

What are Redemptive Narratives?

Stories of **challenge, failure or adversity** that acknowledge **goodness** or **personal growth** that resulted.

Hypotheses

1. Redemptive arcs will demonstrate a **more positive tone** at their end than their beginning.
2. Both **cognitive** and **emotional processes** play a role in **redemptive narratives**.

Materials

97 Life narratives of difficult events collected by Brady Jones (Jones, 2018).
Narratives were hand-coded as redemptive or non-redemptive following McAdams et al. (2001).

Emotional Processing

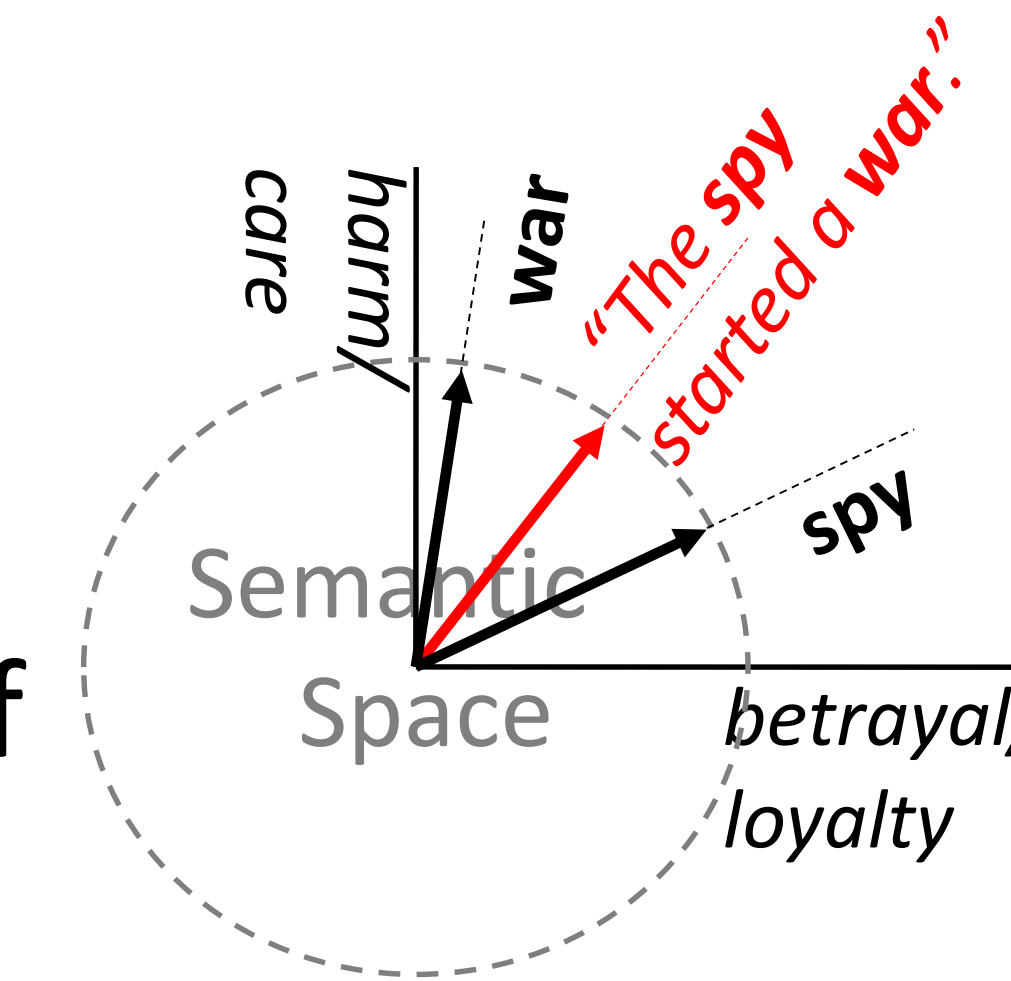
Redemptive narratives are characterized as stories that turn a negative event into a positive outcome. To measure this arc of valence we used a set of terms frequently employed for **sentiment analysis** (Hu and Liu, 2004; positive: *easier; ideal; improve*; negative: *crisis; debt; pain*).

Cognitive Processing

Redemptive narratives are stories that emphasize *moral character*. To measure this aspect we relied on **Moral Foundations Theory** (Haidt & Joseph, 2004) which identifies 5 domains of moral reasoning. We used the **Moral Foundations Dictionary** to identify relevant terms in each domain (Graham et al., 2009; e.g., care: *protection*; harm: *suffered*; loyalty: *together*; betrayal: *enemy*; Authority: *respect*; Subversion: *protest*)

Method: Measuring Valence in a Narrative

- ❖ Based on Sagi & Deghani (2014)
- ❖ Words as vectors in a *semantic space*
- ❖ **Data points:** Sentences in a narrative
- ❖ **Basic measure:** Angle between vectors of sentences and terms from the Moral Foundations Dictionary and sentiment analysis.
- ❖ **Aggregate measure:** The difference between the average of positive valence terms and negative valence terms.

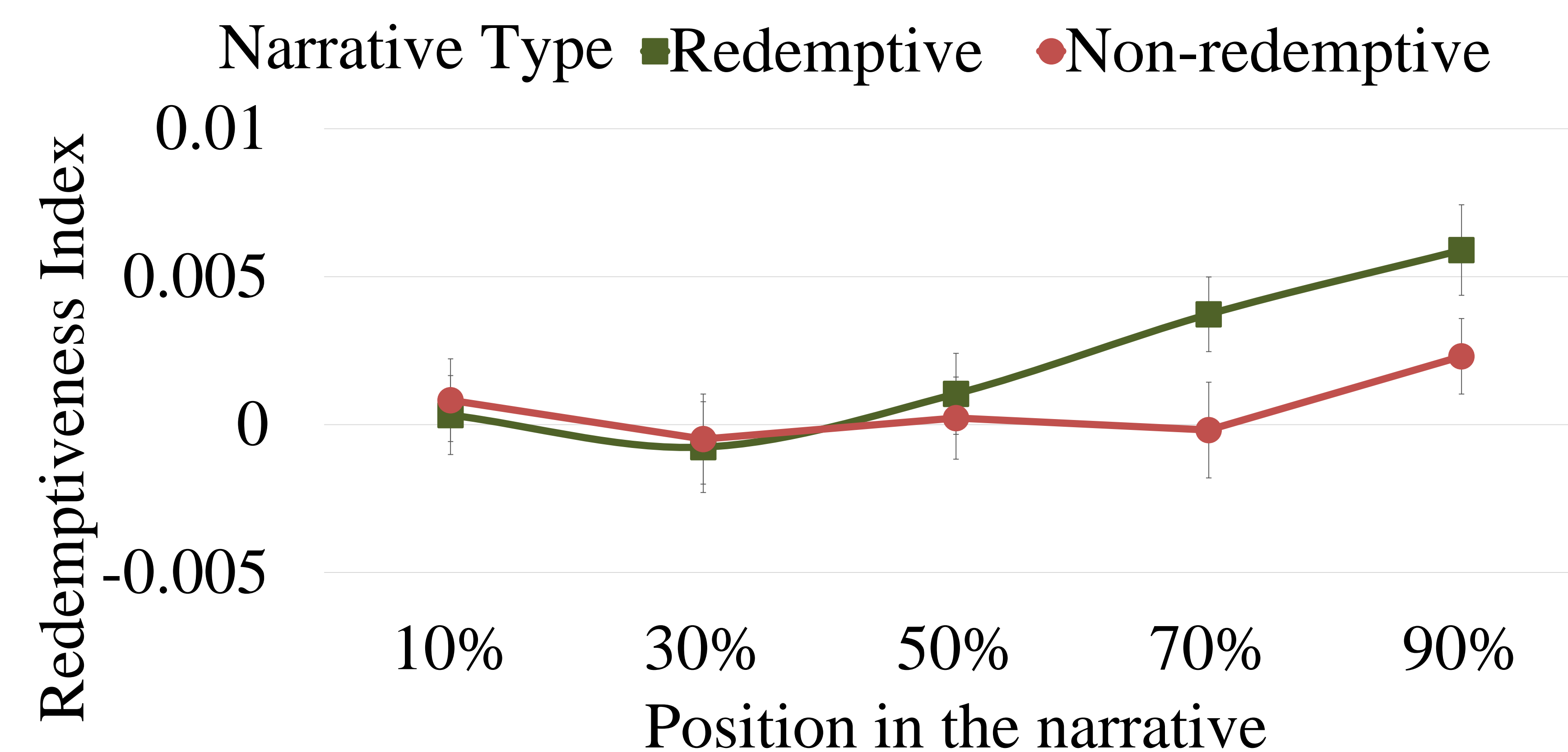


Semantic Spaces

Topicality: Words that occur together likely relate to the same topic.

- ❖ Based on *Infomap*. (Takayama et al., 1999; Similar to *Latent Semantic Analysis*, Deerwester et al., 1990)
- ❖ The space is based on patterns of *word co-occurrence*.

Results



- ❖ Redemptive narratives showed more increase than non-redemptive narratives. ($p < .005$)
- ❖ This difference is due to increased *negative valence* in non-redemptive narratives, for both cognition and emotion.

Sample Redemptive Narrative

I think the worst time in my life was while I was doing my master's. I lost my mother a month after I started, and the workload and financial worries added on to make things even worse. Midway into the program, the housing market and Lehman brothers tanked, and I could then look forward to graduating with scads of debt into a job market that would be laying off teachers. This time was horrible because it was so overwhelming. I couldn't really process my thoughts and feelings, I spent a lot of time drinking in front of the TV, zoning out. My hair fell out, I gained weight, and getting to sleep at night was difficult at best. This time tested everything in me; the support of my significant other and my friends was the only thing that kept me going. I think I've become a lot more pessimistic and cynical since then, but also more appreciative.

Sentences are colored coded based on redemptiveness (low indices in red, high in green)

Results

- ❖ Narratives of redemption are characterized by a shift in the valence of the text over the course of the narrative.
- ❖ These arcs are characterized by reduced negativity at their end.
- ❖ Both cognitive (assessment of virtues and vices) and emotional (positive and negative sentiments) combine in these arcs.

Future Studies

- ❖ Can automated methods be used to assist hand coding?
- ❖ What specific processes are represented in this narratives?

References

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