



Leading with stories: Andrew Cuomo, family narratives and authentic leadership

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ABSTRACT

The increasing mediatization of politics and government requires political actors to disclose aspects of their private and personal lives within their political communications. This article focuses on a sequence of personal narratives told by New York governor, Andrew Cuomo, in one of his daily press briefings during the early days of the COVID-19 crisis. I show how Cuomo enacted authentic leadership by mobilizing relational identities in a narrative segment. By telling three interconnected family stories, Cuomo provided evidence for his stay-at-home policy for New Yorkers during the pandemic. The performance of various relational identities in this narrative sequence helped construct Andrew Cuomo and his family members as ordinary citizens, making them relatable to viewers; at the same time, through the telling of these particular stories, Cuomo positioned himself as a trustworthy, effective leader and a prescient, reliable decision-maker. The study demonstrates how affective, relational discourse can be exploited by political leaders in the service of advancing their more transactional goals.

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1. Introduction

Early 2020 saw varied responses from United States' governors to COVID-19. In the absence of a coherent policy at the national level, each U.S. state governor responded to the public health crisis with policies that reflected not only their states' rates of contagion but also their political perspectives and alignments. In this context, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's public press briefings attracted positive attention from the media. One year later, Cuomo would find himself the subject of far less flattering media portrayals. However in March 2020 – at the onset of unprecedented uncertainty and immense fear surrounding the pandemic – Cuomo's daily televised press briefings provided at least some segment of the U.S. population with much-needed information as well as comfort.

In the early days of the pandemic in the U.S., New York quickly became the state with the highest number of cases and virus-related deaths. During the first week of March 2020, Governor Cuomo began holding daily televised press briefings, where he introduced a series of policies intended to curtail the spread of the virus (e.g., closing non-essential businesses, increased testing, expansions to the state's healthcare equipment and hospital capacity, and advocating social distancing and sheltering-in-place). While unpopular with some, Cuomo's swift data-informed actions drew praise from others who understood that Cuomo's policies

were intended to reduce the risk of contagion. In addition to Cuomo's actions, his leadership style – enacted publicly during his daily press briefings – also drew praise from the press and the public alike.

Relying on a problem/solution mode of discourse, Cuomo's speeches during his press briefings took an analytic approach, emphasizing facts, data and numbers. According to journalists and media commentators (e.g., [Asghar, 2020](#); [Behesti, 2020](#); [Dill and Chen, 2020](#); [Herz, 2020](#)), his cool and calm demeanor inspired confidence among New Yorkers. At the same time, beyond his “no-nonsense plain talk” communication style, characterized by simple syntax and frequent pausing, Cuomo's leadership discourse was also praised by the press as humane and empathetic. Predictably, most of Cuomo's talk in these press briefings was largely transactional, reporting on rates of infection and mortality rates in New York – as well as numbers of hospital beds and ventilators. Yet occasionally, Cuomo broke out of the transactional frame and interjected more relational forms of talk, such as brief narratives of personal experience involving his mother, his siblings, or his children.

During the months of March–April 2020, I observed Cuomo's daily press briefings. I downloaded available transcripts that corresponded to 20 of these briefings and I carried out preliminary analyses that allowed me to identify the aforementioned features characteristic of his discourse. From this larger dataset, the press briefing from March 31 was especially noteworthy, because in it, Governor Cuomo announced that his brother, CNN Reporter Chris

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Cuomo, had tested positive for coronavirus and was subsequently quarantined in his home. Occupying visible public roles in politics and media respectively, Andrew and Chris Cuomo are familiar to the U.S. public. The two brothers became known for their joint media performances involving jocular teasing, delivered in a deadpan style, as they playfully “argued” over topics such as which one of them was their mother’s favorite son (Chiyu, 2020).

Below I show how Governor Andrew Cuomo merged public and private discourses to enact authentic leadership by delivering a series of narratives of personal experience about his relationship with his younger brother. I argue that, on the one hand, mobilizing various relational identities served to position Andrew Cuomo and his family members as ordinary citizens, making them relatable to viewers during a time of crisis; and, on the other hand, through the telling of these particular stories, Cuomo positioned himself as a cool-headed, trustworthy and effective leader, and a prescient decision-maker.

The data comprise a sequence of connected narratives told by Cuomo during one of his daily press briefings in March 2020. These prepared speeches (typically 30–60 min) were delivered to an immediate audience of a few journalists, but were designed for a larger viewing public, to be broadcast via mass and digital media channels. With their primary focus on issues, facts and recent pandemic-related developments, the emphasis on transactional content in these press briefings was undoubtedly shaped by generic expectations of institutional as well as political discourse. At the same time however, as many discourse and media scholars have argued (e.g., Bhatia, 2006; Fetzer, 2010; Schubert, 2010; Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2010), the mediatized nature of this discourse also shaped it in ways which made relevant the communication of more personal, relational and affective types of content. In spite of their potential impact on both political and everyday realities, press briefings represent a surprisingly understudied genre in the field of discourse studies (Bhatia, 2006), with the majority of existing research attending to their dialogic dimension – specifically, the at-times adversarial interactions between politicians and members of the press corps (e.g., Partington, 2003, 2006; Schubert, 2012). In contrast, the present study focuses on the press briefing as a discourse context for a politician’s use of personal narratives to enact authentic leadership.

2. Politicians’ use of personal narratives

Studies of politicians’ uses of personal narratives have focused on speeches regarding events of global importance (Fetzer, 2010; Schubert, 2010), political debates (Reyes, 2015), and campaign speeches (Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2010). Although traditionally, narratives told by politicians did not typically delve into personal matters related to their roles as public citizens, Schubert (2010) and others have noted that “with the rise of the mass media, speeches have become more personal, relying more strongly on emotional than on rational argumentation” (p. 150). This trend is also related to conversationalization of institutional discourse genres such as press briefings (Bhatia, 2006) more generally, with the lines between political figures’ public and private experiences growing increasingly blurred.

Today, personal narratives serve as a means for politicians to both build intimacy and common ground with an audience, as well as to appeal to their emotions (Reyes, 2015). Fetzer (2010) argues that in contemporary life, personal narratives told to mediated audiences highlight politicians’ identities not as “one-dimensional figures, but rather as multifaceted and multidimensional social agents,” explaining further that “the mediatization of politics requires [...] political actors to present themselves as both public servants and private individuals” (p. 173). By commu-

nicating about themselves as private citizens within mediated political discourse, politicians construct credibility and sincerity. This, in turn, builds affiliation, alignment and common ground with their constituents.

3. Discursive leadership

The field of leadership studies – a multidisciplinary endeavor dedicated to studying leaders in a variety of organizational contexts – has seen a shift from earlier positivist, trait-based approaches to leadership to a more contemporary focus on the constitutive nature of language and discourse in leadership. Discursive leadership scholars (e.g., Fairhurst, 2007; Clifton, 2006, 2012; Holmes and Marra, 2004) argue that leadership is not continuous with some pre-established personality trait(s), but rather that leadership is a relational process, which comes into being through communication and interaction. In their focus on leadership enacted through narrative discourse, Clifton et al (2019) claim that contextualized analyses of *in situ* narratives offer nuanced insights how language is used to enact leadership. Such an approach explores “how particular leader identities are talked into being on a particular occasion to achieve particular ends” (p. 8).

Research on leadership has tended to emphasize the more transactional aspects of leadership – in other words, how leaders “get things done.” In contrast, fewer studies have addressed authentic leadership, which involves, among other things, the disclosure of personal values, motives, and sentiments – as well as a willingness to display one’s self-awareness and vulnerability (Clifton et al., 2019). As Sparrowe (2005) explains, authentic leadership comes into being as leaders weave together elements from their past life experiences and integrate them together into some coherent and compelling narrative(s). In short, authentic leaders communicate in ways that emphasizes their humanity.

When told in the middle of a genre associated with predominantly transactional functions – such as a press briefing – a leader’s narratives of personal experience may seem tangential to the primary goal of communicating newsworthy information to the public. However, I demonstrate below how, for Cuomo, personal narratives serve to enact authentic leadership within this mediatized form of public, political discourse. Clifton et al (2019) explain that by integrating narratives into their talk “speakers construct certain (leader) identities for themselves while at the same time, often doing leadership and enacting relational behaviors [...] as well as transactional leadership behaviors (such as getting things done or teaching their [...] audience a lesson)” (p. 119). Indeed, Cuomo accomplishes all these functions within the narratives analyzed: the relational dimension of the narratives highlights his humanity and humility as he describes his own actions and positions within situations of family conflict. Yet those same stories simultaneously serve his more transactional goals by rhetorically emphasizing his “stay at home” policy to the public, thereby enacting effective, authentic leadership.

4. Narrative analytic approach

I rely on an interactional sociolinguistic approach to the analysis of narrative discourse. Interactional sociolinguistics takes into account linguistic features (lexis, syntax), paralinguistic features (e.g., stress, prosody, pausing, rate of speech), as well as pre-existing contextual information, such as facts about the speaker that are known prior to a particular speech event. In the narrative excerpts below, I use a modified conversation analytic transcription system (Jefferson, 2004) to depict paralinguistic information, such as pausing, laughter and shifts in prosody. Additionally, I refer

to previously-established facts about the speaker and his family, as public figures. I pay particular attention to how Cuomo positions himself relative to his younger brother, Chris, as social actors.

I adopt a narrative-as-practice approach (De Fina, 2021; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008), which links micro-analyses of talk to the larger social and historical contexts in which that talk is embedded. I also draw on two classic frameworks (i.e., Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Ochs and Capps, 2001) to segment and describe the data. Because the narratives I discuss are monologic and canonical, the Labovian approach to narrative provides a structural understanding of the different story components (i.e., abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda) of the three stories told by Cuomo. Ochs and Capps (2001) conceptualize all narratives as falling somewhere on a continuum of five different dimensions: tellership, embeddedness, linearity, tellability and moral stance. In terms of tellership, these narrative data feature only one active teller: Andrew Cuomo, speaking in his public role as NY governor. This narrative sequence is highly embedded within the larger speech activity underway (March 31 press briefing) and its contents are thematically relevant to the overarching topic of his COVID-19 updates. In terms of linearity, Cuomo refers to three different time frames in the three narrative segments, as I explain below: a recent event that occurred the same day as the press briefing; an episode from the remote past, which occurred over 20 years ago; and a conversation that took place 2 weeks earlier. Tellability refers both to how “reportable” a particular story is as well as how rhetorically effective the speaker is in making their point. In the data discussed below, all three narrative sequences are highly tellable, in the sense of reporting on a noteworthy, timely and high-stakes occurrence; however only the second and third narratives include dramatic performance features, such as the performative voicing of different characters in the storyworld. Finally, moral stance refers to the speaker’s perspective on what is right and wrong, good and bad. Cuomo’s moral stance is decisive and consistent throughout all three narratives: this steady, unyielding moral stance is characteristic of Cuomo’s discursive leadership style.

5. Narrative data

In this series of narratives – stories centering on Chris Cuomo’s recently-diagnosed coronavirus infection – told during a public press briefing, the elder Cuomo brother mobilizes various relational identities (devoted son, older brother) to convey moral lessons, which communicate his public health policies to the public. The seven minute sequence of three narratives occurs in minutes 32:00–39:00 of the press briefing [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eUXl8u8tj0&feature=youtu.be>], which ends three minutes later, at which point Cuomo invites the press to ask questions. Consistent with Fetzer’s (2010) observation that politicians often use personal narratives to contextualize their prior discourse, these narratives occur just before the end of the press briefing.

Although his talk during these seven minutes occurred as a continuous stream of discourse, for analytic purposes I have segmented Cuomo’s storytelling episode into three narratives, focusing on three distinct points in time. In the first and briefest of the narratives, Cuomo reveals his younger brother, Chris, discovered earlier that day he had contracted the coronavirus, resulting in self-quarantine. In the second narrative, which consists of a longer digression into the remote past, Cuomo explains how it was that, 23 years earlier, Chris became a journalist – in opposition to their father’s wishes that Chris pursue a career in law. Finally, in the third narrative, Cuomo references a conversation that he and Chris had two weeks earlier. This story concerns a disagreement between the two brothers over where their elderly mother should

reside during the pandemic. My analysis focuses on how the speaker, Governor Andrew Cuomo, positions himself and his brother Chris in the storyworlds that he creates. Specifically, I demonstrate how these fraternal identities are mobilized as discursive resources by Cuomo to underscore his stay-at-home policies during the first month of the COVID-19 outbreak in New York. Through sharing his own family’s experiences, Cuomo establishes rapport with his viewing audience (Reyes, 2015).

5.1. Narrative 1

Leading into this first narrative of the series, Cuomo describes the virus as “the great equalizer,” explaining that everyone is at risk of contagion, regardless of their intelligence, wealth or power. The repetition of this utterance, “this virus is the great equalizer” (line 1) becomes the narrative’s abstract, underscoring the main point of Cuomo’s story, which is that no one is immune from COVID-19 – not even the governor’s younger brother, introduced as a new topic as “my brother Chris.” This is followed by the announcement of Chris’s diagnosis (line 2) and the fact that it had been discovered earlier that day (line 3). Cuomo’s subsequent utterance (line 4) begins with a few uncharacteristic false starts, as he searches for the right words to reassure his listeners that Chris will ultimately recover from the illness. He does this by characterizing his brother as “young,” “in good shape” and “strong” – categories that are contextually relevant, because of the virus’s more severe effects on older or immune-compromised people. However, he immediately qualifies his description of his brother as “strong” – by muttering “not as strong as he thinks he is” quickly and under his breath (line 7), thereby referring intertextually to the jocular sibling rivalry that the two brothers are known for performing on camera.

Narrative 1 (32:00)

1	<u>this</u> (.) virus > is the great ↑equal↓izer< (1.0)
2	my brother CHRIS (2.0) uh- is positive for ↓coronavirus
3	°found out this morning°
4	the:: (1.0) ah- now (1.0) uh- ↑ <u>he</u> : (.) is going to be (.) ↓fine
5	he:’s (1.0) uh- <u>young</u> (.)
6	in good shape (.)
7	uh- strong (.) >°not as strong as he thinks°<
8	but (1.0) uh- <u>he will be</u> (.) ↑fine (2.0)
9	<u>but</u> (.) there’s a <↑LESSON > in ↓this (.)
10	>he’s an essential worker
11	a member of the ↓press<
12	so: (1.0) uh- he’s been out ↑ <u>there</u>
13	>if <u>you</u> go <u>out</u> there
14	the chance that you get infected<
15	is very ↓high (.)
16	uh- I spoke to him this morning (1.0)
17	and uh- he’s going to be quaranti:ned uh- in his ↑basement (.) at ↑home
18	he’s > just worried about his daughter and his ↑kids
19	that he hopes he didn’t get <u>THEM</u> < (.) infected

Cuomo gets to the point quickly, as he tells viewers what the lesson of the story is (line 9), emphasizing the word *lesson* by raising his pitch and by making the word louder than his surrounding talk. Explaining how his brother Chris, as a member of the essential workforce, got infected by leaving his home (“he’s been out there,” line 12), Cuomo extends this argument analogically, making it applicable to the wider public, by using the second person pronoun

you, placing stress on the word *out*: “if you go out there the chance that you get infected is very high” (lines 13–15). Cuomo shares his brother’s infection with the coronavirus as a specific case, in order to reinforce his stay-at-home-policy for the citizens of New York.

The outcome of the situation serves as the narrative’s resolution, which is that Chris will now be quarantined in his home (line 17). Speaking on his brother’s behalf, Cuomo positions Chris as both a responsible citizen, who self-quarantines in his homes’ basement in order to not infect others, and a caring father, concerned with keeping his children safe (lines 18–19). The shortest of the three narratives – just over one minute – this story is communicated in a straightforward, unemotional fashion, with few dramatic performance features. Cuomo sharing this story about his brother’s health in the press briefing functions obviously to make a larger point to the public: to stay at home to avoid the risk of contracting the virus. Through this exemplifying (Schubert, 2010) narrative, Cuomo highlights the ordinariness of the event: his brother became infected by going to his job, and must now remain in his home.

5.2. Narrative 2

The second narrative, involving a digression into the remote past, immediately follows the preceding one and is about twice as long. Flashbacks to previous episodes in the political leader’s private life represent the “personalizing function” of narrative (Schubert, 2010) and in Narrative 2, Cuomo delves into how two decades earlier, his younger brother Chris went against his father’s wishes, changing careers from law to journalism. The narrative begins with Cuomo’s attempt to explain the kind of person his brother “really” is – and how that contrasts with Chris’s more aggressive public persona, as a journalist on CNN. Cuomo does this by explaining that being “combative” is part of his brother’s professional requirements. Cuomo’s raised pitch following the adversative construction (“but that’s his job,” line 28) signals a contrast between Chris’s professional identity, and the person that he “really” is. By placing stress on each descriptor and pausing briefly between them (“He’s a really sweet beautiful guy,” line 30) Cuomo further emphasizes this characterization. Cuomo humanizes his brother by providing him with an identity beyond that of journalist, thus merging public and private spheres, demonstrating Cuomo’s awareness of the importance of weaving details from one’s personal life into one’s discursively produced public identity.

Jumping timescales into the more remote past, when the two brothers were children, Cuomo provides viewers with an intimate glimpse into the brothers’ relationship referring to Chris as “my best friend.” Cuomo explains that because their father (three-term New York governor, Mario Cuomo) was always working, the two boys were very close (“it was always just me and Chris,” line 33). Viewers familiar with the Cuomos as a political family may be aware that there is a 13-year age gap between the two Cuomo brothers and that they have 3 other siblings. However, Cuomo does not mention these facts, instead using the narrative’s orientation to underscore his closeness to, and his affection for, his youngest sibling, the story’s protagonist.

In line 34, Cuomo shifts from describing their relationship to identifying his brother professionally, as a lawyer (line 34). With this, he launches into a series of narrative clauses explaining how it came to be that Chris, who started his professional life a lawyer, eventually became a journalist, his current professional role. This story is only tangentially related to Chris’s current status of being infected with coronavirus; however Cuomo does eventually return to this topic (line 71). By telling this seemingly unrelated story and positioning the relevant social actors within the remote past of the storyworld, Cuomo reveals aspects of his brother’s character as well as his own.

Narrative 2 (33:06)

-
- 20 uh- (1.0) you don’t really know ↓Chris
-
- 21 >y’know < you see Chris
 22 uh he: has a show on night (1.0) uh- >°9o’clock on CNN°<
 23 but you just see one <↓dimension > right?
 24 you see a person in his jo:b (1.0)
 25 and in his jo:b he:s ↓combative
 26 and he’s argumentative
 27 °and he’s pushing people°
 28 >but ↑that’s his job<
 29 that’s really not (.) who he ↓is
 30 he’s a really (.) sweet (.) beautiful (.) guy (.)
 31 uh- (2.0) and uh- (.) he’s my best friend
 32 >my Father was always working
 33 so it was always just me and Chris< (1.0)
 34 and uh- (1.0) he’s a ↑lawyer also °↓Chris° (1.0)
 35 he’s a ↑lawyer because growing up (1.0)
 36 uh the decision point came to > what do you want to do
 after ↑college<
 37 and my father was a very strong personality (2.0)
 38 °and uh- my father basically° (.) suggested forcefully to
 Chris
 39 that he should be a lawyer (1.0)
 40 uh- it was a different time and a different place (.)
 °y’know°<
 41 uh- now (.) my ↓daughters- Cara who’s here
 42 >°y’know°< they all (.) follow their (.) individual ↑sta:rs
 43 this is their destiny (.)
 44 >which is right<
 45 >if you had said to my ↓father < (.) I want to follow my
 individual sta:r (.)
 46 he would say yeah y- you can follow your individual sta:r
 (.) right out that door
 47 >y’know that’s (hh) what (hh) he (hh) would (hh) have
 (hh) said< (.)
 48 so Chris went to law school (.)
 49 uh- >but he ↑NEVER really < had a desire to practice ↓law
 50 he calls me when he’s abou:t 26 (.) >°he’s at a law ↓firm°<
 (.)
 51 and he said > y’know ↑I don’t want to be a ↓lawyer< (.)
 52 °I said° >yeah I know< (.) but you ARE (.) now a ↓lawyer (.)
 you are (.)
 53 °he said° >↑yeah but I don’t ↑want to be a ↓lawyer<
 54 °I said° >what do you want to be?<
 55 °he said° >I want to be a JOURNALIST< (.)
 56 °I said° >you want to be a ↓journalist<
 57 °I said° >it’s ↑too late< (.)
 58 you’re a lawyer (.)
 59 you have to < pa:y law school bills> (.)
 60 you didn’t go to < journalism school> (.)
 61 °too ↑late° (.)
 62 >↑NO no < I think I can ↓do it (.)
 63 >and ↑God bless him<
 64 he quit (.) the law ↓firm (.)
 65 uh- <went to work for > Fox TV (.)
 66 ° >which is a whole < separate conversation in the house°
 (.)
 67 uh- <and then:> worked his way ↑up

1 (continued)

20	uh- (1.0) you don't really know ↓Chris
68	>he's at CNN<
69	he does a beautiful ↑job (.)
70	but a ↑sweet guy
71	>and now he's quarantined in the ↓basement
72	but he's funny as heck<
73	°he says to me uh ↑even the do:gs won't come ↓ downstairs ° >he (hh) says< (hh) so-
74	uh- (1.0) but he <u>is</u> concerned about his wife and his kids
75	BUT (.) the ↑reason I ↑ <u>raise</u> it (.) i:s he:'s (.) ↑smart (.)
76	he:'s social distancing <u>yes</u> (1.0)
77	but <↑ <u>you::</u> wind up expo:↑sing yourself>
78	>people wind up exposing <u>you</u>
79	and the:n they find out they're positive a couple of days ↓ later< (.)

In sharing this family narrative of how his youngest sibling defied their authoritarian father, Cuomo mobilizes several relational identities: son, brother, father. In the narrative's orientation, Cuomo shifts back to when he and his brother were young adults. That this was "a different time and a different place" (line 40) is reinforced by multiple references to their father's authoritarian approach and contrasted with Cuomo's own more egalitarian parenting style in the present day (lines 41–43). Cuomo describes their father as a "very strong personality," which is underscored by the manner in which he delivered his career advice to his youngest son (i.e., "suggested forcefully"), insisting he become a lawyer (lines 38–39).

Cuomo transitions back to the present as he explains that "now," in contrast to the past, young people are given freedom to choose their own careers. Using a metaphorical expression (i.e., *follow their individual stars*) to refer to pursuing one's professional passions, he names his own daughter, Cara (present at this press briefing), as an example of this trend. By expressing his positive stance toward children determining their own professional paths ("which is right," line 44), Cuomo positions himself as a progressive parent, which contrasts with his father's traditional approach.

Cuomo makes this contrast even more vivid by enacting a hypothetical conversation between an imagined speaker (presented as generic *you*) and his father, chuckling as he imagines his father's reaction to an imagined young person expressing their desire to pursue their own life goals (lines 45–47). Unsurprisingly, Cuomo indicates that Chris ultimately followed his father's directive: "so Chris went to law school" (line 48). As in other instances of constructed dialogues (discussed below), the fictional conversation between Cuomo's father and an imagined interlocutor features one of Cuomo's trademarks in expressing disagreement – other-repetition (underlined here, and below) with slight variation: e.g., "I want to follow my individual star" / "you can follow your individual star right out that door."

In the next section, one of the most tellable segments in terms of its performance features, Cuomo again uses constructed dialogue (Tannen, 1989) to re-enact a telephone call that took place between the two brothers, 23 years earlier. At that time Chris, having graduated from law school, was working at a law firm (lines 51–62). As his younger brother explains to Cuomo that he wants to be a journalist instead of a lawyer, his older brother – aligning with their father's perspective – argues that Chris cannot change careers. Presented as a volley of back-and-forth reported speech ("he said"/"I said") spanning seven turns at talk, both brothers are portrayed as equally headstrong. This performed interaction, with each brother insisting on his own position and disagreeing

with the other, is not unlike the Cuomo brothers' mediatized jocular banter in the present day. In this way, Cuomo discloses personal information about his family, by drawing on the brothers' already-established interactional dynamic, likely familiar to at least some of his viewing public. This narrative showcases Cuomo's skills as an engaging storyteller and his understanding of "the power of dramatic narrative to create an identity for an audience, to involve the audience, and to bond that audience to him" as well as "the importance of invoking sentiments in the audience through use of vivid detail and delivered conviction" (Jamieson 1988, as cited in Schubert, 2010, p. 150). The constructed dialogue between the two brothers – dramatically re-enacted by Cuomo (lines 51–62) – includes several and frequent shifts in prosody, involving pitch, volume, stress and rate of speech.

Cuomo performs his brother as repeating his desire to not be a lawyer: "you know I don't want to be a lawyer" / "yeah but I don't want to be a lawyer" (lines 51 and 53). This is met with Cuomo's presentation of a simple fact to the contrary, which parallels this repetition: "yeah I know, but you are now a lawyer, you are" (line 52). The dialogue continues with Cuomo voicing his younger brother who articulates his desired occupation ("I want to be a journalist," line 55), to which Cuomo responds with almost verbatim other-repetition, substituting only the pronominal subject of the sentence so that the deictic referent matches the utterance's author: "you want to be a journalist" (line 56). After echoing his brother's statement, Cuomo immediately launches into disagreement. Using a list-like intonation, Cuomo presents three facts that stand in opposition to Chris's desire to be a journalist: 1) "you're a lawyer" 2) "you have to pay law school bills" 3) "you didn't go to journalism school." These are bookended by the statement "[it's] too late," which begins Cuomo's disagreement and concludes it (lines 57 and 61).

Chris is portrayed as getting the last word, both literally ("no no I think I can do it") and figuratively, as Cuomo explains that Chris ultimately succeeded in becoming a journalist. Cuomo reacts to this outcome with a formulaic construction ("and God bless him," line 63), conveying his appreciation of his brother's success. Next, Cuomo compresses two decades of Chris's career into four short clauses: 1) quit the law firm, 2) worked at Fox TV, 3) worked his way up, and 4) moved to CNN. Cuomo ends this abbreviated account of his brother's work history with positive appraisal of his brother's professional performance ("he does a beautiful job") and his personal character ("a sweet guy") – assessments which reprise his earlier description of his brother as "a sweet beautiful guy."

In line 71, Cuomo brings the narrative back to the present and to the topic raised by the first narrative: Chris's quarantine in his home basement. After a humorous aside marked by laughter at his brother's predicament and the fact that even the family dogs are avoiding him (lines 72–73), Cuomo reiterates Chris's concern about not infecting his family. He then spells out the story's point explicitly ("but the reason I raise it," line 75), which is that even clever, successful people – like his brother – who are practicing social distancing, can get infected (line 76). Cuomo extends this by saying that social distancing as a precaution offers no guarantees and anyone who comes into contact with other people may be exposed to individuals who are asymptomatic, or who do not yet know that they have been infected. So although Narrative 2 centers on how Chris defied both convention and the wisdom of his elders to accomplish professionally what no one but he thought was possible, at the same time, the moral of this story remains the same as that of the previous one: following the governor's stay-at-home-policy remains the safest course of action – regardless of one's intellect, professional success – or having been right about something in the past.

5.3. Narrative 3

Over three minutes in length, in the final narrative Cuomo returns to a moment in the more recent past (“two weeks ago”), when he and Chris had a disagreement, which Cuomo had mentioned (line 81) in a prior press briefing (March 21). This conflict concerned where their mother, Matilda, would be safest during the crisis. Whereas the previous narrative highlighted an episode in which the younger Cuomo proved his older brother wrong, in this segment the elder Cuomo brother is shown to be right throughout the narrative.

Although Matilda was staying with Chris and his family during the early days of the pandemic, Cuomo believed that she would have less risk of exposure by returning to her own apartment. However Chris wanted their mother to remain with his family. After consulting with a medical expert, Cuomo decided their mother would be safest alone in her apartment. Consequently, he established “Matilda’s Law,” a measure intended to protect New York’s elderly and vulnerable populations, requiring them to stay in their homes and restricting their contact with others. In this way, Cuomo illustrates how a debate that started within his own family eventually resulted in a public policy. This narrative touches on a number of widely-experienced issues during the early pandemic – uncertainty over the wisest courses of action, concerns about elderly/vulnerable populations, and resistance to precautions restricting physical closeness.

Continuing from the previous narrative, Narrative 3 begins with Cuomo’s euphemistic reference to the narrative’s central conflict: “I had a situation with Christopher” (line 80). Cuomo’s sudden use of his brother’s full name (*Christopher*) is a marked choice here, since in all previous references to his brother, he used the shorter form, *Chris*. This switch to a more formal version of his brother’s name signals a shift in footing (Goffman, 1981), indexing the seriousness of the current topic, as Cuomo’s intonation grows increasingly more impassioned (i.e., louder and with greater variation in pitch, stress, and rate of speech). As Cuomo performatively voices his objection to having their mother stay at Chris’s home, his pitch rises on the final syllable of the word “mistake,” as he emphatically expresses his opposition: “and I said ‘THAT is a mis↑take’” (line 83). Cuomo continues, explaining that their mother is member of a vulnerable population.

Narrative 3 (35:43)	
80	and ↑I had a situation with ↓Christopher (.) two ↑wEEks ago (2.0)
81	that I even ↓mentioned
82	my mother (.) was at his ↑house (2.0)
83	and I sai:d THAT is a mis↑take (2.0)
84	>now my mother is in a different situ↑Ation< (1.0)
85	she:’s u:h (.) she’s older (.) u:h an:d she’s health↑y but- (2.0)
86	>°I said°< you ↑can’t have mom at the ↑house (1.0)
87	and he said >↓no no no mom is lo:nely
88	she wants to be at the hou:se
89	I feel ba:d she’s cooped up in the apartment<
90	°I said° >↑yeah I feel bad she’s cooped up in the apartment ↑too<
91	but you ↑bring her to your ↑hou:se
92	you ↑expO:se her > to a lot of ↑things <

1 (continued)

Narrative 3 (35:43)	
93	you have the kids ↓there
94	you have your wife ↓there
95	>you’re coming and ↓going
96	your wife is coming and ↓going< (1.0)
97	an:d (.) uh- you could ↑expO:se (.) ↑MO:M (.) to: the ↓virus (1.0)
98	an:d LOVE is: uh- somet:mes a- a- little- a-
99	needs to be uh a little ↑smarter than uh just ↑reactive (2.0)
100	an:d >↑we had a whole ↓discussion
101	and ↑truth< (.) now he’s ↓informed
102	I’m ↓informed (2.0)
103	uh > was that ↑dangerous?
104	was that not ↑dangerous?<
105	so I went back to Dr. Zucker
106	>°I said°< look we have to ↑tell people (2.0)
107	WHAT are the (.) ↑RULES? how does this ↑WORK? (1.0)
108	THAT’S when I came up with ↑Matilda’s ↓law
109	>and I said < I named it for my ↑mother
110	and it was very ↑clear about: (.) uh- (.) > people who are ↓older
111	and what they should be exp↑osed to (2.0)
112	↑MY BROther > that was two weeks ago<
113	if MY BROther still had my (.) MOTHer at his hou:se
114	again (.) out of lo:ve an:d comfort
115	>and my mother ↑wanted to be at the house ↓ anyway °by the way°
116	she didn’t want to be sitting at home in an apartment<
117	uh (1.0) so (.) > she would have been doing < what ↑SHE < wanted to do>
118	>he would have been doing < what ↑HE < wanted to do>
119	it would have (.) ↑SEE::MED great an:d ↑harmless (.)
120	but ↑now we’d have a much different °↓ situation° (2.0)
121	because if ↑he was expo:sed (.)
122	chances are ↑SHE may r- very well have been expo:sed (.)
123	and then > we would be looking < at a different situation
124	than ju:st > my brother sitting in his ↑basement< °for two mon- two ↓weeks° (.)
125	uh- so <↑think about that > RIGHT? (1.0)
126	>my brother’s smart
127	he was acting out of love< (.)
128	uh- luckily we caught it EARly enough (2.0)
129	↑but °it’s my ↑family
130	it’s your ↑family°
131	>it’s ↑ALL of our< ↓families (2.0)
132	an:d this virus (.) is: (.) that (.) in↑sidious (.)

1 (continued)

Narrative 3

(35:43)

133	>and we have to keep that in ↑mind< (2.0)
134	keep in mind Matilda's law
135	remember < who is vulnerable > here (1.0)
136	and <u>pro</u> ↑ <u>tect</u> them (1.0)
137	>you want to go out<
138	and act <u>stupid</u> for yourself
139	>that's one thing<
140	but (.)↑ <u>your</u> stupid ↓actions >↑don't ↑just ↑affect ↑you<
141	↑ <u>you</u> come ↓ho:me
142	you can ↑affect- ↑infect someone ↓else (.)
143	and you can < cau:se a serious illness > or even ↑ <u>death</u> for ↓them (.)
144	<↑by ↑your ↑actions> (.)
145	and people have to really get ↓this (.)
146	and <u>in</u> ↑ <u>TER</u> nalize it (1.0)
147	>because it can happen to < a:nyone (.)
148	two weeks (.) with my mother and Christopher (.) today is a very different ↓ situation

Cuomo presents another re-enactment of a conversation with his brother (lines 83–97) about this issue concerning their mother. In one of the first turns of this performed dialogue, Cuomo issues a very strong, unmitigated directive to his younger brother, with a raised pitch: “I said you can’t have mom at the house” (line 86). Cuomo then animates the voice of his brother by lowering his pitch. Chris is portrayed as responding to this directive with emphatic disagreement (“no no no”), rejecting the course of action proposed by Cuomo in his prior turn. Chris – as voiced by Cuomo – frames the issue in terms of their mother’s desires, by making her the grammatical subject of the following sentences: i.e., “mom is lonely / she wants to be at the house” (lines 87–88). Chris’s turn ends with an expression of his empathy for his mother: “I feel bad she’s cooped up in the apartment.”

Taking up his brother’s line of argumentation, Cuomo begins by agreeing on this final point and repeats Chris’s preceding words (“yeah I feel bad she’s cooped up in the apartment too”). However, he immediately shifts the topic of discussion from their mother’s feelings to the risks involved with her staying at Chris’s home. In lines 91–92, Cuomo not only explains his reasoning to his younger brother, but he also uses dramatic shifts in prosody to stress the serious and urgent nature of the situation: by raising his pitch and increasing his volume on several words, and lengthening the vowels in the words *house* and *expose*.

Continuing to re-enact his explanation to his younger brother over the next four clauses, Cuomo uses a list-like intonation, which involves two pairs of parallel syntactic structures, with repeated patterns of emphasis and utterance-final falling intonation (i.e., “you have the kids there”/ “you have your wife there” / “you’re coming and going”/ “your wife is coming and going”). In addition to the sound patterning (Juzwik, 2004), the syntactic parallelism and the repetitive listing have the cumulative effect of emphasizing the many sources of risk. He ends this represented turn-at-talk addressed to his brother by providing the upshot (“and uh you could expose mom to the virus”); he does so by pausing before, placing emphatic stress on, and lengthening the vowel in the word *mom*. Using these dramatic discourse features, Cuomo makes this story highly tellable. Repetition helps provide structure and pre-

dictability to his discourse, and bringing different voices into the “here and now” of this mediatized storytelling may also appeal to the audience’s emotions (Reyes, 2015, p. 66).

Next, Cuomo evaluates Chris’s position in an indirect fashion. Instead of overtly stating that his brother was wrong, Cuomo makes the emotion *love* stand in as the grammatical subject of his next sentence, which is followed by the predicate “needs to be a little smarter than just reactive” (lines 98–99). Semantically, this sentence makes no sense – emotions are not smart and reactive, people are smart and reactive – however, this unconventional wording enables Cuomo to avoid saying “Chris needs to be a little smarter than just reactive.” With this construction, Cuomo also implies that his brother was acting out of love. Moreover, by not criticizing Chris more explicitly, Cuomo simultaneously avoids portraying himself as overly self-righteous. The several instances of hesitation (false starts, filled pauses) are unusual in Cuomo’s normally more fluent discourse and may be indications of Cuomo searching for the best way to express this critique of his brother.

As the narrative continues, Cuomo relates how he and his family discussed the safest course of action for their mother (lines 100–104), ultimately lead to his consultation with a medical expert for advice (lines 105–107). As he explains, he named his stay-at-home and minimal exposure policy for elderly/vulnerable populations, after his mother: *Matilda’s Law*. This gesture of filial respect also serves as a reminder to his constituents that Cuomo’s family is experiencing the same challenges and taking the same precautions, and that he is not asking the public to do anything that he does not expect his own family members to do – underscoring Cuomo’s affiliation, and similarity, with his viewers. In order to achieve their relational goals, “political actors dig through personal experiences to find common ground with the audience to share it in the context of the speech event” (Reyes, 2015, p. 63).

In what follows, Cuomo entertains a hypothetical scenario (or “sideshadowing,” Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 95) about what would have happened had their mother remained at Chris’s house during the last two weeks. The fact that their mother did return to her own apartment is never explicitly stated, and is instead left for the audience to infer through the cue provided by the conditional clause in line 113 (“if my brother still had my mother at his house”). Cuomo draws further attention to this by using sound parallelism (Juzwik, 2004), placing equal stress on *brother* and *mother*. He refers to his brother’s loving intentions in line 114 (“again out of love and comfort”) – echoing the word *love* from line 98 – as well as his mother’s own wishes, expressed as an aside (lines 115–116). Cuomo uses syntactic parallelism and repeated intonational contours (“she would have been doing what she wanted to do/ he would have been doing what he wanted to do”) with increasing stress on the last three pronouns, to underscore the alignment in perspectives between Chris and his mother. As Cuomo continues with his evaluation of this counterfactual situation (“it would have seemed great and harmless”) his multiple forms of emphasis on the word *seemed* (i.e., increase in pitch and volume, and vowel lengthening) indicates this state of affairs might have appeared to be a reasonable solution. Yet his next utterance suggests otherwise. Once again, he does not state this explicitly, but instead implies it: “but now we’d have a much different situation.” Ultimately, Cuomo does state directly what would likely have happened, but in a multiply mitigated utterance (i.e., *if, chances are, may* [...] *have*, lines 121–122). Placing equal stress on both *he* and *she* (lines 121–122) again links together Chris and their mother in this alternative scenario, in which both would have shared the outcome of being infected with the virus. Continuing to imagine the results of this counterfactual outcome (“and then we would’ve been looking at a different situation than just my brother sitting in his basement”), Cuomo implies that if they

had allowed their mother to stay with Chris, she too would be quarantined today – or worse.

Moving to the story's coda by bringing the narrative back to the present context of the telling, Cuomo addresses viewers directly: "so think about that, right?" (line 125). He reiterates once more that his brother is "smart" and was acting out of "love" (lines 126–127). Cuomo never states that Chris was wrong, or mistaken, about wanting to keep their mother at his house. Instead, it is left up to viewers to make these inferences themselves. Cuomo's moral stance remains clear and constant, in firmly insisting that safety precautions should overrule all other considerations – even if this means going against his brother's and mother's wishes. As an analogy for his larger stay-at-home policy, through this family narrative Cuomo underscores that his policies must be followed if individuals are to protect themselves and others from contracting the virus – even if this results in individuals "not getting to do what they want to do." Throughout this narrative Cuomo draws a parallel between his personal (leader of his family) and public (leader the state which he governs) roles.

Next, Cuomo widens the scope of relevance to his viewers ("it's my family / it's your family / it's all of our families," lines 129–131). The syntactic parallelism and repetition underscores the universality of this situation, further driving home Cuomo's point that everyone is responsible for keeping their loved ones safe. The following lines (132–147) contain the narrative's moral lessons (i.e., the virus is insidious; we must protect the vulnerable; our actions affect others). Narrative Three closes with the statement "two weeks with my mother and Christopher, today is a very different situation" (line 148). With this utterance, Cuomo implies that his mother is safe because the family followed his policy, which was based on the advice of medical professional. He also makes the point that wanting to be with one's family members is a natural impulse – but the only way to ward off the virus is through actions guided by reason, not emotion.

6. Conclusions

This study has examined three interlinked personal narratives integrated into a publicly broadcast speech event: a politician's press briefing addressing a public health crisis. The storying of Cuomo's family experiences in this professional context is far from gratuitous. On the contrary, within these contextually-relevant narratives, Cuomo mobilizes his multiple family roles – a devoted and caring son, a sensible and wiser older brother, a reasonable parent – to enact authentic leadership, by producing compelling accounts that provide evidence and support for his public health policies. These narratives highlight the ordinariness of Cuomo and his family's experiences, showing how their lives have been personally affected by the pandemic, just as those of all other citizens.

In the first and briefest of the narratives, Cuomo established how his family was personally affected by coronavirus, disclosing that his younger brother, Chris, had become infected. This narrative underscores the rationale behind Cuomo's stay-at-home policy: "If you go out there, you too can get infected." Narrative Two appears to be the most tangential to the larger topic of coronavirus. In it, Cuomo provided his viewers with insights into the different personalities of the two brothers as they reacted to Chris's professional dreams: Andrew was shown to be more rational and analytical, basing his arguments on facts, whereas Chris was portrayed as a more of a passionate risk-taker. On the surface, the story focuses on how Chris proved both his father and his older brother wrong, by becoming a journalist instead of a lawyer. Yet, when coupled with the first narrative, both stories make the point that no one is safe from the virus – not even someone as clever and accom-

plished as Chris Cuomo. Within the story, Cuomo performed a constructed dialogue that re-enacted the brothers' unique interactional style, thus indexing a previously-mediatized (and by-now-familiar to many viewers) communicative dynamic between the two brothers. Yet this very personal story also showed viewers that the playful sibling rivalry and one-upmanship performed by the brothers' on-camera belies a fraternal bond of deep affection.

Although Narrative Two demonstrated how following his passions served Chris Cuomo well earlier in his life in terms of his professional career, Narrative Three showed that following one's emotions is clearly *not* a desirable characteristic in the context of a crisis situation. Crisis situations require that difficult decisions be made, and, in his narratives, Cuomo makes it clear that his own level-headed approach – relying on medical experts, rather than on feelings – is most effective when navigating crisis-related uncertainty. Specifically, in Narrative Three Cuomo shows that his initial proposed course of action (i.e., keeping their mother isolated in her own home) – which turned out to be consistent with the advice of medical experts – was clearly a safer alternative than allowing their mother to remain in Chris's home, where she would have been exposed to the virus. Whereas his brother Chris emerged as the successful protagonist of Narrative Two (i.e., proving others wrong by becoming a successful journalist), in Narrative Three Cuomo regained the upper hand, by portraying himself as cautious, exercising good judgement, and as an informed and rational decision maker who consults experts before taking action. An example of the "looking good principle" (Ochs et al, 1989), whereby narrators "shape the narrative to make their own comportment appear morally superior to that of another protagonist" (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 47), Cuomo highlights the prudence and prescience of his own stance and actions, ending this narrative on a powerful note.

Throughout his COVID briefings, Cuomo's talk typically adhered to the topics outlined on the slides that were projected next to him as he spoke. However, inserted into this more scripted talk, Cuomo's personal narratives in this public, mediatized context functioned as performances of authentic leadership. By telling stories about his family – and by disclosing private conflicts and disagreements – Cuomo legitimized his actions in his role as the head of his family, and by extension, his actions as the leader of his state. Through the telling of these personal narratives, Cuomo projected a strong and unwavering moral stance regarding his policy decisions, yet he also positioned himself as a benevolent family leader, whose rational, well-informed policies were intended to protect those who he loves (his immediate family members) as well as those who he serves (his constituents).

This specific sequence of interconnected personal narratives embedded in a televised press briefing, shows how Cuomo used relational discourse – personal stories about his family – to accomplish the more transactional goals of persuading the public about the reasons for his policies. Although relational aspects have often been overlooked by leadership research (Clifton et al, 2019), this study has shown how affective, relational discourse can be exploited by leaders in the service of advancing their more transactional goals.

7. Coda

As much as Cuomo's initial responses to the pandemic were publicly lauded in early 2020, almost one year later, Cuomo found himself at the center of multiple media scandals. In February 2021, several major news outlets reported that Cuomo's office had earlier underreported the number of pandemic-related deaths in New York nursing homes. Cuomo accepted full responsibility for any

discrepancies in reporting, characterizing them as mistakes rather than deliberate acts of misinformation. Yet, for a political leader whose communication style during the early days of the coronavirus crisis became synonymous with a consistent reporting of facts and transparent presentation of data, many found these allegations troubling. Added to this, allegations of sexual harassment from several women also surfaced around the same time; Cuomo responded by apologizing if his past utterances had made these women uncomfortable. At the time of the writing of this paper, these matters remains unresolved. Regardless of whether Cuomo is ultimately vindicated or condemned for these alleged transgressions, the overwhelmingly positive media portrayals of his effective communication during the early days of the pandemic remain a matter of public record.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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