

NARRATIVE FOR HHC SLIDE (2.5 minutes)

Hi. I'm Johanna Shapiro and I'm going to say a few words about the narrative structure of these student essays. Like many of us, in my life I've encountered a fair amount of loss and grief. Personally, I find these experiences to be extremely difficult, and my stories about them are often chaotic and unruly.

What surprised me in this study was the degree of narrative smoothing that occurred in many, not all, but many of the essays, their predictable trajectory from negative to positive emotions and toward the satisfaction of useful lessons learned, especially with regard to patient care. The majority of these stories can be framed as quest stories, following the narrative typologies of the medical sociologist Arthur Frank. Students viewed themselves as on a quest to become doctors, they suffered pain and loss, but they were quite consistent about reframing their experiences in positive, self-protective ways and extracting lessons that would be beneficial to them as clinicians.

I suspect students so frequently opted for writing these quest stories because this particular narrative structure allowed them to feel in control, like they were being "good doctors". Yet quest stories cannot always contain students' lived experiences; and students may feel pressured to shoehorn their encounters with loss and grief into a quest narrative when their story really doesn't fit.

The way students embraced this familiar conventional narrative form speaks to how deeply embedded we all are, as medical educators and as medical learners, in systems of positivism that still dominate in medical education and indeed in medicine as a whole. This certainly makes me aware of how powerful structural issues are and how necessary it is to make space for and support all kinds of medical student stories, including those that are messy and complicated.