicities exist at various levels, intrapersonally, interpersonally, and collectively (Pasupathi, 2016, p. 49).

Pasupathi's research on listening effects comes as close to narrative listening theory that I've found thus far, where she talks about the impact of strong listening on storied selves,

straddling the line between narrative identity theory and listening theory in many of her papers (Pasupathi et al., 2016; Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015; Pasupathi & Rich, 2005). Her studies demonstrate how responsive friends and romantic partners can help scaffold more meaningful and interpretive narratives in late adolescents and young adults (Jennings et al., 2014; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). Listeners play a key role in shaping narratives by influencing both the decision to share an experience and how it is told, ultimately affecting the story's content, structure, and performance (Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015).

My exploration of narrative listening leans on the theoretical musings of Cavarero, supported by Pasupathi's findings, but places a heavier emphasis on what narrative listeners do to listen *for narrative* in an interaction. Using the foundation Pasupathi and other theorists have set, which shows that narrative identity theory and listening theory can work together, I analyzed transcripts from listeners in the healing and leadership fields. The interview questions (see Appendix D) we approached the listeners with were based on narrative identity theory, asking questions that sought the details of their own lives. We did this to help understand the underlying experiences that may have led to the way they now listen for narrative. Layered on top of these were direct questions concerned with their perceived listening behaviors and the effects they'd noticed.

Research Questions

Narrative listening is positioned between narrative identity theory and listening theory in communication studies because it helps us to understand what the narrative listeners are doing and what's led them to develop these skills that have such an instrumental impact on the teller. Listening theory emphasizes the effects of attentive listening but often lacks a detailed exploration of the underlying motivations behind it. Narrative identity shows us how we puzzle

together events in our lives to create a personal story but doesn't look at the process that takes place when we share it with another. This gap led me to ask the following research questions.

RQ1: How do narrative listeners listen *for* narrative?

RQ2: How do narrative listeners facilitate the co-construction of narrative identity?

METHODS

The methodology for this project is a reflexive, thematic, iterative, textual analysis of interviews conducted with narrative listeners. The objective of the analysis was to further understand how narrative listeners listen *for* narrative, and, in the process, how they participate in a co-construction of the storyteller's narrative identity.

When deciding the best way to learn from the listeners, Dr. Humphrey and I knew our best option would be to listen to them. So, the two of us created the Storylisteners Podcast, an effective way to gather experts together. We conducted purposive sampling to find guests who are known as "great listeners," as referred to us by their communities. Along with a team of undergraduate interviewers, we conducted in-depth interviews with these great listeners and edited the interviews into podcast episodes that were released weekly. For this thesis, I conducted a purposive sampling of the podcast seasons to select 8 episodes to analyze.

The Storylisteners podcast had approximately 32 people involved, between an independent study of five undergraduates who participated in creating the first season, an 18-person class dedicated to producing the second season, and a cohort of 7 undergraduates who worked to code the first season, alongside Dr. Humphrey and myself. These actors will be introduced further in the section.

Because the groups of students all partook in the creation of the podcast, it's important to note the differentiation of their work and what research I conducted separately for this thesis. The undergraduate independent study and class were responsible for conducting the interviews that I sampled from, and for creating extra content that went into the actual podcast creation and publication. In addition to leading and participating in conducting the interviews, I supervised

and partook in the cohort of coders who were responsible for establishing the initial codebook using reflexive thematic analysis. The extent of their participation will be outlined further below.

Alone, I used this codebook as a tool for coding the interviews sampled from the second season to accompany the interviews from the first season that were coded in the previous academic year. From there, I analyzed the sampled interviews based on this coding.

Methodological Framework

I chose qualitative content analysis (QCA) as my evaluation method for a few reasons. With QCA, there's flexibility to create both deductive and inductive categories when the themes fit into a priori classifications, like those set by McAdams and Georgakopoulou (Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2020; McAdams, n.d.-a). This allows the researcher to watch new themes emerge once they are presented simultaneously and consistently.

Within QCA, thematic analysis aims to understand the patterns of meaning-making throughout the coding process. Because this is inductive work at its core, thematic analysis helped uncover the repetitive themes.

> Overall, TA [thematic analysis] does a good job at systematically mapping and organizing the topics within a body of texts, thus providing a holistic view of what is in this body of texts and how to organize it to answer a research question (Alejandro & Zhao, 2023, p. 4).

Finally, I used narrative analysis to understand the positionality of the interviews. Looking at the stories being told helped with understanding how the interviewee positions their experiences in context.

Thematic and narrative analysis have proven to be effective methodologies for researchers pioneering new fields within the discipline, such as Georgakopoulou (2020). In her research on small stories, she notes that "since its inception, empirical work has added nuance to the general descriptor of small stories, bringing to the fore specific genres of small stories that

occur in specific contexts and that ought to be included in the narrative analytic lens" (Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2020, p. 96). This approach, as exemplified by scholars in life narrative studies (Albrechtslund, 2010; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2020; McAdams, 1993), demonstrates that incorporating Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) into narrative analysis provides a richer contextual background to the stories presented in the text.

I will continue to use Georgakopoulou's research as a primary example due to the alignment of our objectives in developing a new theoretical framework. She employs narrative analysis to examine identities using a specific set of predetermined codes, which focus on understanding the timing, manner, and reasons behind individuals' self-classifications during interactions. Additionally, using QCA, she investigates how these classifications fit within the broader context and explores the patterns and connections with other interactions or events (Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2020).

Similarly, McAdams (2018) primarily utilizes QCA in his research on life stories. In a recent study, he sought to establish a set of codes for future QCA studies on narrative coherence where he employed thematic analysis to analyze pre-existing coherence codes from various researchers (Adler et al., 2018).

I employed an iterative method of emergent coding (Tracy, 2013), informed and influenced by the theory building and literature that supported the project. This iterative analysis of the transcripts allowed me to interpret the themes and generate new theory.

Themes and Concepts

In the spring of 2024, I interviewed and recruited a cohort of students, the Storylisteners Thematic Analysis Project, formed with an Undergraduate Research Academy (UGRA) grant from CSU. The members of the project focused on coding the interview transcripts of the first

season of the Storylisteners Podcast to find themes among the participants. My role in the UGRA was that of a facilitator, supervisor, and participant. While I recruited and trained the undergraduates on how to conduct the research, I was likewise involved in the methods and coded alongside them.

The UGRA coded the transcripts using reflexive thematic analysis. This meant there was a mix of inductive and deductive development of categories. The methodology included narrative analysis (Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2020) and thematic analysis (Kuckartz, 2019; Terry et al., 2017).

Following an initial two weeks of training, each coder received four interview transcripts from the first season of the Storylisteners podcast. In those two weeks, they were trained to look for emergent codes through assigned readings of Owen's (1984) article, which outlines three criteria for finding emergent codes: 1) recurrence, 2) repetition, and 3) forcefulness. They applied these criteria in their coding of the interview transcripts assigned to them to find emergent codes that related to how and why narrative listeners listen. Alongside in-person practice workshops, the students engaged in Q&A sessions to solidify their understanding of the method. It is important to note here that the undergraduates were not provided with any supporting literature on narrative or listening, making their initial first-cycle coding emergent.

There were eight episodes in the first season, and each episode was coded twice for reliability. Their task was to code information related to the backgrounds, perspectives, and tools for listening used by the narrative listeners in their professions. Each coder looked for the a priori codes that Dr. Humphrey and I created from our initial listen-throughs of the interviews and was instructed to look for emergent codes regarding how and to what effect the listeners talked about their listening skills. We then met once a month to compare these findings and ask questions.

Finally, we met for a conference at the end of the semester to bring together all of the codes, a priori and emergent alike. Each coder arrived with a compilation of their emergent codes, which we sorted into larger, overarching categories and then condensed into an applicable list that became the codebook.

To create the initial priori codes, Dr. Humphrey and I met separately to compare our notes from listening to the interviews and the podcast episodes created around each listener. The a priori codes we gave the coding team were:

- **Curiosity** - Expresses interest in learning more about their surroundings, about other people, etc. A motivation to understand unknown information or stories for the sake of learning.
- **Purpose-oriented/goal-driven** - Expresses an interest in listening with an end goal, listening with a set purpose. Not exploratory.
- **Empathy/kindness/prosocial** - Themes of listening as a gift to the other, philanthropic motivations.
- **Vulnerability** - Share intimate details about their lives, their thoughts, and their intentions.
- **Self-knowledge** - Reflective of how their thoughts and behaviors impact themselves, others, and the world. Talk about the importance of "knowing yourself" or "listening to yourself."
- **Sense of not belonging** - Themes of feeling lonely, or like an outsider. They express a sense of almost forced independence. They talk about not having community at some point in their lives.

Based on these a priori codes and combined with emergent codes, the UGRA compiled a list of key themes that we identified in the first season of the podcast. The codes we found are:

- **Curiosity** – Listening driven by a desire to learn more, often motivated by wanting to resolve confusion, satisfy curiosity, or address a problem.
- **Purpose-oriented** – Listening that is focused on achieving a specific goal or fulfilling a need in a professional or vocational context.
- **Empathy/Pro-Social** – Listening with the aim of providing emotional support and comfort. It may stem from the listener's personal experiences or a desire to connect deeply with others.
- **Holding space** – Listening with the intention of being fully present and creating a safe environment for the speaker to share their thoughts and feelings.
- **Formative existential disconnect** – Listening that comes from a need for connection, often developed in response to feelings of loneliness or a lack of meaningful relationships.
- **Pivotal experiences** – Deepened listening skills that develop as a result of major life events, which shape how a person approaches listening and understanding others.
- **Listening to self** – A reflective practice where the listener also pays attention to their own thoughts, emotions, and inner dialogue.
- **Vulnerability** – Listening that involves openness and emotional risk, requiring careful navigation of boundaries and sensitivity.
- **Academic connection** – Listening as a way to engage critically with what is heard, often leading to deeper analysis or theoretical insights.

- **Narrative healing** – Listening that supports emotional healing by allowing the speaker to reframe their life story in a meaningful way.
- **Non-traditional listening** – Listening that includes understanding non-verbal cues or underlying messages beyond what is directly spoken.

Additionally, these themes came with their own sets of sub-themes. Through my analysis of the two seasons for the thesis project, the themes were reduced based on which were applicable across both vocations.

Instruments and Variables

For this study, I utilized various instruments, including recording devices, transcription services, MAXQDA, and Google Drive for data organization. To analyze the interviews, I used Otter.ai for transcription and organized the transcriptions in Google Drive, alternating between Google Docs and Google Sheets for data management.

Finally, the most highly used instrument was my codebook which was created with the help of the UGRA and MAXQDA, which I used to organize my analysis.

Data Collection

For this thesis, I pulled four episodes from each season of the Storylisteners podcast, resulting in eight interviews in total. I choose these using purposive sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019) to provide a variety of interviews and identities of the listeners. I began by identifying the intersectional identities of the interviewees and sampling interviewees who have varying jobs, genders, and ages to provide a wide breadth within each vocation's season. Additionally, interviews were selected based on their relevant insights into the questions posed.

Sample and Recruitment

To qualify as "great listeners," the recommended interviewed listeners had to impress their referrers with their listening skills in conversation. Dr. Humphrey and I did not measure the referrers' criteria but filtered recommendations based on their job descriptions and willingness to participate. An initial recruitment email, approved by the IRB and included in Appendix A, was sent to potential participants. This email requested their consent and allowed them to review the interview questions beforehand. We also obtained consent to share their data, except for one participant in the first season who requested anonymity but permitted us to use and publish the interview content. In this person's case, I did not interact with them and was not privy to their name or information. It was completely handled by Dr. Humphrey and the information was stored only on his password-protected computer to shield the participant's identity. There are no explicitly identifying details in the transcript or audio recording of the interview.

Data Collection Procedures

Storylisteners Podcast. Once participants agreed, we scheduled interview times. Before conducting the interviews, we trained our interviewers, whom we referred to as "storylisteners." Most of our storylisteners were students recruited through various methods (see Season 1 and Season 2 below). These students conducted the majority of the interviews, while Dr. Humphrey and I each conducted one. This approach aimed to teach the students narrative listening interview techniques and provide practical experience.

We trained the students for the first four weeks of the semester in an interview technique called branching. Branching is a way for the interviewer to "listen the story out" of their interviewee (Humphrey, 2023). We used a tree diagram (*figure 1*) to illustrate how they should extend from the initial, structured questions to explore deeper aspects of the participant's story.

We taught them to move their interviewees from upper-level answers that reflect behaviors to answers that reflect their attitudes, then to dive deeper into their beliefs, until finally they reached to the "root" of the personal narratives. They did this by asking follow-up questions in response to the answers they received from the set of base questions for the interviews. Their instructions were to listen with presence and ask follow-up questions with the goal of understanding the "who" of the person, not the "what" (Humphrey, 2023).

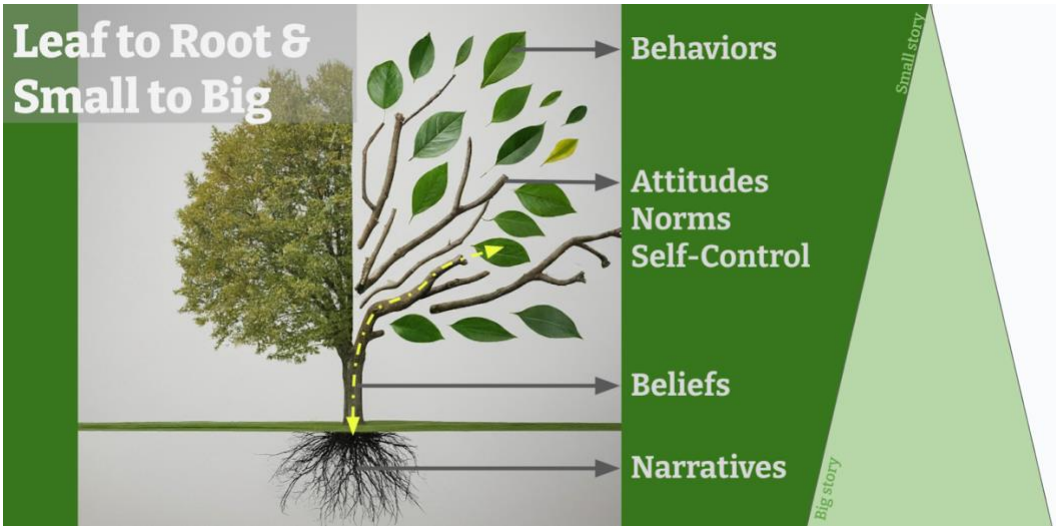

Figure 1: Narrative listening "branching" technique, credit Michael Humphrey

The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the depth of branching and participant responses. After completing the interviews, we uploaded them to the project's Google Drive and transcribed them using Otter.ai. The transcriptions were also stored in the Google Drive folders for the next steps.

Each storylistener then wrote up talking points from the interview and shared them with the rest of the team. With these notes, we gathered in the podcast studio to discuss the initial interview. These weekly conversations that were recorded in the studio were conducted to discuss each interview that the storylistener conducted. For the podcast's purposes, we would

splice together cuts of the original interview with the conversation in our studio about the interviewee and the topic discussed. The studio conversations that we held acted as the base, first level of coding of the transcripts. It was from these conversations that Dr. Humphrey and I were able to create the set of a priori codes we provided our UGRA cohort of coders (see Analysis).

These initial conversations acted as a level one run-through of coding the interviews. Through discussion and debate of each concept and how they fit into an idea of narrative listening on air, we were able to tease out what could belong and what may not belong in the theory, utilizing the criteria put forward by Owen (1984) for emergent codes.

This recorded conversation was edited alongside the original interview to create a narrative story. Once the audio was mastered, we sent each episode to the original interviewee for a member check. Upon receiving their approval, we published the episode using RSS.com and shared it on our social media channels.

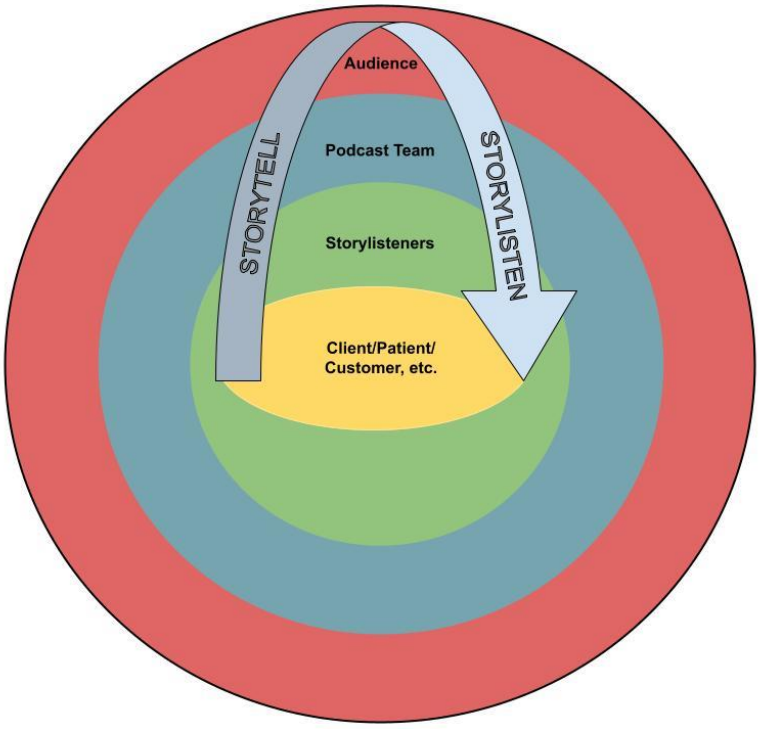

Figure 2: Storylisteners Podcast diagram, credit Michael Humphrey

This thesis analyzes only the original interview transcripts. However, I include information about the full podcast process for two reasons. First, the data was publicly shared after transcription, which needs to be noted. Second, publishing the episodes allowed us to receive community feedback. Our audience mainly consists of scholars and professionals in the vocations we discuss, providing valuable reactions and recommendations for future interviewees. This helped keep the podcast educational and sustainable.

Season 1: Healers. The initial season, themed "Healers," involved six interviewers. Four were undergraduate students recruited for an independent study within the journalism department, while the other two were Dr. Humphrey and me. Find a full list of links to the season in Appendix E.

Table 1: Season 1 list of interviewees and interviewers

Season 1, Healers	
Participant	*Interviewer*
Xenia Copeland-Fuentes	Dr. Humphrey
Rachel Pearl	Milo Gladstein
Therapist (anonymous)	Dr. Humphrey
Jody Engel	Maisy Barbosa
Shannon Darling	Lucy Bowman
Sarah Mitchell	Alexis Austere

Season 1, Healers	
Trinity Wilbourn	Milo Gladstein
Lee Tomlinson	Katie Mitchell
Ron Holder	Alexis Austere

The questions asked of each interviewee (see Appendix D) in this season are as follows:

- What do you think is the most important part of your job?
- Tell me about the typical patient/client needs on an average day.
- Do you think that patients/clients whose stories are heard get treated differently?
- How do you think about listening?
- How do you think you've changed the way you listen over time?
- Tell me about a time you have felt very listened to.
- Tell me a little about growing up, especially about your family.

A second group of students, the UGRA, coded this season. The first season was recorded during the Fall 2023 semester and was coded by the UGRA in the Spring 2024 semester.

Season 2: Leaders. We expanded the process for season two on a larger scale by creating JMC 490, a workshop course with 18 students. The class conducted 13 interviews for this season. The students were taught the same interview techniques as the initial independent study participants and interviewed their guests using the second set of questions. Season 2 of the podcast has yet to be released at the time of the publication of this thesis, which means there are no hyperlinks to these episodes.

Table 2: Season 2 list of interviewees and interviewers

Season 2, Leaders	
Participant	*Interviewer*
Carrie Hessler-Radelet	Annie Hessler
Sgt. Gar Hugo	Garrett Mogel
Charles Tingle	Kayla Mcllroy
Wes Sternberg	Tristan Moore
Linda Shapley	Bekah Lamb
Angela Myers	Gunnar Imgarten
Abby Tillinghast	Lisa Aitkin
Mike Jennings	Sarah Meyer
Rye Vigil	Emma Houckes
Ayla Sirois	Ivy Secrest
Adrienne DeTray	Molly Gates
Dani Grant	Toril Aserlind

We slightly adjusted the questions to reflect the change in vocation from healers to leaders while maintaining the integrity of questions concerning the participant's life narrative. The questions (see Appendix D) asked of each participant in this season are as follows:

- What is the most important part of your job?

- (If they answer listening, then we skipped this question). How does listening play a role in being a leader?
- If you could teach someone how to listen, what would you tell them?
- How important is it to know someone's story in order to lead them? Why?
- When was a time you felt most listened to?
- What parts of your own life story do think helped make you a better listener?

Member Checks

After editing and narrating each podcast episode, we sent it to the participants for review before publication. We required their approval before releasing the episode to the public. This step was crucial for two reasons: first, to ensure we accurately understood and represented their perspectives, and second, to confirm that no key information was accidentally omitted during the editing process.

Podcast and Thesis Connection

This thesis builds on the conversations that were conducted in and out of the studio with the cohorts of student interviewers. By enacting an informal coding process in the studio and explaining the theoretical concepts in class settings, we were able to form a base understanding of narrative listening before turning to the formal coding of the interviews.

The process of creating the podcast had many elements and steps that informed the foundation on which we based the a priori codes. These codes in turn informed the way I coded the second season's episodes and thus created the framework through which I analyzed the seasons together.

We were holding conversations about the basis of narrative listening even as we recruited the first cohort of student interviewers/storylisteners, looking for people who engaged in the

classroom with empathy and curiosity. These were two virtues that we predicted would be helpful to have in our interviewers for the research and preliminary framework building, based on the initial literature with which we had engaged (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Parks, 2019).

Once we compiled the first cohort of interviewers using these criteria, we taught them the technique of interview branching. This was a technique Dr. Humphrey taught, wherein the interviewer probes with questions that invite the speaker to go deeper into their narrative history, thus creating a fuller picture of their motivations in their enactments of narrative listening in their vocations. These conversations that were a result of branching showed us that branching also doubles as a tool that a few narrative listeners use in their own narrative listening practice, not just as the tool that we were using to interview them. We found this helpful in understanding the technique they were using, as we were also utilizing it, but likewise, we realized it to be a limitation because we weren't employing it in the same way as the listeners.

While we were using branching to further understand the listeners' answers and motivations in listening, we would pull them back to the initial set of interview questions instead of continuing the branching technique to get to their deeper narrative "roots." This back-and-forth between surface-level questions and deep narrative history dives using the branching technique is different than how it is commonly used in a dedicated narrative listening setting (Humphrey, 2023).

Once the storylisteners conducted their interview with their interviewee, they returned to the cohort for a weekly studio session, where each interviewer was treated as our "expert" and would discuss their interview in conversation with either Dr. Humphrey or myself as the host, and two other students. These conversations were edited together with the initial interview clips to create a cohesive conversation about listening. These studio conversations were where our

theory-building informally began. Through discussion about what we heard each week, the cohort, along with Dr. Humphrey and I, began to form a rough concept of what narrative listening could be. These conversations then informed the a priori codes that Dr. Humphrey and I forged for our initial coding of the first season (see Data Collection Procedures). The informal coding that happened in the studio was an emergent process of understanding the basis of what we were discussing when we talked about narrative listening. It helped us to create and recreate the foundation of the theory in a process much like grounded theory building (Khokhar et al., 2020).

Finally, as we published the first season, we received feedback from our audience that informed our ideas of narrative listening as well. While most of the feedback was about the audio and podcast technicalities, there were also comments recommending people we should interview, which inferred the types of vocations that our community saw as listeners-by-trade.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

For this study of narrative listening, I analyzed the original transcripts of eight interviews conducted between August 2023 and May 2024. These transcripts were collected through an extensive interview process conducted by a trained cohort of students for the Storylisteners podcast. I chose eight, a little over one-third, of the 21 recorded interviews to analyze. My research questions for the study aimed to understand how narrative listeners listen for narrative, and what events have led them to these skills.

RQ1: How do narrative listeners listen *for* narrative?

RQ2: How do narrative listeners facilitate the co-construction of narrative identity?

Textual analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research, particularly in the fields of life narrative and listening. The method is used to explore texts for deeper meanings, interpretations, and cultural contexts (Khokhar et al., 2020; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). It examines more than just the content by looking at how information is presented and identifying the underlying assumptions and arguments within the text. Textual analysis involves creating categories, or codes, which are then organized into a larger system known as a coding frame (Kuckartz, 2019). In this study, thematic analysis specifically was employed to examine how listening is discussed both explicitly and implicitly, which allowed me to connect the text with broader concepts (Khokhar et al., 2020; Tracy, 2013). We arrived at the UGRA codebook through a combination of inductive and deductive approaches.

Thematic analysis has been successfully used by other researchers who are pioneering new areas within related disciplines. For example, Georgakopoulou's work in sociolinguistics has

shown how thematic analysis can bring nuance to the study of narrative, particularly in the context of her "small stories" research. She notes that empirical work has added depth to the understanding of small stories, highlighting specific genres that occur in particular contexts and should be included in narrative analysis (Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2020).

Analytical Procedures

I analyzed the collected data from the Storylisteners podcast using reflexive thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2021). They differentiate reflexive thematic analysis as distinct from other forms of thematic analysis, including coding reliability and codebook thematic analysis, due to how it embraces a more organic and subjective coding process. Reflexive thematic analysis does not require a coding team and values the unique qualitative skills and perspectives that the individual researcher brings to the analysis, however, I chose to create the codebook in the spring of 2024 with a team of coders trained in reflexive thematic analysis for credibility of inter-coder reliability. While the next levels of analysis were completed on my own, working with a team to form the initial foundation of a codebook was beneficial while I learned the method.

Braun and Clarke (2021) specifically highlight the flexibility of reflexive thematic analysis, and how it can be used for both inductive and deductive coding. Reflexive thematic analysis begins with familiarization and engaging with the data by repeatedly reading it and taking notes. This is followed by the coding stage when the data is systematically identified and labeled according to relevance to the research question. Once the data has been coded, the data is sorted into themes by organizing the codes into broader patterns. Next, the themes are reviewed to confirm they form a meaningful pattern that represents the data. Once these are set, it’s time to name the themes, which is also a good time to refine them by identifying the essence of each and

their contribution to the overall narrative of the analysis. With the UGRA in the spring of 2024, we completed level 1 and 2 (Yin, 2011) coding of the first season, which involved disassembling the interview transcripts to look for emergent codes before incrementally moving to higher, more categorical level 2 codes. After completing these steps with the UGRA, I completed the same task for season two's data alone while engaging in a reassembly process of combining both seasons' data. This included, as recommended by Yin (2011), constant comparisons, looking for negative instances in the data, and investigating rival thinking to further understand alternative explanations for my initial interpretations.

The flexibility of the method is particularly relevant to my study, as it is part of a broader attempt to develop a new theory. There is ample research to support the idea that thematic analysis can be instrumental in grounded theory building (Charmaz, 2006; Khokhar et al., 2020; Wertz et al., 2011). In coding texts to identify key terms and phrases, researchers can develop themes that form the foundation of new theoretical frameworks. In Charmaz's research on grounded theory (2006; 2011), she notes that through the use of memo writing alongside thematic analysis and coding, one's able to begin amplifying the categories into more abstract, theoretical concepts that can then be examined through a grounded theory lens. This memo-writing acts as the bridge between coding and paper drafts, as it's the chance to clarify ideas that arise about codes and how they are sorted into categories and themes (Charmaz, 2006). In this study, I added a growing repository of data and case studies that served as a basis for narrative listening theory, which made thematic analysis a crucial tool in the research.

Part of its foundation, grounded theory leans on codes arising from the text, not coming from pre-determined codes (Charmaz, 2006; Wertz et al., 2011). This is how we approached coding season 1 of the podcast, completely through a priori codes. While the UGRA was given a

few pre-determined codes that Dr. Humphrey and I had created, those, in turn, arose from our initial listen-throughs of the interviews as we edited them into podcast episodes. When we had conversations with the interviewers in the studio about the interviews they conducted with the listeners, we were able to form this set of a priori codes. While they are emergent for the most part, we were informed by periphery literature at the time, making it an iterative process of theory building. Alongside being informed by previous literature, we built the initial themes on the findings that came from the conversations with the undergraduates, who had not engaged with any literature adjacent to narrative listening. In this way, it was an analysis of many perspectives.

As I conducted this thematic analysis, I worked on the interpretation of the data, exploring how narrative listening can be applied using a grounded approach to the theory. This interpretation included considerations of the attributes suggested by Yin (2011): completeness, fairness, empirical accuracy, value-added, and credibility.

FINDINGS

Through the analysis of the eight transcripts pulled for this project, three key themes emerged. The first, emotional competence, refers to the state of the listener. It evaluates how competent the listener is in handling their moods, reactions, and relationships. The second that showed up is active engagement. Active engagement is a theme that is almost parallel to active listening, which is a buzzword phrase right now. To avoid misconceptions, active engagement is applied in this study with the following definition: the way a listener positions themselves to show the speaker that they are engaging with their message and the person speaking themselves (Topornycky & Golparian, 2016). The third theme to arise was holistic interest, which takes active engagement to a deeper space and is the one theme that can tie the three together to create an act of narrative listening. It asks that the listener engages an ethic of care and considers the contexts of the person's life and relationship contexts in their interpretation and involvement with the conversation.

Combined, these three themes emerged while furthering the understanding of narrative listening through the proposed research questions.

RQ1: How do narrative listeners listen *for* narrative?

RQ2: How do narrative listeners facilitate the co-construction of narrative identity?

Emotional competence

The first finding is a need for the listeners to display high levels of emotional competence. Doas (2015) defines emotional competence as:

> In emotionally competent environments, individuals display a mutual respect for patients and colleagues, an understanding of basic motivations, and a commitment to take responsibility, a desire to correct faulty situations, and the ability to assume full

> accountability for self-actions and take positive action to correct actions resulting in lack of accountability (Doas, 2015, p. 566).

When broken down, there are five main characteristics of emotionally competent behavior. 1) Self-awareness: recognizing the emotions that arise in an interaction, reactions associated with emotional interactions, recognizing feelings as they occur, and discriminating between different feelings. 2) Mood management: keeping control of emotions relevant to the current situation. 3) Self-motivation: staying directed toward a goal, despite self-doubt, inertia, and impulsiveness. 4) Exercising empathy: deciphering others' emotions by tuning into verbal and non-verbal cues. 5) Managing relationships: handling interpersonal interactions, implementing conflict resolution tactics when necessary, and negotiating constructively (Belschak, 2004; Brasseur et al., 2013; Doas, 2015).

Self-awareness

Interviewees demonstrated a knowledge of the self in their responses about what constitutes "good listening." One of the listeners interviewed for the podcast was a therapist (Find full list of Storylisteners season 1 links in Appendix E). This therapist, who requested anonymity, discussed their long, shifting career, and how in their later years they found therapy as a path that resonated with them. They talk about the ways they break (at least some people's) rules of therapy, their own opinions about listening and narrative, and how a life less travelled led them to healing. And as they spoke, they referenced the necessity of self-awareness to be strong healers.

> [W]here things start, where the healing starts, is where growth starts. It is with awareness. And so a person who doesn't have awareness about themselves and about their process, I'm not sure if they heal. Because healing happens from the inside out. And if you don't know who you are, and if you don't know what you've been doing, you know, you're kind of screwed (Therapist, personal communication, Sep 27, 2023).

Along the lines of this sentiment, a few of the leaders showed the necessity of knowing their processes to be stronger managers and leaders. Adrienne DeTray was one leader interviewed in the second season of the podcast. She is a CIO at a major healthcare company, where she manages roughly 800 people. Her interview blended tangible suggestions for listening with thoughtful reflections on her own experiences provided through examples. Here, she talks about how important it is to be self-aware of oneself in a leadership role to handle feedback and be consistently improving.

> You've got to be aware of the things that you're that you're really strong at, and the things personally that you're not so strong at, and you've got to auto-correct constantly so that you can continue to kind of rehearse and get better at those, those areas that you're not naturally strong (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

The lens that speakers with self-awareness are listening through is one that shows they know they may not always be correct. It is an example of humility to accept that others may know better, and to move forward with their ideas, setting the ego aside. Humility, in this application, can be beneficial for relationships that have pre-determined power structures, such as doctor-patient, or manager-employee (Ruberton et al., 2016). Research shows that conversations in which the person in a position of power demonstrates humility are found to be more effective because of the focus on the other, versus on the self, demonstrating a dedication to understanding the person with less power in the situation (Ruberton et al., 2016).

A great example of this exercise of humility in a listening practice is Ayla Sirois. At the time of the interview, Sirois was the Deputy Chief of Staff of the student body leadership at Colorado State University: ASCSU.

> I really have to remind myself that everyone has different ways they want to approach something, and it's not always like my place to put in how I think something should be done, because sometimes, before I do that, I sit and listen and I realize that their idea was so much better than mine (Ayla Sirois, personal communication, May 1, 2024).

Listening to another and understanding that what they are saying may not be congruent with a previous understanding of the self or world can be difficult to comprehend and can elicit emotional responses. How emotionally competent listeners combat this reaction is the second behavior necessary.

Mood management

Interviewees greatly understood the need for mood management in their listening interactions. Many of the times the topic was addressed, they spoke of managing external criticism and their internal criticism as well, as DeTray explains below.

> Not every conversation, when you have to be the listener, is going to be a positive one. Sometimes it's going to be very uncomfortable. And so don't be reactive. Don't be emotional. Just sit back, listen, take it for what it is, and it's going to make you stronger as you go forward (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

This understanding of the usefulness of criticism shows up again in the way it can be used for problem-solving. “You have to be able to one, take a lot of criticism, but even more than that, take that criticism and do something with it, effectively to help someone else or yourself” (Ayla Sirois, personal communication, May 1, 2024).

Similarly, listeners who are skilled at mood management must be able to understand how emotions related to external factors in their lives may impact their listening. Charles Tingle, a leader interviewed for the second season of the podcast, talks more about this below. A municipal judge and former attorney, Tingle is familiar with the necessity of separating life from his leadership roles in order to practice justice.

> When we listen to someone, our ability to listen can also be impacted by what's going on in our lives. What? What are my emotions like at that particular time? Am I feeling pleasant? Am I feeling positive, or am I trying to deal with a fire or disaster or some other crisis that's really preoccupying me? And in those times, without a doubt, I know that as much as I would want to be a good listener, that I come up short. And that's something that hopefully, if you're in the position of trying to listen to someone and, and, be a good

> leader in that context, you recognize that (Charles Tingle, personal communication, April 22, 2024).

He shows the importance of managing moods that may be affected by completely separate events from the messages of the conversation. It is important to be able to compartmentalize these emotions, to set them aside, to be present in the conversation with the speaker and avoid the distractions of external factors. Setting aside emotional reactions to irrelevant happenings when in a conversation can be difficult, yet a helpful tool when creating an intentional listening space, as Tingle (2024) explained. This is where a strong need for self-motivation comes in, as putting in the effort to create that space amid distractions requires a determination to do so.

Self-motivation

Self-motivation is a unique qualifier to add to the theme of emotional competency, yet Doas (2015) defines it with an emotional lens: "Self-motivated individuals display positive attitudes, high energy levels, enthusiasm, and overall positive role modeling behaviors" (p.567). This idea of self-motivation ties in with the enthusiasm needed for listeners to do the work to be good listeners, which is no small effort. Yet even before listeners can be motivated to learn to listen to others, one healer explained a need to consistently be their own best listener and how that motivates them. Lee Tomlinson, who was interviewed for the first season of the podcast, shared the winding path his life had taken: from professional tennis player and adrenaline junkie to successful Hollywood film producer, and eventually to a stage 4 cancer patient. And how, now in remission, he uses public speaking to motivate healthcare workers to commit to an intentional daily practice of compassion. Here, he talks about one small way that he motivates himself to continue the work.

> So more often than not, it takes very conscious effort to go in and listen to those voices. And when they say you can't, stop for a second. Is that really true? I mean, is there evidence that I absolutely positively can't do this? Or is that just that voice again? And

> yes, you have to look at the business prospect. Yes, you have to look at, you know, how you're doing it not well, but first [you have] got to give yourself permission and listen to the loving part in itself rather than the abusive part. Give yourself the power. Call it, or move forward (Lee Tomlinson, personal communication, Dec 12, 2023).

In listening to the loving voices instead of the abusive ones, Tomlinson (2023) demonstrated how important taking care of oneself is through a positive mindset and enthusiasm, even when the situation may be difficult. In times when "you're not doing it well," understanding that to foster change and emotional competence, an optimistic outlook can be beneficial. Once the listener's mental state is calm and understanding that the situation may not be optimal, they can open themselves to comprehending feedback from others (Avery & Bashir, 2003).

Self-motivation can also be fostered extrinsically through peer relationships and providing quality care to patients or customers (Avery and Bashir, 2003; Doas, 2015).

> It's not just about listening to me, it's about, like, a meaningful conversation, where you can sit back and absorb what people are saying and deeply understand it and create a bond, like, that's what it's all about. It's not just about listening to people talk (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

DeTray (2024) shows the pleasure she receives when creating a bond in the interaction, a motivation to continue listening to keep creating a strong relationship. Strong, positive social bonds are great motivators to continue listening and strengthening relationships. This can be done through showing empathy for the speaker, or even just expressing interest in what they're saying. The impact of the listener's engagement and interest in the conversation can be just as helpful to the speaker (Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015).

Self-motivation plays a vital role in emotional competency, emphasizing the energy, enthusiasm, and effort required to be a narrative listener. As the interviewees have shown, self-motivation can be strengthened through both creating a foundation for emotional resilience and growth and through meaningful social interactions which provide extrinsic motivation to

continue listening and building relationships. Together, these contribute to the listener's ability to engage with a high emotional competence.

Exercising empathy

Almost every respondent mentioned the need for empathy in their listening practice. Either by defining their actions as empathetically driven or by explaining empathetic behaviors without naming them as such, it showed up again and again. Interestingly enough, the importance of empathy for the self showed up multiple times in addition to expressing empathy for the person they're listening to. "[There is] an absolute necessity of being compassionate to yourself, since then you can be healthy enough to be compassionate with your patients" (Lee Tomlinson, personal communication, Dec 12, 2023). Expressing empathy and compassion for the self is a way of restoring one's energy to be able to express empathy for the people they're tasked with listening to in their vocations.

Rachel Pearl, an ER doctor interviewed for the first season of the podcast, spoke about her mental preparation for the ER and how she developed a style of listening not taught in medical school. She also discussed the influence of genetic trauma and the value of medically guided psychedelic therapy for healing psychosomatic issues. Here, she talks about the importance of restoring her levels of empathy and compassion to stay objective.

> There are things that I do outside of work that restore my, my empathy, and my compassion. So if I'm in flow and practice with meditation, or self-care or breathing, then I'm in a much better place, like, I'm not going to get triggered. And I can remain sort of objective. In the moment, it's, it's just taking a pause, whether that means leaving the room, taking a deep breath (Rachel Pearl, personal communication, Nov 29, 2023).

To borrow from a popular phrase, "you can't pour from an empty cup." The interviewees demonstrated that in order to be generous listeners, they needed to restore and refill their own energy supplies first. This has been shown throughout the interviews to be a common and

necessary element of a strong listening practice, as the mind that is listening to the message of the speaker must be prepared to focus and care for the story.

Exercising empathy is a foundational aspect of effective listening, as highlighted by nearly every interviewee. Whether explicitly named or implied through empathetic behaviors, its importance was evident throughout the interviews. Empathy was not only expressed toward others but also toward themselves, as the interviewees emphasized the necessity of their own self-compassion.

Managing relationships

In their definition of relationship management as applied to emotional competence, Doas (2015) shares that the most effective way to manage a relationship is to aim for all human interactions to have a positive outcome. While this sounds like a daunting task, they claim it can be achieved through mutual respect and trust in one another, the quality and intentionality of the interactions, and a want for collaboration and sharing.

Interviewees shared that a way they negotiate relationships with the people they listen to can be through sharing their own vulnerabilities as a method of building trust. DeTray (2024) specifically talks about her intentionality in relationship building and how that manifests tangibly.

> It's about creating space to have a two-way and very meaningful and deep relationship, and you do that through sharing right both sides, both sides, that you have to listen to what they're doing, and you also have to be willing to share some insecurities or things that would make you vulnerable to the other person as well (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

This intentionality when creating a relationship also ties in with a need for self-awareness to create meaningful relationships. “In my own life, I really make it a point to unconditionally sit down and try and understand another person before I try putting my own personal opinions on a

situation" (Ayla Sirois, personal communication, May 1, 2024). Stagnant listening cannot form a relationship. In order to build a relationship based on respect and trust, it must go two ways.

Another tactic for trust-building in relationships that DeTray (2024) shared is a need to recognize when there is an imbalance of fairness or equality and be an advocate for the parties affected.

> So I think sometimes it is our, well, not sometimes, I think it is our obligation to be aware, to root for the underdog, and to make sure that you, you know, do those big, bold things to help course correct when inequality is happening (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

Advocacy in this manner is not easy work yet work that is hoped for and expected in power relationships such as the ones studied for this thesis. Listening plays a key part in this role, as a method of understanding what must be changed, or advocated on behalf of (Avery & Bashir, 2003).

Managing relationships is an essential component of emotional competence. Through mutual trust, mutual respect, and intentionality in interactions, the interviewee's ideas ultimately distilled to a focus on creating meaningful two-way relationships by both listening and sharing vulnerably.

Emotional competence in the context of narrative listening requires the listener to be able to remove and insert themselves into the conversation with control. This means understanding the listener's own life experiences, moods, and processes, and how these experiences may impact their interpretations and reactions (Brasseur et al., 2013) in ambiguous social, personal, and professional situations (Belschak, 2004). Listeners who display high levels of emotional competence are also able to negotiate their relationships with the speaker through respect and trust-building, forging bonds in the interactions that strengthen self-motivation to continue an intentional listening practice.

Active engagement

Throughout the initial coding process, a category of "doing listening" for all tangible mentions of listening practices emerged. When examined, it became clear that many of the interviewees were implementing active listening. This is no surprise, as active listening has been taught widely to people hoping to become a "good listener" across fields (Rogers, 2007; Topornycky & Golparian, 2016; Tustonja et al., 2024). In a grand definition of the phrase, Topornycky & Golparian (2016) define active listening as encompassing everything from hearing to buying time.

> [Active listening can be used to] hear accurately, understand, draw out ideas and information, empathize, gather information, show respect, build self-esteem, find answers, show appreciation, buy time, connect, question assumptions and ideas, weigh options, change perspectives, soothe or heal, set the stage for something else, and build relationships" (p. 176).

When broken down into four main components, active listening is a compilation of: 1) Non-verbal communication of the listener's unconditional attention; 2) Paraphrasing the speaker's message without judgment; 3) Asking questions to help the speaker elaborate; 4) Deferring judgment of the speaker and their message (Tustonja et al., 2024; Topornycky & Golparian, 2016; Rogers, 2007). However, in addition to these four components, the listener's interpretation of the message should also be taken into account (Brownell, 2008; McAdams, 1993; Topornycky & Golparian, 2016). This is why the theme has been labeled as active engagement, to make space for the additional consideration of interpretation.

In the literature review, two models of listening norms were outlined. Within the healing field, norms were broken down by unobservable behavior (i.e., comprehension), observable behaviors (i.e., body language), and finally, the speakers' perceptions and evaluations of them (i.e., if they felt listened to) (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Shipley, 2010). Throughout the analysis

process, there were codes related to sharing intentions with the speaker, adopting the speaker's framework, reflecting back to the speaker, engaging, and showing empathy. For leadership listening norms analysis, there was a more clear-cut model to follow: HURIER. This stands for hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding (Brownell, 2008). These overlap with, and show in more detail, the components of active engagement, specifically describing the process that goes into the non-verbal body language used to show attention, and how listeners interpret the messages they receive. Overall, there is great overlap between the two sets of norms and the 5 main components of active engagement, as detailed below.

Non-verbal communication of the listener's unconditional attention

In many active listening courses, participants are taught to have open body language, sometimes mirroring the person they're listening to, other times providing head nods, engaged eye contact, or even light verbal affirmations of "yes" or "uh huh" (Tustonja et al., 2024). While the effectiveness of each gesture will depend on the situation, the basis remains the same: signaling to the speaker that the listener is unequivocally paying attention to them. One listener, Abby Tillinghast, shared her own methods for giving direct attention. Interviewed for the second season of the podcast, Tillinghast is an account manager at CIG Public Relations. Her interview placed an emphasis on how she differentiates between listening to different people, and how within her job she plays multiple roles – specifically as a manager of her team and as a liaison between the client and agency – that require their own listening styles. Here, she talks about how she practices non-verbal listening skills in these situations.

> For me, it's really making eye contact, looking directly at that person, nodding, making sure I'm responding to what they're saying, and not just being a blank slate in front of them. And also making sure I've tuned out any other distractions (Abby Tillinghast, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

Tillinghast (2024) mentions in her description of nonverbal listening the importance of tuning out distractions. Likewise, Tingle (2024) brings this up, sharing that setting aside time away from distractions can be a method of introducing intentionality into the conversation.

> There are some really basic types of things that you can do to help one set yourself up so that you're not distracted. Set aside time. Be intentional, very intentional, about how you listen. That means be sure to try to understand what it is they're saying (Charles Tingle, personal communication, April 22, 2024).

In these examples, the interviewees explained their methods for attuning themselves to the speaker without distractions. Signals like eye contact, nodding, putting away distractors, and putting in the effort to understand what the other is saying are all ways of expressing nonverbal confirmation that listeners are paying attention.

This is one of the most understood tenets of listening - using the body as a signaler of attention. It can also be an invitation to the speaker, permission to begin their story, and know that it will be attended to by the listener (Parks, 2019; Pasupathi & Rich, 2005). Nonverbal communication can also be a signal of agreement or support of the message the speaker is sharing (Pasupathi & Rich, 2005). However, it is possible to use body language and an occasional light verbal affirmation without paying much attention or furthering the thoughts of the speaker. That is why there are so many other elements with which it must be coupled.

Responding to the speaker through paraphrasing and questions

Once the speaker has finished sharing their message, however, the interaction isn't finished. From here, how the listener attends to the story can have a strong impact on the speaker's long-term retention and understanding of what they're saying, especially in life narrative contexts (Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015). This is a space where co-construction can happen most obviously with a back-and-forth negotiation of the speaker's message. By asking

questions and paraphrasing, the listener shares a new lens, or perspective, for the speaker to understand their life story through.

Without asking them directly about co-construction, however, the interviewees talked about what made a great listener great, many responding with stories of the ways great listeners in their lives interacted with them in conversations even when they didn't agree. Tingle (2024) specifically shared this when he talked about a friend and boss he worked with for a majority of his career.

> He was a superb listener, and what made him so good was that he would ask a lot of questions about whatever topic we were discussing. He would ask for ideas and insight and genuinely seem to care about the things that I would have to offer. He wouldn't always agree with them, of course, but that's what made our relationship so good and productive, and there was always follow-up (Charles Tingle, personal communication, April 22, 2024).

Tingle's (2024) description of his previous boss shows a very necessary element of this active engagement: curiosity. Consistently, curiosity showed up in the answers of these leaders and healers when they spoke of how to be a great listener. Tillinghast (2024) explains this below, sharing how she approaches a conversation with curiosity to learn the deeper messages being conveyed.

> People say things because they want to and because they want you to hear what they're telling them. So, if you're practicing listening, then be thinking as they're talking to you, going, okay, what are they trying to tell me? What are they conveying? What is the meaning behind their words, and how do I make sure that they know I'm hearing them, whether that's repeating back to them what they just told me, or getting into one of the essences of something they said, or maybe digging into an emotion of: feels like you're really upset right now, or feels like you're really passionate about this topic, like somehow make what they've said feel validated. I think it is a great first step to listening because it makes people feel like they were actually heard (Abby Tillinghast, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

Curiosity, as shown in Tillinghast's (2024) answer, can be about seeking to find the best way to move the conversation forward as an act of care for the other, making sure they feel heard by how the listener replies. This is evident in the beliefs of the therapist as well.

> When I talk to people who are in a relationship about when I counseled them, I talked to them about two things. This one of them is curiosity. And the other one's interest, you know, to be curious and interested about that other person. And those two things. To me, listening is just one aspect of how you would respond to that situation. So, so, it's like, it's not, to me, it's not dependent on your listening skills. It's dependent on: do you care? Are you interested? And then those skills, I think, would tend to just appear? Does that make sense? (Therapist, personal communication, Sep 27, 2023).

In their words, the therapist shares that listening, which can be taken to mean hearing and comprehending, is only one aspect of the interaction. They argue that curiosity and interest are key elements that must also be present. This is a unique way of looking at the listening process, and ties in a few of the core tenets of the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1995; Gilligan & Eddy, 2017).

Paraphrasing and question-asking are two important elements of the listening and co-construction process, tying in norms from both HURIER and for healers. HURIER places a large emphasis on interpreting, understanding, and responding, while the healing norms refer to the necessity of engaging and reflecting back to the speaker. These are all core steps in the process required for responding to the speaker. Interpretation and understanding happen before any verbal engagement with the speaker, but their presence in the reply shows an engaged interest in what was said.

Showing a curious interest in what the speaker has to say by reflecting back to them through furthering questions and summarizing can be an act of care when coupled with emotional competence to maintain a measured temperament (Parks, 2019). It can be argued that acts of care such as these differentiate narrative listeners in their listening practice.

Deferring judgment of the speaker and their message

Deferring judgment is another way of building trust with the speaker. By showing acceptance of what the speaker has to say, listeners show that they see the importance of the speaker's message. Pearl (2023) shares how she goes out of her way not to interrupt her patients, giving them the space to fully explore their message without disruption.

> As a standard, when I walk into a room, I often will ask a patient, why they came in, or how I can help them. And I think it's important that, and I didn't used to do this, but you just let them go until they stop (Rachel Pearl, personal communication, Nov 29, 2023).

As Pearl (2023) shares in her explanation, letting someone speak without interruption can be a tool that portrays a lack of judgment on the listener's part. Other interviewees, like DeTray, touched on this as well, bringing up the necessity of letting people talk uninterrupted to further understand their total message.

> [A]s a listener, sometimes you have to do what they call SSL, which is sit down, shut up and listen right, and don't interrupt people. Let them finish their thought. Wait till they're done, and then you can ask follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding" (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

As an example of this, Tomlinson (2023) talked about his almost fatal choices as a result of poor healthcare professionals' communication skills, and how the choice of one professional to listen without interrupting saved his life.

> So I decided I would end my life put on the fentanyl patches. And I would have done that. If it hadn't been for a very brief conversation with a very famous Dr. Edell, Dr. Dean Edell, who came to visit and listen to my misery. He didn't interrupt me, just listened. And when I paused to take a breath, to try and reignite my throat, he put his hand on my arm and apologized for the lack of what he calls compassion that I have experienced in that hospital (Lee Tomlinson, personal communication, Dec 12, 2023).

Deferring judgment can be a difficult task, one that is born out of a care for the speaker. In this case, intentional listening is a powerful reminder of the impact it can have on speakers. In this situation, Tomlinson was receiving such poor care for his throat cancer in the hospital that he had decided to end his life with an overdose of fentanyl patches. But when Dr. Edell gave

Tomlinson the space to speak freely without the fear of judgment and acknowledged the lack of compassion he had endured, the listening restored Tomlinson's faith in himself and his situation.

These examples highlight how deferring judgment in a listening practice requires intentionality and care for the speaker. It reinforces the power of listening not just as a passive act, but as an active choice that can profoundly impact relationships and even lives. Deferring judgment is a vital addition to a listening practice that builds trust by showing the speaker their message is valued. Letting someone speak without interruption demonstrates acceptance and openness, which then can foster deeper understanding.

Interpretation

Topornycky and Golparian's writing (2016), states that "One of the key elements of interpretation is making sense of information you receive by using what you already know to connect and fit it within your existing understanding and view of the world." (p. 178). When listening, it can be difficult to separate our experiences and biases from the message in front of us. DeTray (2024) brought up how difficult this can be in a leadership role when receiving tough feedback.

> [W]hen someone's delivering harsh, harsh information, try not to react, and keep your emotions in check, because the only real way that you can get past those type of conversations is to listen to really, try to sit back and not be emotional and listen to what the person's saying in a way that you're gleaming the content so that you can carry it forward and become a better person. And whether you agree or disagree, you can talk about that on a different day (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

In situations like these, emotional competence, specifically mood management and self-awareness, is a tool that listeners must lean upon.

However, another way of looking at the provided definition of interpretation is in the context of understanding narrative listening. Here, the listener's interpretation itself is an element

of the co-construction of the conversation because one's own contexts and experiences in life inform the interpretation, which then informs the response. When looking at the amount of vulnerability in the responses to the speaker, the interviewees aired more on the side of being more vulnerable and relating with the speaker than to keeping personal distance from the topic. One listener who explained this thoroughly was the therapist, who spoke of the way vulnerability plays a role in their practice.

> I do think there are times when either the starkness of it, or the similarity of it seems useful to me, seems like, you know, like, let clients know that I have hurt the way they hurt, or, you know, or, or something like that. I, so, there's supposed to be a professional distance, and there is a substantial. I mean, it's, it's huge – the gap. There, I mean, there are some people who are like, you don't get to know me at all, almost like robot therapy. And you can tell from the way I'm talking about it, not my style. And if I had to say, I think that I am a little bit too personal, I think I am a little bit too connective. I really prefer having a dialogue with clients, rather than a monologue, rather than a client dumping for 40 minutes, then me giving my wisdom about it (Therapist, personal communication, Sep 27, 2023).

As the therapist shared, they preferred to relate with their patients, connecting on similar pain points in a dialogue, as opposed to only responding after a longer monologue from the speaker about their issue. These examples of "doing" co-construction point to practicing authenticity, engaging in critical thinking, investing in the relationship, and caring for the dialogue, as DeTray explains below.

> It's about creating space to have a two-way and very meaningful and deep relationship, and you do that through sharing, right, both sides, both sides, that you have to listen to what they're doing, and you also have to be willing to share some insecurities or things that would make you vulnerable to the other person as well (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

By showing vulnerability and personal experience expertise, the listener invites the speaker into a relationship, a dialogue, wherein they build a story together while co-constructing the narrative the speaker is sharing (Parks, 2019; Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015).

While interpretation often involves managing biases, it also plays a key role in narrative listening. In this context, interpretation is not a passive process but an active element of co-constructing the conversation. A listener's experiences and worldview shape how they interpret a message, and this interpretation, in turn, informs their response. Co-construction in narrative listening involves authenticity, critical thinking, and mutual investment in the relationship. By sharing their own insecurities and lived experiences, listeners demonstrate care and invite the speaker into a collaborative process.

Active engagement is about building trust with the speaker through body positioning, engaged responses, allowing space for them to share without judgment, as well as being aware of the listener's own interpretation. It creates space for the speaker to explore their thoughts and share openly. However, to reach a state of deeper narrative listening, there needs to be even more attention and intention by the listener in the practice.

Holistic interest

To further the intentionality of active engagement in a listening exchange, an interest in the speaker's fuller life contexts is necessary. Occasionally known as dialogic listening, the application of a holistic interest in the speaker keeps a larger context in mind when listening to another. Often coupled with the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1995), this is as a way of attending to the other (Parks, 2019). It is important to differentiate between holistic interest and active engagement here: active engagement is how the listener positions themselves to guide the speaker to openness and sharing, while holistic interest is the way by which the listener dives deeper into the message than what the speaker initially shared. Active engagement is about the positioning of the listener to help the speaker feel open to sharing, while holistic interest refers to the need to understand the larger context from which the speaker is communicating.

Holistic interest is, as argued in this thesis, the "glue" that brings all three themes together to create a practice of narrative listening. A person can be emotionally competent and showing their attention in a listening interaction through active engagement, but unless they're applying a holistic interest to the overarching message and story being shared, it likely isn't narrative listening. Here, the therapist talks about the necessity of care in his listening practice.

> If a person is able to care about other people, I absolutely think they can learn how to be a great listener. And I think that's what it is, it's like, I, probably -- sociopaths are probably not great listeners (Therapist, personal communication, Sep 27, 2023).

In their sweeping comment, they share their belief that care is a foundational element to strong listening. If the intention is there, then the execution can follow.

To understand the overlap of active engagement and holistic interest, the values Parks lays out in her book prove helpful. They point toward a highly intentional framework of holistic interest:

- Be open
- Cultivate understanding
- Practice authenticity
- Engage in critical thinking
- Invest in the relationship
- Care for the dialogue
- Focus on what matters
- Be intentionally present
- Remember the ongoing story
- Be responsive to the need (Parks, 2019)

A few of these coincide with the fundamentals of active engagement and emotional competency, although they ask the listener to engage with more in-depth listening practice. That in-depth listening means a deeper investment in the relationship than active engagement requires, relating back to the unobservable healing listening norms of adopting the speaker's framework and sharing the speaker's intentions.

One way that the interviewees explained their more in-depth listening practices was by showing how they listen more holistically to the speaker, reading between the lines for a message that is not being verbally expressed. In the example of Pearl's medical practice, she talks about the necessity of taking the time to care for patients, even if there's nothing "wrong" on the surface.

> 'Oh, you're, you know, it looks like there's nothing serious going on today. Let's have you follow up.' But it was clear that this person was suffering, you know, they were here, they bothered to come to the emergency department, they bothered to take the time out of the day, wait for up to six hours to be seen. So, like, what's really going on? (Rachel Pearl, personal communication, Nov 29, 2023).

A curiosity is present here, bundled with deep-seated care for the patient. In taking the wait time and location into context, Pearl was able to comprehend that there must be something wrong on a deeper level.

Leaders also expressed a need for holistically understanding their employees to better manage and motivate them. DeTray (2024) breaks down how purpose of listening can impact the way a listener approaches an interaction. If the purpose is to understand the person's story, then she will go about the listening with more attention to the larger context.

> There's different types of listening, so it's not just about giving people space to talk, but actually sitting down and understanding what makes a person tick and what fuels their passion that then I feel is an incredibly powerful, just component of human connection, and ultimately, what can fuel a really excited workforce. So listening is incredibly important. But again, it's not just giving space for people to talk, it's actually really

> understanding and hearing their story (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

In knowing an employee or coworker better, leaders can understand how to be the best support for the people on their team. Examples they provided included ways that they were able to change feedback styles, allow for different sharing methods, and when to give space if it was needed. These are things that they would not know if they did not listen to understand the full story of their employees' lives. Tillinghast (2024) recognizes the importance of knowing her employees' and clients' stories and how those can impact the work they're doing.

> I think, in my opinion, most people don't say things just to say them. Most people do say things for a reason and with an intent. And if they're telling me something, it might be because they're telling me something and they really want to be telling me something else, and so they're using it as a bridge, or they're telling me something because they're trying to convince themselves that they're okay with something, or that they're comfortable, or that they're fine. And picking up on those little nuances through listening really helps me understand, like, okay? Are you actually okay? Is there something else I should be asking you, is there something that you're leaving out that might actually be tied to an issue that you want to talk about, or tied to something else that really is your priority, but maybe you're afraid to voice that? (Abby Tillinghast, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024).

Tillinghast explains the importance of reading between the lines, sharing that when you know somebody's larger story, it is easier to understand what they may be trying to convey as a subliminal message.

Listening with interest is a gift given to the speaker, one that expresses a care not only in what they are saying in the present moment, but also in what they have said before, their behaviors, and their lives outside of the context of the conversation. It can be shown to the speaker by contextualizing their message with a deeper understanding of themselves, through taking actions that represent values they have previously expressed, or even just through exhibiting body language that is specific to their needs.

Together, the three overarching themes of emotional competence, active engagement, and holistic interest shine through in the transcripts analyzed for this thesis. These themes create a framework of narrative listening wherein listeners engage more intentionally and meaningfully in conversations by attending to the narrative.

Emotional competence focuses on being aware of one's own emotions, managing them in conversations, and staying motivated to listen effectively. The findings also demonstrate that showing empathy—for others and for yourself — helps sustain the energy needed for listening with care and patience. Active engagement builds on these skills by offering practical tools, such as using body language to show attention, paraphrasing what the speaker says, and asking thoughtful questions. These actions make speakers feel valued and heard.

Active engagement builds on emotional competence by offering tangible tools to deepen engagement. Listeners utilize non-verbal cues, such as eye contact and open body language, as well as techniques like paraphrasing and asking thoughtful questions when responding to the speaker. A combination of these actions signals to the speaker that they are being heard and understood, creating a sense of trust. Active engagement is not just about hearing; it is about fostering a shared understanding and the basis for life narrative co-construction.

Holistic interest goes even further, requiring the listener to consider the bigger picture of the speaker's life and context. It relies on the ethic of care and encourages the listeners to focus on a holistic understanding of the speaker.

Overall, these findings show that narrative listening isn't a single skill but a combination of approaches that work together. By practicing emotional competence, active engagement, and holistic interest, listeners can create stronger connections, support others' personal growth, and build trust.

DISCUSSION

This study of narrative listening concluded in three overarching themes prevalent in people who listen as a key element of their vocations. The listeners interviewed for the study described their application of high levels of emotional competence, active engagement, and holistic interest when listening. The presence of these three themes in the listening skills of narrative listeners works toward an understanding of the active, purposeful co-construction they enter into with the speaker. Interviewees did not mention this co-construction by name, but their attention to intentional engagement and encouragement of the story point to a conscious understanding of their influence.

It was clear throughout the iterative analysis process many of the findings were congruent with the literature. Emotional competence was a theme that emerged through an understanding that the listeners interviewed were speaking about their emotional experiences as they listened. This included their internal methods of regulating mood, how they stayed motivated to put in the work necessary to be trustworthy listeners, how they care for themselves when the messages they listen to are distressing, and how they manage their relationships with the speakers. When looking to the relevant literature, McAdams (1993) argues personal myth forms starting in adolescence and that as a part of this personal myth, people apply autobiographical meaning to experiences. Autobiographical meaning can be defined in this context as a self-knowledge of how we interact, react, and behave in certain scenarios. This can then be applied when interacting with another to make sense of their message and position in the world. The concept of emotional competency introduced in this study is congruent with McAdams' ideas. Within

emotional competence, self-awareness, mood management, and self-motivation specifically relate to the foundations of the autobiographical sense-making.

Interviewees spoke of the importance of knowing and monitoring how they react to the world and fit into certain situations as a necessary understanding when working to hold and attend to another's personal myth. While the caveat of adolescence was not included in this thesis, the idea that to engage with another, one should know themselves, does apply. The listeners expressed that they do their best listening when they've attended to their own needs and understand their biases and distractions, leaving them available to care for another's story. Specifically, when discussing the ways they express empathy, the interviewees spoke about the need for replenishing activities.

> There are things that I do outside of work that restore my, my empathy, and my compassion. So if I'm in flow and practice with meditation, or self-care or breathing, then I'm in a much better place, like, I'm not going to get triggered. And I can remain sort of objective. In the moment, it's, it's just taking a pause, whether that means leaving the room, taking a deep breath (Rachel Pearl, personal communication, Nov 29, 2023).

As Pearl shares in her statement on empathy, working to prioritize her self-care is an action that helps her to be a better listener and practitioner for her patients.

The theme of active engagement that arose was centered around how the listeners "do listening." This involved their body positioning and non-verbal communication, their responses to the speaker, deferring judgment of the speaker and message, and finally their interpretation of the message. When exploring the basis of narrative listening, RQ2 asked: How do narrative listeners facilitate the co-construction of narrative identity? This question gets at the heart of trying to understand what exactly the listeners are doing – tangible skills so explicated that could potentially be taught to new narrative listeners. What the theme of active engagement showing up in the analysis did was start to answer this question. In understanding what is necessary from

the listener in the actual listening interaction, such as body language, how narrative listeners respond, and when they respond, this study can point toward tangible actions for listeners to mimic when attempting narrative listening.

These tangible steps involved in active engagement are consistent with the literature. Specifically, they correspond with the listening norms included for leadership roles and healing vocations. Interpreting, evaluating, and responding were referred to often by the interviewees – tying in the importance of paraphrasing and question asking, deferring judgment, and interpreting (or evaluating) the message of the speaker. A reason for this may be that the second half of the steps, the observable steps, may represent the first steps: hearing, understanding, and remembering. For a listener to respond appropriately, they must have first heard, understood, and remembered the speaker's message.

One unique finding that becomes clear when analyzing the elements of active engagement is that within the listening norms as described in the literature review, non-verbal communication is not at the forefront of necessary methods for a successful interaction. While the idea of non-verbal body language as an element of expressing empathy or how the listener is interpreting the message was touched on, it was not listed as a distinctive element. Neither the leadership nor healing norms applied to this thesis take this into heavy consideration, which may be a space for further development. However, the interviewees would reference the need to "shut up, sit down, and listen" (Adrienne DeTray, personal communication, Mar 28, 2024), along with mentions of open body language, direct eye contact, and tuning out other distractions. They made a key point to speak about the process of attending to the speaker via body language in their answers, oftentimes starting their explanations of what "good listening" is by explaining the necessity of non-verbal communication.

Finally, when interviewees spoke of their engagement with the speaker, they mentioned or insinuated that curiosity was a large part of how they acted on these components of listening. Their curiosity moved them to ask deeper questions, read between the lines of what the speaker was saying, or reflect back their curiosity in a way that could help the speaker reframe their thoughts. In the case of the therapist (2023), they expounded on this idea, sharing that curiosity is the cornerstone of listening, and that without curiosity, strong narrative listening, especially in a healing context, could not be as successful.

Finally, holistic interest is the component that brings together both narrative identity theory and listening theory to create a practice of narrative listening. It assumes the speaker has a larger identity than is being shared in the interaction and brings that knowledge into their listening practice. Additionally, tying in a core connection with the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1995), this finding shows listeners are cognizant of the holistic story the speaker is sharing, and the background from which they are coming. Even in a first interaction with a speaker, this may mean pulling in knowledge of their larger identities, i.e. being a person of color in the United States during the Black Lives Matter protests, and how they may be interpreting the world because of these identities. When listening for someone's story and attending to that story, holistic interest assumes each person has a full narrative identity that influences the way the speaker interprets the world.

Interviewees shared the importance of knowing the context of the speaker's life as well, noting how it helps them as leaders to best manage and inspire their employees. Understanding what may be happening in the lives of the people they work with helped them to know when to ask deeper questions, when to back off on assigning larger amounts of work, and when to add more. In the healing realm, interviewees shared how the context of their patients' lives helps

them to, in some instances, further understand the deeper severity of their ailments than may have been verbally communicated. As Pearl shares about working in the emergency room,

> But it was clear that this person was suffering, you know, they were here, they bothered to come to the emergency department, they bothered to take the time out of the day, wait for up to six hours to be seen. So, like, what's really going on? (Rachel Pearl, personal communication, Nov 29, 2023).

Understanding that there is more to the story than the surface-level words of the speaker is an act of seeing another and sharing in knowing their story. This idea harkens back to narrative identity co-construction as advocated for by Cavarero (2000), and as researched by Georgakopolou (2020). Referring to the words of Pasupathi and Billitteri (2015), listening "is how we emerge as joint creations of our own and others' shaping" (Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015, p. 68).

Of course, there's also much to be said about the role of vocation and purpose in the listening interaction. While the scope of this project focused on overarching similar themes that arose from both vocations studied, there is much room to study the way a narrative listener changes their approach based on the purpose of the interaction.

When examining the differences in the responses and purpose of listening from both the healers and leaders, clear distinctions appear. These are likely based on the purpose of the vocations. The healers portrayed more mentions of care, and the need of hearing the full story or engaging for the well-being of the patient. This can be tied into the ethic of care, which is a feminist theory, concerned with building and protecting communities. On the other hand, the responses from the leaders were full of tangible skills that were employed as a way of achieving success, be that by improving themselves to be a better manager or hearing their employees' stories to motivate them further within the work. From this, we can see how the purpose of the listening interaction can impact the way each listener approaches the dialogue. For example,

Tillinghast (2024), a leader, shared in her interview the way her narrative listening tactics differs between her clients, employees, and people she's close with when she considers the importance of knowing their life story.

> I think it really depends on the person and the relationship I have with them. If it's someone that I have a very close personal relationship with that I know really well, then I might come out and say like, 'Hey, like, feels like there's more to this story. Like, what are you not telling me? What's what's on your mind that you're not necessarily feeling like you want to share?' In other situations, especially in a professional environment, when it's a client and I can sense that they're uncomfortable, but they're not quite sure how to say something, then I'll try to think through like, what might be bothering them, what questions could I use to prompt them. Or can I bring up, like, 'Hey, you might be worried about this scenario. Let's talk about how we're going to mitigate that scenario, or how we're going to problem solve in advance so that it's going to be okay.' And try to almost do that problem solving in the back end and be a little bit of a detective about it, going 'Okay, what might be worrying you that you're not coming right out and telling me?' But I could start to ask some prompting questions or offer some solutions that might get into that concern of yours (Abby Tillinghast, personal communication, March 28, 2024).

There is room for future research to explore how this differentiation shows up between vocations, between purposes in the interaction, and between listener identities themselves. However, the scope of this thesis focused on the overarching similarities between vocations.

This study identified emotional competence, active engagement, and holistic interest as foundational themes in narrative listening for people whose vocations depend on listening. Congruent with the literature, the findings showed the importance of listening between vocations, while allowing room for discussion of the differences of practice between purposes. Overall, the thesis provides insight into who the narrative listeners are, and what skills they share between their identities that can be adopted for use by more listeners.

CONCLUSION

This thesis' grounded research toward a theory of narrative listening has concluded with a few key findings. By way of a thorough analysis of eight interview transcripts, findings showed a presence of emotional competence, active engagement, and holistic interest skills in the vocational listeners interviewed. Application and knowledge of these three findings points to an understanding that narrative listeners' intentional engagement and encouragement are a result of a conscious understanding of their influence on the speaker. The findings are congruent with the literature presented, although leave room for future research into the topic.

This study adds to the growing body of literature on narrative identity and listening by offering insights into how vocational listeners shape the co-construction process. By focusing on the listener's role, this research highlights the importance of listening as an active, collaborative process that can shape personal and professional relationships. While the scope of this research is limited to healers and leaders, the findings could have broader applications, offering valuable insights for improving communication practices in a wide range of fields, from healthcare to education.

Future implications

Case study research into a theory of narrative listening has a long way to go, and this thesis has acted as a step toward future implications. It is recommended that future case studies of narrative listening pull from a larger population, including listeners from more vocations. A few recommended vocations include teachers, servers, and advocates. Including a wider array of vocations is key to understanding a broader application and usage of narrative listening by a larger population. Additionally, it is recommended that future studies place a heavier emphasis

on narrative identity when interviewing the listeners. This has the potential to further examine the conscious knowledge listeners have of the speaker's identity when listening to them and the role this places in their practice.

Additionally, there is room for a more in-depth study of narrative listening utilizing a larger, academically-diversified team of coders, similar to the UGRA. This input from professionals across fields may then be compiled into a listening curriculum to be taught in universities. For this to happen, a large-scale interview project would be necessary to capture the stories and wisdom of listeners nationwide and worldwide, likely followed by a grant or university funding to build a program dedicated to passing along and furthering the findings in academia and communities. There are many directions in which this study into narrative listening can continue, and these are only a few recommendations for future studies.

Finally, it may be beneficial to study the way that narrative listening practices change between vocations, purposes, and identities. While a study of the similar, overarching themes is where the research has begun, that is not where it needs to end. Breaking down the skills based on purpose may allow a more elemental view of what is happening when narrative listeners listen for narrative.

Limitations

This study has some limitations worth noting. I recognize that multiple identities influenced the narratives shared during the interviews. I was not the only interviewer; a total of 18 interviewers contributed to the podcast, each bringing their own identity—including roles as researchers, students, and supervisors—that helped shape the conversations with interviewees. Further investigation is needed to understand how the identities of both the interviewers and myself, as the researcher, may have impacted this process. Additionally, the public nature of the

interviews shared via podcast could have influenced the responses. There is a possibility that interviewees were influenced by social desirability, which may have affected the content of their answers.

Finally, we used a branching interview technique to explore the interviewees' deeper beliefs and motivations within their listening practice. This approach, which usually helps expand the speaker's narrative identity in storytelling contexts, was used here to delve into structured questions before moving to the next topic. However, this alternation between structured and branching questions may have limited how freely interviewees shared their own narrative identities, particularly in relation to their roles as listeners, thus limiting the data.

In tying the project back to the broader field of study, narrative listening can offer a new perspective on how stories and identities are co-constructed. This has implications for fields such as therapy, leadership, journalism, and even everyday interactions where listening plays a key role in understanding one another. Future research could explore narrative listening across other professions or examine how it functions in non-verbal or digital interactions. Overall, this project highlights the profound impact of listening on the narrative process, showing that listeners play an active role in shaping not only the stories they hear but also the identities of the people who tell them.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Materials

Consent Email Interview

Dear [Participant],
My name is Michael Humphrey and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the Journalism and Media Communication department. My colleague, Katie Mitchell, and I are conducting a research study on (*give brief description of research & purpose*). The title of our project is Storylisteners. I am the Principal Investigator.
We would like to do an interview. Participation will take approximately 1 hour. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty. ***Please note that because this is an engaged research project, meant to help the community while the research is ongoing, you will be recorded for a podcast episode. Below you will see options for the level of privacy you wish to maintain.***
If you agree to participate in my research, I will conduct an interview with you at a time and location of your choice. The interview will involve questions about your personal history, your daily work tasks, your perceptions about listening, and your perceptions about the stories of the people you serve. It should last about 1 hour. With your permission, I will audiotape, and possibly videotape, and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide and will be used for transcription purposes as well as for a podcast series called *Storylisteners*. If you choose not to be videotaped, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being audiotaped but feel uncomfortable or change your mind for any reason during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you do not wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.
Having your story heard is a powerful experience that makes one's own motivations for their work and lives more clear. Telling one's story to highly engaged listeners has been shown to benefit a person's well-being. There is also a possibility that your honest answers might not be accepted to everyone who listens to the podcast or reads the research articles. This creates a slight risk to your reputation. Also, it can be uncomfortable for some to talk about their life stories, especially if you have experienced unresolved trauma in your life.
Identifiers might be removed from the identifiable *private information* and, after such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you.
If you have any questions about the research, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB.

Michael Humphrey, Assistant Professor, Journalism Media Communication, Colorado State University

Katie Mitchell, Graduate Student, Journalism Media Communication, Colorado State University

Recruitment Email [Short]

Hi [Participant],

My name is Mike Humphrey, I'm an assistant professor here at Colorado State University and [reference] brought up your name and work during a conversation recently. I am beginning community-based research into the concept of "storylistening" or the ability to listen *for* story when working with and seeking to help others. In speaking with [reference], I felt that you might be a doing a version of this in your practice.

I would love to talk to you about that and the possibility of being in a podcast that I am producing that will also become interview data for research (on the practices, stories, and knowhow of storylisteners who heal others).

I have written a brief description: https://medium.com/story-listeners/storylistening-going-deeper-into-what-who-and-why-4fd0260663a5

Please see a more detailed invitation attached.

If you have time and are interested in having a conversation with me, I can explain the research better and my hopes of developing a community of storylisteners. I would be happy to send you my calendar so you can choose a time that's convenient for you.

Thanks for reading and all the best,

Mike

Consent to Participate in Research

The Storylisteners Project

Introduction and Purpose

My name is Michael Humphrey. I am a faculty member at Colorado State University in the School/Department of Journalism and Media Communicaiton I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which looks at how people listen for the narratives of the people they serve in their vocation. **Please note that because this is an engaged research project, meant to help the community while the research is ongoing, you will be recorded for a podcast episode. Below you will see options for the level of privacy you wish to maintain.**

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my research, I will conduct an interview with you at a time and location of your choice. The interview will involve questions about your personal history, your daily work tasks, your perceptions about listening, and your perceptions about the stories of the people you serve. It should last about 1 hour. With your permission, I will audiotape, and possibly videotape, and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide and will be used for transcription purposes as well as for a podcast series called *Storylisteners*. If you choose not to be videotaped, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being audiotaped but feel uncomfortable or change your mind for any reason during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you do not wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

You will have the right to choose the follow levels of identification:

1) I (am / am not) granting permission for the podcast and research articles to use my first and last name.
   Initial:
2) I (am / am not) granting permission for the podcast promotion materials to use my image, either in video or photography.
   Initial:
3) I (am / am not) granting permission for the podcast and research articles to name my place of work.
   Initial:

If you chose to not grant permission to any of the identifying information above, we will: 1) use a pseudonym or just a first name based on your wishes; 2) not video the proceeding and not use any photography of you in the podcast materials; 3) will not name your place of work and use general terms (nurse, teacher, etc.) to describe your vocation.

I expect to conduct only one interview; however, follow-ups may be needed for added clarification and you will have the chance to listen to the interview before it is released. You will have a significant say in what is included and excluded in the interview. I will contact you by email request this. You will likely hear from us 1-2 months after the interview, and we will communicate via email unless you prefer to discuss elements of the interview over the phone, Zoom, or in person.

Benefits

Having your story heard is a powerful experience that makes one's own motivations for their work and lives more clear. Telling one's story to highly engaged listeners has been shown to benefit a person's well-being.

Risks/Discomforts

There is a possibility that your honest answers might not be accepted to everyone who listens to the podcast or reads the research articles. This creates a slight risk to your reputation. Also, it can be uncomfortable for some to talk about their life stories, especially if you have experienced unresolved trauma in your life.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, we are taking precautions to minimize this risk, if you choose to keep your identity private.

Confidentiality

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. When results of this study are published or presented, any individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used if you chose above to keep those details private.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, all sound, video, and transcribed data will be secured in password-protected digital folders (Google Drive) with an alphanumeric code that can be referenced in a separate filing system (also password-protected) spreadsheet with identifying information and consent status. Only the Principal Investigators will have access to these files and will not be shared or analyzed outside of the online foldering system.

When the research is completed, we will save the transcriptions and other study data for possible use in future research done by myself or others. We will retain these records for up to 10 years after the study is over. The same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality of this study data. We may be asked to share the research files with the sponsor or the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee for auditing purposes.

Identifiers might be removed from the identifiable *private information* and, after such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you.

Compensation

You will not be paid for taking part in this study

Rights

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research and whether or not you choose to answer any questions or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me at 970-480-7583 or michael.humphrey@colostate.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at: 970-491-1553, or e-mail CSU_IRB@colostate.edu .

CONSENT

Participant Consent:

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and voluntarily wish to participate in this research. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing __ pages.

_____ _____
Signature of participant Date

_____
Name of participant

_____ _____
Signature of person providing information Date

_____
Name of person providing information

Do you consent for your interview to be audiotaped for the podcast?
Yes
No

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

_____
Participant's Name *(please print)*

_____ _____
Participant's Signature Date

If you agree to allow your name or other identifying information to be included in all final reports, publications, and/or presentations resulting from this research, please sign and date below.

_____ _____
Participant's Signature Dates

Appendix B: “Storylisteners” Teaching Figures

Figure B3: Narrative listening "branching" technique, credit Michael Humphrey

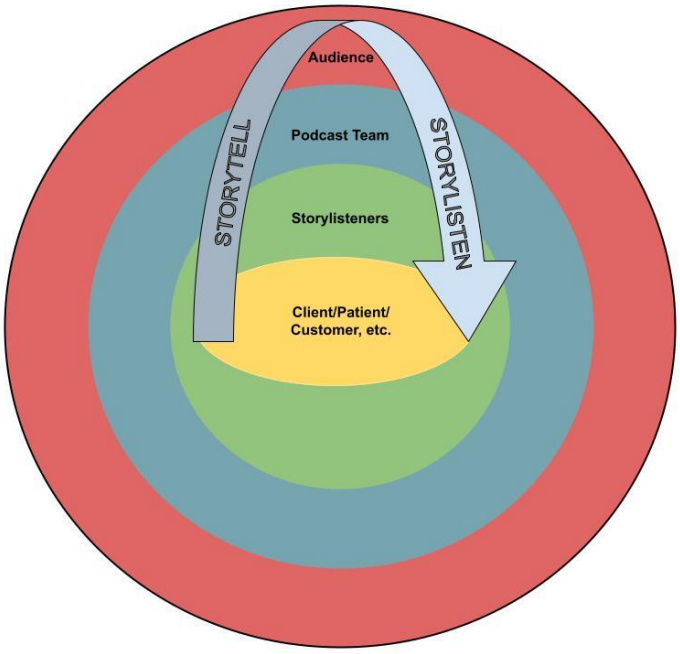

Figure B4: Storylisteners Podcast diagram, credit Michael Humphrey

Appendix C: Storylisteners Podcast Interviewers/Interviewees Tables

Table C1: Season 1 list of interviewees and interviewers

Season 1, Healers	
Participant	*Interviewer*
Xenia Copeland-Fuentes	Dr. Humphrey
Rachel Pearl	Milo Gladstein
Therapist (anonymous)	Dr. Humphrey
Jody Engel	Maisy Barbosa
Shannon Darling	Lucy Bowman
Sarah Mitchell	Alexis Austere
Trinity Wilbourn	Milo Gladstein
Lee Tomlinson	Katie Mitchell
Ron Holder	Alexis Austere

Table C2: Season 2 list of interviewees and interviewers

Season 2, Leaders	
Participant	*Interviewer*
Carrie Hessler-Radelet	Annie Hessler

Sgt. Gar Hugo	Garrett Mogel
Charles Tingle	Kayla Mcllroy
Wes Sternberg	Tristan Moore
Linda Shapley	Bekah Lamb
Angela Myers	Gunnar Imgarten
Abby Tillinghast	Lisa Aitkin
Mike Jennings	Sarah Meyer
Rye Vigil	Emma Houckes
Ayla Sirois	Ivy Secrest
Adrienne DeTray	Molly Gates
Dani Grant	Toril Aserlind

Appendix D: Storylisteners Podcast Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Storylisteners season 1 semi-structured interview questions

- What do you think is the most important part of your job?
- Tell me about the typical patient/clients needs on a typical day.
- Do you think that patients/clients whose stories are heard get treated differently?
- How do you think about listening?
- How do you think you've changed the way you listen over time?
- Tell me about a time you have felt very listened to.
- Tell me a little about growing up, especially about your family.

Storylisteners season 2 semi-structured interview questions

- What is the most important part of your job?
- (If they answer listening, then skip this question). How does listening play a role in being a leader?
- If you could teach someone how to listen, what would you tell them?
- How important is it to know someone's story in order to lead them? Why?
- When was a time you felt most listened to?
- What parts of your own life story do think helped make you a better listener?

Appendix E: Storylisteners Podcast Season 1 Links

Season 1, Healers	Air Date
Xenia Copeland-Fuentes	February 6, 2024
Rachel Pearl	February 14, 2024
Therapist (anonymous)	February 21, 2024
Jody Engel	February 28, 2024
Shannon Darling	March 6, 2024
Sarah Mitchell	March 20, 2024
Trinity Wilbourn	March 27, 2024
Lee Tomlinson	April 3, 2024
Ron Holder	April 10, 2024